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A Brief Chronicle of the Time:
Staging Shakespeare's English
Histories, 2000 – 2010

Katherine Wilkinson

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements of Sheffield Hallam University for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

This thesis uses the approach of performance criticism to study the place of Shakespeare's history plays on the English stage during the first ten years of the twenty-first century. Although there have been numerous productions of Shakespeare's tragedies and comedies during this period also, the history plays opened the decade in Stratford as the Royal Shakespeare Company's millennium project and concluded the decade at Shakespeare's Globe. The history plays were to some extent based on English chronicles, and this thesis acts as chronicle, setting out to address the interpretations and meanings of the productions in a decade which has seen in Britain social, economic, and political upheaval. The thesis looks at different aspects of the history plays in production: the idea of the plays as a cycle; productions that engage with the present moment; adaptation; Shakespeare's histories on film. In so doing the thesis considers how far the productions engage with and comment on the conditions in which they have been produced and in which they were written; and whether it is necessary for them to do either in order to be successful. The introduction offers a review of existing performance criticism. Thereafter the first chapter addresses influential film adaptations of *Richard III*; productions of *Henry V* at Manchester and the National Theatre, *Richard II* at the Old Vic, and *Richard III: An Arab Tragedy* are discussed as twenty-first century history plays; Northern Broadsides's *Wars of the Roses* is looked at in relation to other productions of cycle adaptations; and the RSC's *The Histories* is discussed in depth as a modern cycle production before the final chapter addresses the history plays on the stage of the new Globe theatre. In an area dominated by theatre history and analyses of production techniques, this thesis offers an original contribution to knowledge in its application of these approaches to recent productions of history plays, creating a chronicle survey of the history plays in these ten years on the English stage.

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Richard Wood: 'His heart and hand both open and both free; / For what he has he gives'.

A Brief Chronicle of the Time: Introduction

Good my lord, will you see the players well bestowed? Do ye hear? – let them be well used, for they are the abstracts and brief chronicles of the time. After your death you were better have a bad epitaph than their ill report while you live.¹

In this instruction from Hamlet to Polonius on the arrival of the players to Elsinore, Hamlet illustrates the idea that actors and plays record and detail the moment in which they exist: they are ‘brief chronicles of the time’ with the power to ruin reputations through their ‘ill report’. Shakespeare was well aware of the power that plays possess to speak to or of the moment in which they are produced, as is evident, for example, in his use of accounts of ancient Rome to talk about Elizabethan politics. This is also true in his history plays, which in themselves draw on chronicles and early English histories to tell the story of medieval England, but to some extent talk about the 1590s when they were first performed. This thesis itself is a chronicle of the performance of Shakespeare’s history plays in the opening decade of the twenty-first century. Although there have been numerous productions of Shakespeare’s tragedies and comedies during this period also, the history plays opened the decade in Stratford as the Royal Shakespeare Company’s (RSC) millennium project, and the Globe theatre closed the decade with productions of the *Henry IV* plays. The opening decade of the twenty-first century has been dominated in Britain by war, terrorism, political power wrangles, concerns about immigration, the rise of far-right political parties such as the UK Independence Party and the British National Party, and, from 2008, social turbulence caused by recession. This thesis looks at productions of the first and second tetralogies of Shakespeare’s history plays in England during this decade addressing different aspects of the history plays in production: the idea of the plays as a cycle; productions that engage with the present moment; adaptation; and Shakespeare’s histories on film.

¹ Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, II.ii.525-529. All quotations from works by William Shakespeare are from the *Oxford Complete Works*, edited by Gary Taylor and Stanley Wells.

In so doing, this thesis offers detailed analysis of the productions themselves and, asks how far the productions engage with and comment on the conditions in which they have been produced; how far they engage with the conditions in which they were written; and whether it is necessary for them to do either in order to be successful.

History plays were a particularly popular genre in London in the 1590s. Nicholas Grene points out that of the 150 history plays written during the period from 1562 to 1642 when the theatres were closed because of civil war, 80 were written during the 1590s alone.² During that decade Shakespeare wrote eight plays focussing on the period of English history from the late fourteenth century through to the late fifteenth century, covering eight kings.³ It is possible to date Shakespeare's early history plays to the opening years of the 1590s as they seem to be alluded to in contemporary sources: Thomas Nashe in *Pierce Pennilesse his Supplication to the Devil* (1592) referred to 'brave Talbot' who features in *1 Henry VI*, and Robert Greene, also in 1592, attempted to insult Shakespeare in *Greene's Groatsworth of Wit* by calling him a 'Tygers hart wrapt in a Players hyde', an insult taken almost directly from York's line to Margaret in *3 Henry VI* 'O tiger's heart wrapped in a woman's hide'.⁴ In his introduction to *2 Henry VI*, Roger Warren interprets this as an indication of the play's date arguing that

here, Greene surely specifically resents Shakespeare's success ... and since he expects the allusion to be picked up easily, he testifies to the fact that the line had become well known: this suggests that *3 Henry VI* must have been performed at least earlier in 1592.⁵

² Nicholas Grene, *Shakespeare's Serial History Plays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 7. Grene states that he takes his figures and dates from a 1902 work by Felix Schelling.

³ The plays are *Richard II*, *1* and *2 Henry IV*, *Henry V* (the second tetralogy), *1*, *2* and *3 Henry VI* and *Richard III* (the first tetralogy), which cover Richard II, Henry IV, Henry V, Henry VI, Edward IV, Edward V, Richard III, and Henry VII.

⁴ *3 Henry VI*, I.iv.138.

⁵ Roger Warren, Introduction to *2 Henry IV* by William Shakespeare, *The Oxford Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 60 – 61.

Warren goes on to claim that '[it] is a reasonable assumption that *2 Henry VI* was performed at roughly the same time or earlier'.⁶ The popularity of the history genre in 1590s London was in part related to the process of becoming a nation state, a process through which England had been going for a number of years.⁷ History plays have been seen as essential as a means of disseminating ideas relating to national identity.⁸ Richard Dutton emphasises the nationalistic aspect of these plays, writing that the authors of chronicle history plays 'celebrated' such plays 'as a patriotic form'.⁹ Contemporary accounts support this patriotic function: Thomas Heywood wrote in *An Apology for Actors* in 1612

What English Prince should he behold the true portraiture of that famous King Edward the third, foraging in France, taking so great a King captive in his own country, quartering the English Lions with the French flower-de-lyce, and would not be suddenly inflamed with so royal a spectacle, being made apt and fit for the like achievement. So of Henry the Fifth.¹⁰

And, in a famous statement about the warrior Talbot in Shakespeare's *1 Henry VI*, Thomas Nashe writing in 1592 states

How would it haue ioyed braue *Talbot* (the terror of the French) to thinke that after he had lyne two hundred yeares in his Tombe, hee should triumphe againe on the Stage, and haue his bones newe embalmed with the teares of ten thousand spectators at least (at seuerall times) who, in the Tragedian that represents his person, imagine they behold him fresh bleeding.¹¹

These quotations highlight the power of history plays. Both Heywood and Nashe describe how the stage, which creates only a 'portraiture', an image rather than the real thing, can cause a powerful emotional effect in the onlooker. There is something voyeuristic about these accounts; for example in Nashe's discussion of Talbot he talks

⁶ Warren, Introduction to *2 Henry IV*, 61.

⁷ Jean E. Howard and Phyllis Rackin, *Engendering a Nation: A Feminist Account of Shakespeare's Histories* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 11.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁹ Richard Dutton, "'Methinks the truth should live from age to age": The Dating and Contexts of *Henry V*', *The Huntington Library Quarterly*, 68 (2005), 175.

¹⁰ Thomas Heywood *An Apology for Actors*, 1612. In *Shakespeare's Theater: A Sourcebook*, ed. Tanya Pollard (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 221.

¹¹ Thomas Nashe, *The Works of Thomas Nashe*, ed. Ronald B. McKerrow, rev. F. P. Wilson, 5 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), 1.212.

about bones which have been in the ground for two hundred years. The image of these bones on a stage being cried over by audience members is at once evocative of the adoration of the relics of Catholic saints and also slightly perverse: there is something eerie about the idea of crying over bleeding bones. Nevertheless it is a powerful emotional response which Nashe details, as is that in the extract from Heywood who talks about how an image of a conquering king on a stage would 'inflame' a prince and perhaps also the lesser mortals in the audience too. Further, in Nashe's statement, the relationship between the viewed and the viewer has a magical effect, in that the tears embalming the bones can effectively bring the real man (who had by 1592 been dead for one hundred and fifty years) back to life.¹²

Both of these quotations also talk about the unifying affect of history plays in national terms: Heywood directly refers to an English king capturing a French king and 'quartering the English Lions with the French flower-de-lyce', while Nashe, perhaps more indirectly, talks in national terms by calling Talbot the terror of the French, a phrase which is also found in Shakespeare's *1 Henry VI*. The audiences in these quotations are united through this nationalistic spirit brought about by images of national heroism. Matthew Steggle has written about Nashe's response, stating that Nashe presents the audience as a collective

which does not merely include all the audience present at one performance ... but all the audience members at a series of performances ... [creating] a communal act of remembrance linking the spectators both to the actor and through him to the historical original, Talbot.¹³

¹² The historical John Talbot lived between c.1387 – 1453. It is perhaps significant that Nashe exaggerates this period of time for further effect. (A. J. Pollard, "Talbot, John, first earl of Shrewsbury and first earl of Waterford (c.1387–1453)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, October 2008, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/26932> (Last accessed 19th August 2010).

¹³ Matthew Steggle, *Laughing and Weeping in Early Modern Theatres* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 86.

Steggle is referring to the series of performances which Nashe discusses. However, it is also fair to suggest that the effect may be true at all performances, thus linking the patriotism experienced in 1592 to modern performances in the twenty-first century. Although it is also fair to suggest that many audience members in the twenty-first century would not be aware of who Talbot was, that his presentation is couched in such patriotic terms of the English against the French and that he can be presented as a martyr of sorts for that brand of heroic Englishness, also has the potential to unite the audience through their emotional response to his character. It is possible to argue that the history plays are used to such an end today: in 2010, for example, extracts from *Henry V* spoken by Brian Blessed and the rapper Dizzee Rascal were televised prior to matches of the football world cup in which the English team were playing, with the intention it appears of 'rallying' the English troops both on and off the football pitch.

Since the sixteenth century, Shakespeare's histories have enjoyed mixed success: *I Henry IV*, for example, was rated among the most popular of Shakespeare's plays after the Restoration¹⁴ while the *Henry VI* plays were rarely performed until the twentieth century, the authorship debate around *I Henry VI* still affecting productions of that play. The World Wars of the twentieth century had a profound impact on productions of the plays: during World War II, E. M. W. Tillyard published his influential work, *Shakespeare's History Plays*, which read England as an invisible character in the plays and introduced the idea of tetralogy thinking.¹⁵ The issue of whether the history plays form and/or were conceived by Shakespeare as a cycle or series of eight plays or two tetralogies has a tumultuous critical history. Although the first modern stagings of a full

¹⁴ Scott McMillin, *Henry IV Part One* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), 2.

¹⁵ Tillyard notes in the introduction to his work on the second tetralogy that 'these plays are connected with a network of cross-references ... Shakespeare conceived his second tetralogy as one great unit' and in writing of the first tetralogy he states that '[i]n none of these plays is there a hero: and one of the reasons is that there is an unnamed protagonist dominating all four. It is England' (E. M. W. Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays* (1944. Reprint. Middlesex: Penguin, 1962), 234, 160.

eight play cycle took place in 1864 in Germany, it was Tillyard's volume, first published in 1944, which most famously presented the plays as a series that was conceived and intended as a single, united body of work. Indeed, although much more recently Nicholas Grene, while writing about the plays as a series, has expressed doubt about Shakespeare's intentions relating to the second tetralogy, Tillyard affirmed that 'Shakespeare conceived his second tetralogy as one great unit'.¹⁶ Tillyard built his thesis in part on the notion of the Tudor Myth: the idea that 'the union of the two houses of York and Lancaster through [Henry VII's] marriage with the York heiress was the providential and happy ending of an organic piece of history'.¹⁷ Tillyard's work had a major influence on critics during the twentieth century: in his critique of 'The Fortunes of Tillyard', Robin Headlam-Wells observes that '[f]or the next twenty years or so the body of ideas referred to by Tillyard as the Tudor Myth was widely accepted as the key to Shakespeare's view of politics'.¹⁸

However, Tillyard's views have been largely discredited by a number of critics over the latter part of the twentieth century: Henry Ansgar Kelly's work in the 1970s began the Tillyard backlash showing

fairly conclusively that what for many years had been regarded as an indisputable reality was in fact "an *ex post facto* Platonic Form, made up of many different fragments that were never fitted together into a mental pattern until they met the force of [Tillyard's] own synthesizing energy."¹⁹

Nevertheless, although Tillyard has fallen out of favour,²⁰ and it seems necessary to refer to him with some sort of apologetic caveat, the idea of the serial history plays has

¹⁶ Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays*, 234.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹⁸ Robin Headlam-Wells, 'The Fortunes of Tillyard: Twentieth-Century Critical Debate on Shakespeare's History Plays', *English Studies* 5 (1985), 391.

¹⁹ Henry Ansgar Kelly, *Divine Providence in the England of Shakespeare's Histories* (Cambridge, Mass. 1970), 298 quoted in Headlam-Wells, 'The Fortunes of Tillyard', 397.

²⁰ There is a much larger debate surrounding Tillyard, regarding the issue of Elizabethan order as he perceived it, and the idea of the tetralogy. The ongoing critical debates are well illustrated in two excellent survey articles: 'The Fortunes of Tillyard: Twentieth-Century Critical Debate on Shakespeare's

much more recently been championed by Grene who argues very persuasively for the history plays as a series, stating that

The *Henry VI – Richard III* plays were ... planned as an interlocking series with a narrative rhythm building across the parts rather than in the individual plays. What is more, they would almost certainly have been performed as a series in the 1590s.²¹

Although Grene's analysis of whether this is true for the *Richard II – Henry V* plays is more tentative, his response to the question '[w]ould the plays [of the second tetralogy] have been serially produced once they were composed' is: 'Possibly'.²²

Since the Second World War, Shakespeare's history plays have increasingly been produced as a cycle: Birmingham Rep staged a cycle in 1951 – 53 which consisted of *1 – 3 Henry VI*, at the same time that Anthony Quayle produced *A Week of Kings* (consisting of *Richard II – Henry V*) at Stratford, both of these productions being related to the Festival of Britain; Peter Hall and John Barton staged *The Wars of the Roses* in 1964 (influenced by Tillyard, Jan Kott and Arthur Colby Sprague); Adrian Noble staged *The Plantagenets* in 1988 just after the English Shakespeare Company (ESC) staged their *Wars of the Roses* 1986 – 1988. Cycles remain a popular way of staging the plays; Scott McMillin writes that the two parts of *Henry IV* are rarely performed as individual pieces but rather as a cycle presenting the development of Hal.²³ During this opening decade of the twenty-first century, five cycles have been performed: a cycle of the *Henry IV* plays at Shakespeare's Globe in London (2010), two adapted cycles of the first tetralogy by Northern Broadsides in Leeds (2006) and the York Shakespeare

History Plays' by Robin Headlam-Wells, and 'The Shakespearean Tetralogy' by Mary Thomas Crane. However, it is not appropriate to discuss the rights and wrongs of the tetralogy-thinking approach here because the productions of cycles under discussion in this thesis took for granted the conception of the plays as a series: my attention here is on what the adaptors and directors did with the tetralogies, as opposed to whether or not they should have conceived of the plays as such.

²¹ Grene, *Shakespeare's Serial History Plays*, 23.

²² *Ibid.*, 28.

²³ Scott McMillin, *Henry IV, Part One*, 5.

Project (2007),²⁴ and two full eight-production cycles by the Royal Shakespeare Company staged in Stratford in 2000 and during 2006 – 2008.

The English Shakespeare Company's cycle of history plays, directed by Michael Bogdanov, was particularly controversial because it was staged in a modern style which commented on 1980s Britain, making connections between the plays and the current socio-political context. The productions grew out of the Company's presentist engagement with the plays, as Bogdanov writes:

Shakespeare's *Henry*s were plays for today; the Irish problem still with us (still) [*sic*]; the Scots clamouring for devolution and the desire to assert their own distinctive culture; the Welsh beleaguered in their welcoming hillsides ... Nothing had changed in six hundred years.²⁵

In this statement Bogdanov draws attention to the fluidity of events that make it possible to continue to see relevance in Shakespeare's plays to current political contexts. It is significant that Bogdanov writes 'six hundred years' as it is only four hundred years since the plays were written. This essentially blurs the lines between now and then. In this quotation, Bogdanov encapsulates a debate that is growing in Shakespeare studies between the historicist approach and that of presentism which seeks to see Shakespeare's plays through a twenty-first century lens, acknowledging the situatedness of the critic in their own context.

In contrast however, performance criticism by its very nature can be said to be engaged in theatre history, describing, recording and analysing productions after the event. That performance criticism often deals with productions and performances that have passed suggests that the historicising approach is the obvious and most appropriate to use.

²⁴ The York Shakespeare Project is a long-term cultural community project producing the complete works of Shakespeare over a twenty year period from 2002. Largely cast using amateur performers, the project works with both amateurs and professionals in and around York.

²⁵ Michael Bogdanov, *Shakespeare: The Director's Cut, vol 2 The Histories* (Edinburgh: Capercaillie Books, 2005), 13.

Indeed, in support of this idea Judith Buchanan states that historicising of film is 'one of the tasks of the [film] critic'.²⁶ This extends beyond the criticising of film as once the conditions in which any given performance, whether filmic or theatrical, is produced have passed our study of that performance must then surely become historicist exploring conditions of performance which are now history. Graham Holderness writes that 'new historicism recognizes history "only as a contemporary activity of narrating or representing the past"'²⁷ which is also a function that theatre history fulfils. Maria Jones further argues that performances are not just pulled back to the moment in which they are produced, but are in fact pulled back to Shakespeare's own moment. Jones writes that 'the work of performance touches the social life of Shakespeare's scripts'.²⁸ Jones implies that the historical founding moment of the script is always present in performance whether it is acknowledged or not. Jones goes on in her work to apply this historicist approach directly to modern performances. It would seem logical to use such a historicising approach of criticism for Shakespeare's history plays; these plays deal with medieval history and were written four hundred years ago. However, productions and indeed individual performances respond to the social conditions of their own moment, as evidenced by the work of performance critics in Manchester University Press's (MUP) *Shakespeare in Performance* series.

Academic interest in performance has been growing over recent years: although volumes in MUP's *Shakespeare in Performance* series were first published in 1989 suggesting that research was already being conducted, it is only in the past few years that there has been something of a boom in the area evidenced in a number of new

²⁶ Judith Buchanan, *Shakespeare on Film* (Harlow: Longman, 2005), 9.

²⁷ Graham Holderness, *Shakespeare Recycled; The Making of Historical Drama* (Hemel Hempstead, 1992), 2 quoted in Ewan Fernie, 'Shakespeare and the Prospect of Presentism,' in *Shakespeare Survey* 58, ed. Peter Holland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 172.

²⁸ Maria Jones, *Shakespeare's Culture in Modern Performance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 4.

publications: these include the *Shakespeare in Production* series of texts with introductions that give full performance histories and notes to the editions which detail how productions staged individual moments throughout the text; the new RSC editions of the texts edited by Jonathan Bate which all include interviews with practitioners; the new series of *Shakespeare Handbooks* which include performance and film histories; and in the inclusion of a performance section in *Shakespeare*, the journal of the British Shakespeare Association. Although publications such as *Shakespeare Survey* have always included a chapter on Shakespeare Performances, the general sense of performance criticism has for a while taken the form of (and to some extent remains in the form of) extended reviews.

In contrast, this thesis seeks to offer a form of performance criticism akin to the approach practised by the *Shakespeare in Performance* series. Although those volumes each focus on a single play (three plays in the case of the *Henry VI* plays because of the tendency to stage those plays as cycles), the books also demonstrate how performance critics engage with productions both to historicise performances and also to attempt to bring them into their own present. James Loehlin and Margaret Shewring's volumes in that series, on *Henry V* and *Richard II* respectively, are examples of this.

Margaret Shewring opens her book *Shakespeare in Performance: Richard II* by immediately drawing attention to the historicity of the play by stating that '[o]f all Shakespeare's history plays, *Richard II* is arguably the most difficult to accommodate on the twentieth-century stage'.²⁹ However, this also establishes the intention of the work: reading a history play in light of the twentieth century. Shewring goes on in this sentence to argue that difficulties arise because of the historical situatedness of the play:

²⁹ Margaret Shewring, *Richard II* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 2.

Once 'the most dangerous, the most politically vibrant play in the canon' ..., this tightly structured poetic account of monarchy in the late Middle Ages is deeply rooted in the political and cultural moment of the 1590s.³⁰

In this opening, Shewring establishes themes that characterise her discussion of *Richard II*: the historical and yet the political and present nature of the play. Shewring argues that there is a 'dangerous immediacy'³¹ about *Richard II*, and although the early chapters focussing on the play on the Elizabethan stage would seem to historicise it, this 'immediacy' is something that she shows as following *Richard II* through its stage life and as still being present. Shewring's work is a theatre history in that it maps out the life of *Richard II* in performance from its earliest productions and possible role in the 1601 Essex Rising through the Restoration and into the twentieth century. She contextualises each production, particularly where those productions marked a significant change from previous interpretations, most evident in her discussion of *Richard II* in cycle productions of the first tetralogy. In discussing Anthony Quayle's *Week of Kings* in 1951 and Peter Hall's *The Wars of the Roses* in 1963 – 1964, Shewring highlights how a shift in academic and theatrical attitudes and in audience expectations affected performative interpretations of the play. For instance, Shewring writes that Hall's focus on the socio-economic effects of how the leaders ruled 'contrasted sharply with Quayle's celebratory, patriotic 1951 tetralogy'.³² She explains this through a cultural shift that saw influences on Hall's production not only from academic sources such as Arthur Colby Sprague and Jan Kott, but also the Berliner Ensemble and a wider 'trend for the questioning of accepted world-views in the spirit of contemporary politics'.³³ In this respect Shewring demonstrates how productions of

³⁰ Shewring, *Richard II*, 2.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 180.

³² *Ibid.*, 102.

³³ *Ibid.*, 103.

Richard II have responded to and commented on concerns that were current at the time in which they were produced.

Indeed, Shewring argues that *Richard II* 'is always of contemporary relevance in any context in which a debate about the nature of power and authority; the public versus the private life of the ruler has significance'.³⁴ The idea that '[a]ny subsequent restaging of the play is, inevitably, both an engagement with its general issues and an interpretation rooted in the moment in which each production is presented'³⁵ is one which Shewring reiterates throughout the book. That the final concluding chapter of Shewring's book is entitled '*Richard II* for the 1990s' supports this, as she argues throughout that the play is created by and for the age that produces and presents it.

Henry V is another of the history plays which can be used to generate a number of different meanings in production beyond simply representing the story of the history it tells. Famous for its ambiguity,³⁶ it is a play that deals with the rights and wrongs of war and leadership. James Loehlin responds to this idea at the opening of his *Shakespeare in Performance: Henry V*, stating that

Innovations in theatrical theory and techniques, changing attitudes to war and politics, and new ideas about Shakespeare's histories have all served to complicate the play and make an 'official' heroic version increasingly untenable.³⁷

Loehlin highlights how developments in the world affect the reading of a play or performance and establishes his approach as being engaged with technical, social and political context. *Henry V* is a strong case for this kind of writing as the twentieth century not only saw war on a global scale involving the media in ways not previously

³⁴ Shewring, *Richard II*, 29.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

³⁶ Norman Rabkin, 'Rabbits, Ducks, and *Henry V*,' *Shakespeare Quarterly* 28:3 (1977).

³⁷ James Loehlin, *Henry V* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 1.

known, it also produced some defining productions of the play that responded to the political contexts of their time, most obviously the 1944 Laurence Olivier film and Kenneth Branagh's 1989 film.

Although Loehlin has a tight focus on description of the productions, his work is also keenly aware of the contextual information influencing those productions. Indeed, he writes that '*Henry V* is a location for the production of meaning, a site where text, performance, history and culture intersect',³⁸ echoing Terence Hawkes's arguments that it is the present culture which invests meaning in Shakespeare's plays, stating that 'facts and texts ... don't simply speak, don't merely mean. *We speak, we mean, by them*'.³⁹ As such, Loehlin's comments place him in the category of a presentist critic. Loehlin also draws alignment between Branagh's film and contemporary contexts, for example, seeing influences on the 1989 *Henry V* from various films including *Chimes at Midnight* (dir. Orson Welles, 1965), *The Seven Samurai* (dir. Akira Kurosawa, 1956) and *Platoon* (dir. Oliver Stone, 1987). Loehlin argues that Branagh's film is

On its grimy, sweaty surface ... a condemnation of war, from France to the Falklands; in its stirring heart it is a celebration of heroic individualism from the battlefield to the Britain of the 1980s.⁴⁰

The comment 'from France to the Falklands' demonstrates how the play can be used to speak about a range of times, not just the moment of the play, nor only the moment of production. Indeed, the France of this statement may be the France of Agincourt or the France of World War I: many of Loehlin's descriptions of the battlefields in Branagh's film call to mind images of trench warfare that are frequently seen on television especially during anniversary years such as 2006's 90th anniversary of the Battle of the Somme. Indeed, when in the Branagh film the French king comments "'Tis certain he

³⁸ Loehlin, *Henry V*, 2.

³⁹ Terence Hawkes and Hugh Grady, *Presentist Shakespeares* (London: Routledge, 2007), 3. Also Terence Hawkes, *Meaning by Shakespeare* (London: Routledge, 1992).

⁴⁰ Loehlin, *Henry V*, 145.

has passed the river Somme' images immediately spring to mind of that 1916 conflict. It is impossible to view these films without the audience bringing their own twentieth, and now twenty-first, century baggage to the table.

Of course, *Henry V* is famous for this kind of emotive, presentist, engagement with its audience, something which Loehlin acknowledges in his conclusion, stating

Our attitudes toward conflict, leadership and politics will no doubt need to be re-examined many times in the coming decades and Shakespeare's *Henry V* is one of the tools we will use.⁴¹

Through this history play we find meaning in our current political situations but through present performance we invest meaning in the play. In a more recent article Ewan Fernie has discussed the play in terms of the 'War on Terror' and American and British invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq.⁴² In this discussion Fernie quotes examples of how the text of *Henry V*, particularly the speeches at the siege of Harfleur and St Crispin's day, were used to promote then US President George W. Bush and Prime Minister Tony Blair in positive, heroic lights and to encourage soldiers headed for the war-zones.⁴³ Fernie draws attention to the reissuing in 2002 of editions of *Henry V* which went out of print in 1947 in order to give them to troops.⁴⁴ As with, or perhaps because of, the Olivier film, *Henry V* it seems is still being used by leaders and politicians in a presentist manner to bolster morale in times of war.

Shewring, Loehlin, and Fernie are established academic critics offering, in the case of Shewring and Loehlin, performance histories of these particular plays in their volumes for the *Shakespeare in Performance* series. However, an uneasy relationship exists between the academic study of Shakespeare and the living work of performance and

⁴¹ Loehlin, *Henry V*, 169.

⁴² Ewan Fernie, 'Action! *Henry V*' in *Presentist Shakespeares*, ed. Hawkes and Grady, 99-100.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 99.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 100.

there is something of a contrast between the approaches of academics and of theatre practitioners to writing about texts and texts in performance. In their written account of the ESC productions Bogdanov and actor and co-founder Michael Pennington describe Britain in the 1980s using a direct quotation from *Richard II* that grows out of accounts of the socio-political atmosphere of the 1980s when they produced the plays:

Westminster Rule. Centralisation. Censorship. Power to the City. Bleed the rest of the country dry...
This land...
Is now leased out...
Like to a tenement or pelting farm:
That England, that was wont to conquer others,
Hath made a shameful conquest of itself.⁴⁵

Bogdanov now writes as well as directs and he continues to view Shakespeare's history plays through his presentist lens, seeing parallels between the plays and up-to-the-minute-of-publication political issues facing Britain. For example, writing about *Henry V* in 2005, Bogdanov directly aligned the plot of medieval history with the unfolding twenty-first century history:

'Salic law', the equivalent of UN Resolution 43, legitimised the war. God has said there are WMD [Weapons of Mass Destruction], so WMD we will find. And France? Like Iraq, no joy, only devastation.⁴⁶

In both of these quotations, Bogdanov's style mixes his analysis of Shakespeare with the current moment and demonstrates Terence Hawkes's idea of not only the past influencing the present, but of the present influencing the past: Hawkes states that 'a fully paid up presentist will always feel entitled to ask how the influence of Shakespeare on Marx or Freud matches up to the influence of Marx or Freud on Shakespeare'.⁴⁷ This is a noticeable feature of Bogdanov's work and, at times, it is simply unclear whether he is discussing the play or the real world situation.

⁴⁵ Michael Bogdanov and Michael Pennington, *The English Shakespeare Company: The Story of The Wars of the Roses, 1986 - 1989* (London: Nick Hern Books, 1990), 24.

⁴⁶ Bogdanov, *Shakespeare: The Director's Cut, volume 2: The Histories*, 93.

⁴⁷ Terence Hawkes, *Shakespeare in the Present* (London: Routledge, 2002), 4.

The irony of these discussions however, is that they become a form of historicist study immediately: Shewring's 1990s *Richard* is now nearly twenty years old. What is apparent though, through this brief study of two performance critics, is how performance criticism links historicism and presentism. It is at the interface of the two. As a theoretical approach, performance criticism is neither historicist nor presentist but something of a fluid approach that moves between and merges the two perspectives, to some extent dependent on the production it studies. Part of the challenge of a study such as this is not knowing what will be produced in this period, nor what might happen in the wider world to influence those productions. My approach to performance criticism grows out of the more traditional textual criticism of Shakespeare: I study the productions as a text, to find meanings and interpretations. This thesis represents a close study of these productions; it seeks to be something of a chronicle survey of Shakespeare's history plays on the English stage during 2000 – 2010. As such the thesis engages with different aspects of the plays in production: the plays on film; adaptations; cycles; engagement with current issues; and Renaissance style productions.

Chapter One addresses films of *Richard III* discussing how the phrase used at the beginning of Laurence Olivier's 1955 film – 'An interwoven pattern of history and legend' – relates to the films by Olivier (1955) and Richard Loncraine (1995). These influential films appropriated the character of Richard to talk about the Second World War, although with quite substantially different results. Neither film makes use of or attempts to access the play's historical moment, in fact deliberately placing themselves apart from the play's theatrical history but reading themselves in the light of film history. This chapter also addresses something that is more strongly related to film production rather than theatre because of the enduring presence of celluloid: what is lost when the moment of the film's production has gone. This chapter is significant to the

thesis because, although the thesis's main focus is theatrical productions, these films illustrate the different layers of time which exist, therefore introducing a key theme of the thesis.

Chapter Two addresses productions of what I term twenty-first century history plays where directors have used Shakespeare and, in some cases, tailored his plays to respond to the current situation of their production. The productions under discussion here are mostly theatrical productions: Nicholas Hytner's 2003 production of *Henry V* at the National Theatre, London; Trevor Nunn's 2005 production of *Richard II* at the Old Vic theatre, London; Jonathan Munby's 2007 production of *Henry V* at Manchester Royal Exchange Theatre; and Sulayman al-Bassam's 2007 adaptation of *Richard III*, *Richard III: An Arab Tragedy*. This chapter first discusses the perceived relevance of Shakespeare's history plays to his own time, and looks briefly at Olivier's film of *Henry V* as an example of using Shakespeare's plays to speak to a current moment. I also discuss Jones's idea of the presence of the founding moment, and ask if it is desirable that productions make the effort to access this, arguing that in fact productions have not necessarily done so but have nevertheless been successful. This in itself raises the issue of what constitutes success: as in Chapter One this section looks at what may be lost when productions speak only to their moment and neglect the presence of Shakespeare. These productions demonstrate how producers seek to use Shakespeare's histories to speak to or of the present moment and are central to my argument that productions do not need to access the founding moment to be successful.

In Chapter Three, Shakespeare *et al*, I address the idea of adapted cycle productions looking at Peter Hall and John Barton's 1964 production for the Royal Shakespeare Company, Bogdanov and Pennington's 1986 ESC production, Edward Hall's 2001 *Rose*

Rage for the Watermill Theatre and closely studying Barrie Rutter's adaptation for Northern Broadsides' *The Wars of the Roses* which was staged at West Yorkshire Playhouse in 2006. In this chapter I look at the effect that adapting and editing has on the text of the plays, the process of and justification for adaptation, and through close study of the character of Joan la Pucelle in Rutter's production I look at how the narrative of a character can be quite radically altered by adaptation.

The longest chapter of the thesis covers the theatrical event of the decade: Michael Boyd's eight play history cycle for the Royal Shakespeare Company at Stratford which was staged from 2006 – 2008. This chapter offers a study of the production over four subsections. The first looks at the context of the production, addressing the RSC's 2000 millennium project, some plays of which were restaged by Boyd in this later project. I look at Boyd's directorial approach to the plays, the notion of tetralogy-thinking and the impact of non-traditional casting policies. The second section, 'What art thou / That counterfeit'st the person of a king', looks at the theme of kingship as a key thread running through Boyd's productions which unites the cycle, addressing the idea of the metatheatrical role of the king. 'My dream was lengthened after life' looks at the extensive use of the supernatural, particularly of ghosts, to impose a providential reading on the cycle. Finally, 'A woman's hide' addresses the issue of gender in the plays. In contrast to the majority of critical work on these plays which argues that the female characters are largely absent, insignificant, or monstrous, I argue that the women form in Boyd's production a unified narrative development across the cycle which, rather than ending in disenfranchisement, actually concludes with the redemption of some of Shakespeare's most horrifying female characters. Such a significant cycle production in this decade requires close discussion in a thesis such as this to explore the

director's interpretation and to investigate the significations of the various themes discussed.

Finally, Chapter Five, Staging History at the New Globe, addresses the final productions of history plays in this decade – *1 and 2 Henry IV* at the Globe Theatre in London. Although these productions took place in 2010, the Globe's 'authentic' approach potentially places these productions closer to the moment of the plays' inception. In this chapter I discuss the paradoxes of this theatre space, and explore the notion of 'original practices' and how staging a play in the style of the late sixteenth century may affect what the plays mean in 2010.

Chapter One: 'An interwoven pattern of history and legend': Shakespeare's *Richard III* on film

Shakespearean films, although ostensibly filmed Shakespeare plays, are very much distinct from traditional theatrical productions. As Russell Jackson points out,

Films made from Shakespeare's plays exist at a meeting point between conflicting cultural assumptions, rival theories and practices of performance, and – at the most basic level – the uneasy and overlapping systems of theatre and cinema.⁴⁸

It is revealing that Jackson refers to these productions as 'films made from Shakespeare': these products will always be something quite different – neither entirely Shakespeare nor entirely cinema, existing at 'a meeting point' between the two. The plays will always be theatre shaped into cinema: the verbal manipulated into the visual. Indeed, Syd Field has stated that 'a screenplay is a story told in pictures, and there will always be some kind of problem when you *tell the story through words* [as Elizabethan drama does], *and not pictures*' (original emphasis).⁴⁹ Barbara Freedman supports this stating that, in making their film of *Richard III*, Richard Loncraine and Ian McKellen 'had a major problem on their hands, since the question of how to join the verbal and the visual is compounded by the problem of how to do justice to the richness of Shakespeare's language in what is essentially a visual medium'.⁵⁰

Sarah Hatchuel supports Jackson's assertions of the different nature of Shakespeare on film, as she states that 'every Shakespeare film can be considered an adaptation as it

⁴⁸ Russell Jackson, 'Introduction: Shakespeare, films and the marketplace', in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Film*, ed. Russell Jackson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 8.

⁴⁹ Syd Field, *The Screenwriter's Problem Solver: How to Recognise, Identify, and Define Screenwriting Problems* (New York: Delta Publishing, 1998), 56.

⁵⁰ Barbara Freedman, 'Critical Junctures in Shakespeare Screen History: The Case of *Richard III*', in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Film*, ed. Russell Jackson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 64. The verbal element is intrinsic to Shakespeare's plays because of the original theatrical practices: a result of its 'mode of presentation' (Hatchuel, 3) in broad daylight with no attempt made in regards to realistic stage settings or backdrops, these were techniques that were introduced to theatrical productions much later, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Thus Shakespeare's plays can be understood as verbal as opposed to the visual of the cinema experience.

moves away from the original play in one way or another'.⁵¹ Hatchuel goes on to detail four distinct categories of Shakespeare film within the genre: these are adaptations using the original English text; adaptations using a translation of the text; films inspired by the plots of Shakespeare plays; and films in which characters play, direct, or teach Shakespeare but are not actually following plots of Shakespeare plays.⁵² However, the films under discussion in this chapter – films of *Richard III* by Laurence Olivier (1955) and Richard Loncraine (1995) – are special cases in the consideration of films of Shakespeare plays because rather than being conceived primarily as films, they both grew out of theatrical productions. In his article titled 'Filming Shakespeare's History', H. R. Coursen discusses both of these productions in light of their theatricality, referring to Olivier's film as 'unabashedly theatrical' and writing about his response to Loncraine's film in the light of his experience of the stage production at the National Theatre.⁵³ Indeed, many of the critical discussions of Loncraine's film highlight the differences between the stage and film versions of the production, and Barbara Freedman comments that 'Shakespeareans still debate [Olivier's] *Richard III* in terms of the relationship of theatre to cinema'.⁵⁴

Although this thesis is primarily concerned with stage productions of Shakespeare's history plays, these films have a place in this discussion. They both fit in Hatchuel's first category of Shakespeare film but they transcend this categorisation by both also belonging somewhere within the realm of theatrical renderings of the plays. Both of these films also to some degree address the questions posed in the Introduction through talking about history. Maria Jones has stated that the historical founding moment of the

⁵¹ Sarah Hatchuel, *Shakespeare, from Stage to Screen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 16.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 17.

⁵³ H. R. Coursen, 'Filming Shakespeare's History' in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Film*, ed. Russell Jackson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 102, 104 – 105.

⁵⁴ Freedman, 'Critical Junctures in Shakespeare Screen History: The Case of *Richard III*', 59.

script is always present in performance whether it is acknowledged or not, and Judith Buchanan, a scholar of Shakespeare film, seems to support the idea of finding the historical moment when she states that '[it] is one of the tasks of the critic ... to puncture [the] illusion of ahistoricity and attempt, in as much as this is possible, to particularise a film's engagements with its production context'.⁵⁵ Although Buchanan here suggests that it is not Shakespeare's founding moment that critics should be looking at but the actual context of the production under consideration, it is possible that the two approaches can be merged: the scholar of Shakespeare films would then historicise both Shakespeare's and the production's context. However, in contrast to Jones's ideas, the modern development of film technology arguably places these productions beyond the scope of Shakespeare's early modern culture. Rather than referencing Shakespeare's history, the films under discussion here are more inclined to reference their own genre's history, as James Loehlin has discussed in his article 'Top of the World, Ma', this title itself a line from a James Cagney film. Loehlin refers to a number of films in relation to Loncraine's *Richard III*, and talks about the 'classic gangster movie, which Loncraine's film parallels ... with uncanny precision'.⁵⁶ In this chapter I argue that, while Olivier's and Loncraine's film 'adaptations' are successful as pieces of self-contained entertainment, they do not access or make use of the play's original historical contexts. In fact, they either deliberately place themselves apart from that history or access new narratives, filmic or historical, which were unavailable to Shakespeare.

It is now generally acknowledged that Shakespeare's history of *Richard III* is not historically accurate and, in fact, might more fairly be called fictitious. Nevertheless the play has become inextricably linked to impressions of the history of England, tales of

⁵⁵ Buchanan, *Shakespeare on Film*, 9.

⁵⁶ James Loehlin, "'Top of the World, Ma' *Richard III* and Cinematic Convention' in *Shakespeare the Movie: Popularising the Plays on Film, TV, and Video* ed. Linda E. Boose and Richard Burt (London: Routledge, 1997), 73.

his dastardly deeds making Richard III legendary as one of England's most wicked kings. Fact and fiction can both be read in productions of the play: the programme notes for Bill Alexander's 1984 production which starred Antony Sher stress '[t]he historical events represented in *Richard III* are to a large extent factual'. However Sher has written of his run-in with the Richard III society while playing the king, precisely because of the 'monstrous lie perpetrated by Shakespeare' which they believe the play represents.⁵⁷ Significantly, in light of Jones's ideas, Olivier's film begins with an extratextual rolling credit which asserts the prominence of legend in the story of Shakespeare's *Richard III*. The text opens with the line used for the title of this chapter and goes on to discuss the positive presence and influence of legends in history, stating:

The history of the world, like letters without poetry, flowers without perfume, or thought without imagination, would be a dry matter indeed without its legends, and many of these, though scorned by proof a hundred times seem worth preserving for their own familiar sakes. The following begins in the latter half of the 15th century in England, at the end of a long period of strife set about by rival factions for the English crown, known as the Wars of the Roses. The red rose being the emblem of the House of Lancaster. The white rose was in its final flowering at the beginning of the story as it inspired William Shakespeare.
[Then follows the cast list]

Here now begins one of the most famous, and at the same time, most infamous, of the legends that are attached to the crown of England.

The presence of this text immediately suggests that the film is fictional and that there will not be a realistic historical setting or an historically accurate narrative; indeed Peter Donaldson refers to this text as a 'disclaimer of truth'.⁵⁸ The suggestion that Shakespeare's story has been 'scorned by proof' sets the film apart from the play's historical moment of inception, its patronising tone suggesting that as time has moved on from Shakespeare we now know better than to believe these stories. Further, the statement that '[t]he white rose was in its final flowering at the beginning of the story as

⁵⁷ In his autobiography, Sher quotes from a letter he received from the Richard III society during the run of the production saying 'You are yet another actor to ignore truth and integrity in order to launch yourself on an ego-trip enabled by the monstrous lie perpetrated by Shakespeare about a most valiant, honourable and excellent king' (*Beside Myself*, 174 – 175).

⁵⁸ Peter Donaldson, 'Cinema and the Kingdom of Death: Loncraine's *Richard III*', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 53:2 (2002), 249.

it inspired William Shakespeare' suggests the separation of fact and fiction and, to some degree, plays down the role of Shakespeare, presenting him as merely inspired by fact into writing a fiction. This is further emphasised after the *Dramatis Personae*: the beginning of the play is heralded with 'now begins one of the most famous, and at the same time, the most infamous of the legends that are attached to the crown of England' which directly terms Shakespeare's narrative in Olivier's film as a legend and therefore not a realistic account of history.⁵⁹ This encourages the audience to view the film as fiction from the outset thus characterising the film, and by extension the audience's conception of Richard created by the film, as myth. This in turn suggests a mythical epic in the vein of the King Arthur or Robin Hood stories and even increases the imaginative power of the film because it is not constrained by specific time and setting concerns as the Loncraine film is. However, encouraging audiences to view the film imaginatively arguably removes the film from considerations of factual relevance or contextualisation. The distancing of the film from both the context in which it was written and the context of the history it writes about is further encouraged through the use of a unitary studio set. Although scholars have argued that the film set allows the film to mimic Elizabethan practices in the fluidity and flexibility of scene changes,⁶⁰ it is the case in the Olivier film that, along with the costuming, the set creates an atmosphere of fairy-tale Medievalism rather than a realistic Elizabethan setting, thus further placing the film outside historical narratives. A result of setting the film in a mythical framework is that it focuses full attention on the character of Richard and his

⁵⁹ One of the main differences between the theatre and the cinema is the extent of realism within and expected of the production: in a brief history of Shakespeare from stage to screen, Hatchuel describes the development of realistic theatre to a point in the nineteenth century when '[t]he theatre actors were included in a world almost as real as themselves, while the spectators were invited to contemplate this world from a voyeuristic position without any direct participation' (12), this clearly foreshadowed the development of the cinema experience as it is known today.

⁶⁰ Hugh Richmond, *King Richard III*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), 59.

status as a legendary villain, and the audience is not encouraged to draw parallels with anything either contemporary or historical in the Olivier film.

Olivier's use of Colley Cibber's script, which makes significant alterations and cuts the character of Margaret completely, further removes the play from its historical narrative. During the last century the play was increasingly performed in the context of the tetralogy, or even in the context of the octology, as the culmination of the Wars of the Roses,⁶¹ thus reinstating the place and power of the role of Margaret.⁶² This is especially true in the past decade which saw two high profile cycle productions: Northern Broadsides' production (2006) and Michael Boyd's (2006 – 2008). When the character of Margaret is cut, as she is in both Olivier's and Loncraine's films, the function of the play as a providential conclusion to a large cycle of plays potentially going as far back as *Richard II* is lost. As a consequence the importance of the play as a part of the providential Tudor Myth, in which the reign of Richard III is a punishment for the crime of deposing Richard II, is also lost; therefore the films arguably lose the connection to the past that allows for Jones's pull of history to be felt.⁶³ Michael Boyd's production of the full eight history plays offers a strong comparison to this and is an example of how *Richard III* may work in the cycle, demonstrating the effect that placing *Richard III* in its tetralogical and octological contexts can have: Boyd's *Henry VI*s were clearly intended to be viewed as an historical cycle and were played under a general title of *The Histories*, a title which immediately asked the audience to consider the plays as history. The productions were played on a bare thrust stage in medieval-

⁶¹ Stuart Hampton-Reeves, 'Theatrical Afterlives', in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare's History Plays* ed. Michael Hattaway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 230.

⁶² Queen Margaret is the only character to appear in all four plays of the first tetralogy. She therefore carries within her character the history of the plays from the beginning of the reign of Henry VI. The curses which she makes in I.iii of *Richard III* confirm the presentation of Margaret as a vessel of history, acting as both a reminder of the past and to some degree creating the future.

⁶³ According to Hatchuel, Loncraine's film is not providential either as the ending is problematised by Richmond's smirk into the camera as Richard dies, suggesting that he will take over the role of tyrant from Richard (Hatchuel, 105-106).

style costumes which created a sense of history being played out in front of the audience. Because the cycle was comprised of three full productions of the *Henry VI* plays, the focus was on the historical build up to the Wars of the Roses and, consequently, the full story and impact of characters such as Queen Margaret was seen. The frequent repetition of claims to the throne and the fact of Richard II's usurpation emphasised the factual history and the productions acted to some extent as a chronicle. On a superficial level, staging the tetralogy offers the audience a chance to be familiar with who each character is in *Richard III*, but it also places the final play in context, both theatrically and historically. Boyd's theatrical production used all four of Shakespeare's scripts and all of the characters to place the individual stories in a wider context consequently granting something of a pull of history within the productions themselves, if not to Shakespeare's moment.

However, the two films work differently. By using elements of Cibber's text as well as Shakespeare's and thereby creating a mix of sixteenth and eighteenth century writing, Olivier's film effectively refutes Jones's argument of the historical pull to Shakespeare's cultural context. Indeed, Hugh Richmond observes that 'the film consistently conforms more to the tradition founded on Cibber's script than on Shakespeare's, so that we may consider the film as a kind of dynamic museum of past interpretations'.⁶⁴ Richmond goes on to set Cibber's script and Olivier's film apart from Elizabethan-style productions by stating that it was only 'the breaking of this domination [of Cibber in Olivier] ... which ... could open up the option of a truly Shakespearian [*sic*] rendering'.⁶⁵ Richmond emphasises the value of Shakespearean productions and in so doing historicises the play; the argument he makes about the

⁶⁴ Richmond, *King Richard III*, 59.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 64.

Olivier film seems to suggest that the production was not 'Shakespearean' enough. The breaking of the conception of what *Richard III* should be like which was based upon Olivier's use of Cibber would then allow practitioners and audience members alike to engage with Shakespeare anew. Richmond's account and response to the film is couched in the terms of how close or not productions come to Elizabethan producing styles: this is evident in the discussion of the set which 'captures much of the fluidity and facility in scene-changing of the permanent Elizabethan stage'.⁶⁶ When he does draw attention to more recent theatrical productions which have used Shakespeare's text Richmond highlights how the productions were disliked by critics because of their familiarity with a 'ready-made Richard III' which was based on Olivier's performance of the Cibber script.⁶⁷

Although also based on a screenplay that is arguably not Shakespeare, the Loncraine film differs greatly from the Olivier. Ian McKellen, who starred as Richard in the film and wrote the screenplay, has stated that '[we] were not making a film of the play, we were making a film of a screenplay from the play'.⁶⁸ The construction of this sentence itself demonstrates the distance that exists between the film product and the original Shakespeare play, never mind the moment of the play's inception: the film is effectively three steps away from Shakespeare's text. The modern setting of the Loncraine production also has this distancing effect: although Olivier's film setting was fairy tale-medieval rather than Elizabethan, it may in the popular imagination represent something akin to that moment in a way that Loncraine's film could not. The setting of Loncraine's film is much more recognisable to a twenty-first century audience, especially an English audience, as it was filmed on location around England: the sets

⁶⁶ Richmond, *King Richard III*, 59.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 64 – 66.

⁶⁸ Ian McKellen in interview with Gary Crowds 'Shakespeare is up to Date: an Interview with Ian McKellen', *Cineaste* 24:1 (1998), 46.

include Brighton pavilion, London's St Pancras station, and Battersea Power Station. Costuming, vehicles, interior detail and general evocation of atmosphere place the film firmly in the 1930s.⁶⁹ Consequently McKellen's Richard III is presented as a Hitler figure: the 1930s setting, combined with Richard and his cohorts' military costumes and his own little moustache suggest this parallel. In his article on the film, H. R. Coursen gives detailed examples of these parallels⁷⁰ and, further, Peter Donaldson provides more specific accounts of the links between McKellen's Richard and Hitler, stating that 'the use of the microphone and the sudden arrest of enemies – or even witnesses – evoke Hitler'⁷¹ and highlighting how the sets of the film suggest other, darker parallels, notably reading the bathhouse of the tower, in which Clarence is seen bathing before he is murdered, as reminiscent of gas-chambers at Auschwitz.⁷²

McKellen's Richard is a violent military man: the audience's first encounter with him presents him as such. This takes place during an extratextual opening scene:⁷³ here, a tank blasts through the walls of a private library around which soldiers scuttle as a single, gas-masked figure comes forward to shoot the man in shirt-sleeves who had been the single occupant of the room. This is apparently Henry VI and the gas-masked face, complete with menacing Darth Vader-like breathing, belongs to Richard, Duke of Gloucester. Lisa Hopkins has argued that the enveloping sound of heavy breathing in

⁶⁹ Most critics of this film point out the close attention that Loncraine paid to 1930s detail, from the 'uncanny historicity [established] through a superabundance of visual details – Bentley limousines, Abdulla cigarettes, Sten guns' (Loehlin, 'Top of the world, Ma', 71) to the behaviour of Richard listening to 'a gramophone record as he delects over photos of Hastings's execution' which paralleled Hitler who had 'watched the films of the slow strangulation of the Stauffenberg plotters in July 1944' (Coursen, 'Filming Shakespeare's History', 107). These details signalled the period in order to '[evoke] the rise of fascism in the thirties in a realistic way' (Hatchuel, 27). The visual elements of this film are very important, compensating in some cases for the editing and cutting of the text that was necessary for the medium: Hatchuel notes that '[t]hroughout the film, Loncraine introduces visual metaphors essentially based on the insults uttered by Queen Margaret. Her part being entirely suppressed, visual metaphors are somehow there to compensate for her absence' (27-28).

⁷⁰ Coursen, 'Filming Shakespeare's History', 105.

⁷¹ Donaldson, 'Cinema and the Kingdom of Death: Loncraine's *Richard III*', 248.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 251.

⁷³ Loehlin points out that a full ten minutes of Loncraine's film has passed before a word of Shakespeare is spoken.

this scene presents the events from the perspective of Richard: the breathing the audience hears being what he hears inside his mask.⁷⁴ Hopkins suggests that intimacy is created between Richard and the audience, therefore creating sympathy with Richard from the earliest point of the film. However, contrary to this argument for intimacy this scene is shocking and frightening and Richard is presented as being the creator of, and therefore central to, that fear. As the setting distances the film from Shakespeare, this moment distances the audience from Richard through horror at the events of the scene which are, significantly for this discussion, not the events of Shakespeare's play.

The reference to *Star Wars* in this brief account of the opening scene is not misplaced here because Loncraine's *Richard III* is more concerned with referencing twentieth-century film than the history of Richard III or any other pre-twentieth century period. Perhaps this is intended to appeal to a wider, possibly a younger, audience. However it is also a result of the play being treated as a thrilling story rather than history or even Shakespeare: it is telling that in the featurette extra on the DVD edition McKellen states that his film is more *Godfather* than *Batman*, thus speaking to a contemporary film audience rather than a theatre or play-reading audience. The film is placed in a contemporary film-history context rather than an historical play-history context. Loehlin writes extensively on the use of heritage costume drama and gangster film conventions particularly seeing references to James Cagney's *White Heat* in the final moments of both films.⁷⁵ It is also possible to see references to Orson Welles's *1984* in the imposing, grey buildings of Richard's dictatorship years and the Tower, and Donaldson writes about how the film references both silent cinema and the films of

⁷⁴ Lisa Hopkins, "How very Like the Home Life of our own Dear Queen": Ian McKellen's *Richard III* in *Spectacular Shakespeare: Critical Theory and Popular Cinema*, ed. Courtney Lehmann and Lisa S. Stark (London: Associated University Presses, 2002), 49.

⁷⁵ Loehlin, 'Top of the World, Ma', 76

Alfred Hitchcock.⁷⁶ Interestingly although a 1930s setting is so firmly established, the strongest references to support parallels between McKellen's Richard and Hitler are filmic and obviously so. For example, the scene of Richard's presentation as king to the populace visually refers to Leni Riefenstahl's Nazi propaganda film of the 1934 Nuremberg rally, *Triumph of the Will*, with primary red flags and row upon row of supporters calling Richard's name, complete with near-but-not-quite Nazi salutes. The use of these references to other films and film genres by Loncraine demonstrates how the film draws on more contemporary narratives in its storytelling, which goes beyond the historical and play context.

Although the 1930s period was also the setting for Richard Eyre's stage production from which the film was developed, this was only so in a vague, suggestive manner: Loncraine made it much more explicit by paying close attention to period detail.⁷⁷ Olivier's film was also based on a stage production, his 1944 production, however his had real resonance for its audience because, as Kenneth Tynan reported Olivier as saying, while Olivier was playing the tyrant 'there was Hitler across the way'.⁷⁸ This political currency is lost in Olivier's film, which was made ten years later, precisely because that historical moment had passed and the setting of the film does not encourage such alignments. Loncraine's setting of his film in Europe's recent and recognisable past suggests that the viewer is being encouraged to align the film with those times and that the play is being used to make a comment on them. However, McKellen is clear about his intentions in this respect in the published screenplay:

The historical events of the play had occurred just a couple of generations before the first audience saw them dramatised. The comparable period for us would be the 1930s, close enough for no-one to think we were identifying the plot of the

⁷⁶ Donaldson, 'Cinema and the Kingdom of Death: Loncraine's *Richard III*', 147 – 148.

⁷⁷ Coursen, 'Filming Shakespeare's History', 106 and Loehlin, 'Top of the World, Ma', 68.

⁷⁸ Kenneth Tynan 'Sir Laurence's Richard', *New York Times* (21st August 1966) quoted in Coursen, 'Filming Shakespeare's History', 109.

play with actual events, any more than Shakespeare was writing about a real king.⁷⁹

Despite making such references to the past, this film does not interrogate that past or use it to discuss or speak to an issue contemporary to the film. Rather the film is deliberately set in the recent though finished and well-documented past in order to not be seen to be making a political comment on anything. Although some critics have inferred from this quotation that the makers of the film were implicitly identifying the play with actual events, I would suggest that McKellen is actually arguing for the play as a story rather than history with a political point to make beyond the plot. Indeed McKellen goes on to say that Shakespeare was creating history 'that never happened',⁸⁰ a point that we may link back to Olivier's opening suggestion that the play is 'legend ... worth preserving for [its] own familiar [sake]'. As with Olivier's film, the moment has passed, and for a 1990s audience, the 1930s are so well known in non-fiction books and documentaries as to mean that the film does not address issues surrounding that time. Instead the 1930s becomes simply a backdrop to a heritage film fiction. Coursen supports this as he states that 'Loncraine's 1930s said nothing to the script, nor did the script inform that time of impending doom. And thus the film says nothing to us'.⁸¹

Hopkins has argued that McKellen is actually being rather cunning in these quotations and his film is in fact about the British royal family, the Windsors. Hopkins draws convincing parallels between the characters of the film and characters from the family's recent past, for example reading Annette Bening's Queen Elizabeth as Wallis Simpson, and Edward IV as Edward VIII. However, Hopkins' argument relies on McKellen assuming his audience are able to see through his diversionary tactics, and the audience

⁷⁹ Ian McKellen, *William Shakespeare's Richard III* (London: Doubleday, 1996), 13.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁸¹ Coursen, 'Filming Shakespeare's History', 113.

ignoring other obvious parallels. For example, Hopkins writes that 'McKellen's Richard is no Hitler; he is not even, despite that black uniform, significantly like that nearest British counterpart Mosley'.⁸² Even if the audience does not see 'significant' parallels between McKellen's Richard and Mosley, the fact that this is suggested, however implicitly, does imply that the character can be read as such. Indeed, Donaldson argues that there are 'insistent parallels between Richard and Hitler [and] English fascism in the 1930's' and that 'McKellen's Richard has affinities with Hitler but also with Oswald Mosley'.⁸³ I would suggest that it is easier to read Richard as Mosley rather than a Windsor because he is portrayed as a British Hitler.

In considering Jones's ideas about the presence of Shakespeare's culture and the text's founding moments in performances of his plays, it is apparent that these two films demonstrate that argument to be incorrect. Through its emphasis on legend, the Olivier film is presented as fairy tale. Despite the fact that Olivier's 1944 stage production was playing while Hitler was 'across the way' posing a real threat, this is not a theme that is present in the Olivier film. While Loncraine's film does focus on a 1930s dictatorship and calls this comparison to mind, his film also does not successfully speak to that or our historical moment. That it is so firmly set within the 1930s also distances the play from Shakespeare's context; moreover Loncraine compounds this occlusion by referencing filmic forms over theatre. Equally, both of these films take the play out of its tetralogical context, thus distancing it from its literary context and from its material, historical context. These films show that, contrary to Jones's argument, productions of Shakespeare's *Richard III* do not always experience the pull of history, but rather by

⁸² Hopkins, "How very Like the Home Life of our own Dear Queen": Ian McKellen's *Richard III*, 53.

⁸³ Donaldson, 'Cinema and the Kingdom of Death: Loncraine's *Richard III*', 244.

tampering⁸⁴ with the historical context they in fact become 'interwoven patterns of history and legend'.

⁸⁴ In discussing his film adaptation of *Twelfth Night*, Trevor Nunn stated: 'I resisted, I wept, I tampered' (Trevor Nunn, *William Shakespeare's Twelfth Night: a screenplay* (London: Methuen, 1996), xi).

Chapter Two: 'History shall speak freely of our acts': Shakespeare's twenty-first century history plays

In his 1967 essay on 'Past Significance and Present Meaning', Robert Weimann argued that for Shakespeare's texts to be entirely effective in the theatre they must acknowledge the plays' past while attempting to be modern. Weimann states that 'in the contemporary Shakespearian [*sic*] theatre, both the modern and the Elizabethan world interact' and that '[the] play's maximum effectiveness today depends on an awareness of its past genetics'.⁸⁵ More recently, in 2003, Maria Jones argued that although '[all] reproductions, transformations, adaptations, translations can speak anew to someone ... the work of art is also related to its founding moment'⁸⁶ and that 'the work of performance touches the social life of Shakespeare's scripts'.⁸⁷ In contrast to Weimann who seeks for productions to find the past in their present staging, Jones states that 'the plays ... will only be relevant if something "new" is made of them'.⁸⁸ However, within this Jones argues strongly for what she terms the 'pull of history'⁸⁹ back to the plays' founding moment which she believes is always present in current production. This is perhaps something that Margaret Shewring touches on in her work on *Richard II* in performance when she states that '[the play's] sense of relevance ensures *Richard II* a special place in the history of performance. For it is both "merely history" and always of contemporary relevance'.⁹⁰ This sense of being 'merely history', however, is, in opposition to Jones's argument, not necessarily always present. In contrast to both Weimann and Jones's arguments it is possible, perhaps even desirable, to stage modern productions of Shakespeare's plays without experiencing the 'pull of history'.

⁸⁵ Robert Weimann, 'Shakespeare on the Modern stage: Past Significance and Present Meaning', in *Shakespeare Survey 20*, ed. Kenneth Muir (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 115.

⁸⁶ Jones, *Shakespeare's Culture in Modern Performance*, 3.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 4.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 3.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 11.

⁹⁰ Shewring, *Richard II*, 29.

The history plays are particularly productive to examine in this context because they were originally written about medieval history, and are now being staged 700 years after the events of their narratives and 400 years after they were written. These plays then are always about an historical moment, whether that is the murder of Richard II or the return of the Earl of Essex from Ireland. Indeed, the Act V Chorus of *Henry V*, in describing the reception that Henry and his men received on return to London, states that:

The mayor and all his brethren, in best sort,
Like to the senators of th'antique Rome
With the plebeians swarming at their heels
Go forth and fetch their conqu'ring Caesar in –
As, by a lower but high-loving likelihood,
Were now the General of our gracious Empress –
As in good time he may – from Ireland coming,
Bringing rebellion broached on his sword,
How many would the peaceful city quit
To welcome him!⁹¹

The character invoked by the phrase 'General of our gracious Empress' coupled with the reference to Ireland is that of the Earl of Essex. In 1599 Essex was pursuing a military campaign to subdue the Irish and re-establish English control in the country before taking on the Earl of Tyrone and his forces in Ulster.⁹² In Michael Boyd's production of *Henry V* (2007 - 2008), the Chorus, in a rare moment of updating in the production, was emended so that the actor stated 'Were now our generals from our wars coming'.⁹³ This can be read as an attempt to make the play relevant to current concerns and is what director Nicholas Hytner refers to as 'a three-way dialogue that includes [the fifteenth century and the Elizabeth present, and] our own present [and] is nowadays

⁹¹ *Henry V*, Act V Chorus, 25 - 34.

⁹² Paul. E. J. Hammer, 'Shakespeare's *Richard II*, the Play of 7 February 1601, and the Essex Rising', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 59:1 (Spring 2008), 5.

⁹³ This received something of an ovation at the performance I attended.

inevitable'.⁹⁴ However, the relevance of the plays to the current moment has always been a matter of significance: the perceived relevance of Shakespeare's history plays to current situations was present at the time of the plays' inception. The genre of the history play was popular in the 1590s in part because of the process of nation building which England had been going through for a number of years, with history plays promulgating a sense of patriotism. A play such as *Henry V* with its inclusion of characters from England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales and an overt discussion of nationality and national identity in III.iii fits into this interpretation, and the existence of the 'unambiguously patriotic' Quarto text of 1600 confirms this positive reading.⁹⁵

However, the 1590s were also rife with concerns surrounding the impending death of Elizabeth, the lack of an heir and the possibility of invasion from various countries with intentions to impose their own monarchies.⁹⁶ Such anxieties are explicit in Shakespeare's history plays which through the two tetralogies dramatize a nation in crisis. Indeed, *Richard II* is about the deposition of a king and the issues of good rule and rightful rule, and Richard Dutton has argued convincingly that *Henry V* is in fact a succession play.⁹⁷ Discussion in these plays of the nature of monarchy and inheritance, and dispute over rightful rule leading to civil war must have had a profound impact in the 1590s. Indeed, so politically sensitive were the issues that Shakespeare staged in *Richard II* (which is ostensibly about a ruler of the late fourteenth century) that some

⁹⁴ Jonathan Bate interview with Nicholas Hytner, 'Henry V in Performance: The RSC and Beyond' in *Henry V* by William Shakespeare (Basingstoke: Macmillan), 179.

⁹⁵ Dutton quotes Gary Taylor's list of omissions from the Quarto text which includes the church's motives for war and financing, Henry's responsibility for Falstaff's death, the motives of the traitors, Henry's ultimatum in III.iii and Burgundy's account of Henry's devastation of France. Taylor notes that '[t]he effect of the differences between this text and the one 'printed in all modern editions is to remove almost every difficulty in the way of an unambiguously patriotic interpretation of Henry' (Dutton, "Methinks the truth should live from age to age", 194).

⁹⁶ Shewring, *Richard II*, 23 and Dutton, "Methinks the truth should live from age to age", 184.

⁹⁷ Dutton, "Methinks the truth should live from age to age", 184. Dutton argues that both the Quarto and Folio texts of *Henry V* register significant concerns about the death of Elizabeth and the issue of who would succeed her.

major scenes, including the deposition scene, were not printed or played until 1608 when Elizabeth had been dead for five years and the 'national crisis', as Shewring terms it, 'had passed'.⁹⁸ The politically explosive nature of *Richard II* is also evident in the performance of a play about that monarch on the eve of the Earl of Essex's rebellion in 1601, an event to which Elizabeth seemed to be referring when, after the rising, she commented to William Lambarde 'I am Richard II, know ye not that?'. Whether this play was Shakespeare's is debatable;⁹⁹ nevertheless a play about Richard II was related to an uprising which eventually led to the Earl's execution. This element of the plays, contemporary to neither the medieval nor the modern but to the Elizabethan era, is something that modern performance still makes reference to: in Boyd's 2006 – 2008 history cycle for the Royal Shakespeare Company, the links between Richard II and Elizabeth I were explicit, presented through the use of the costuming and makeup design for Jonathan Slinger who played Richard.

Indeed, the characters in the plays seem aware of the way in which history can be used to reinterpret their actions. For example, in I.ii of *Henry V* King Henry makes his decision to invade France. After the lengthy Salic Law speech from the Archbishop of Canterbury in which the complicated claim is detailed, Henry speaks about the potential outcomes of the war. He says,

[T]here we'll sit,
Ruling in large and ample empery
O'er France and all her almost kingly dukedoms,
Or lay these bones in an unworthy urn,
Tombless with no remembrance over them.
Either our history shall with full mouth
Speak freely of our acts, or else our grave,
Like Turkish mute, shall have a tongueless mouth,

⁹⁸ Shewring, *Richard II*, 24.

⁹⁹ See Blair Worden, 'Which Play Was Performed at the Globe Theatre on 7 February 1601?' *London Review of Books* 25:13 (July 10 2003) and Paul E. J. Hammer, 'Shakespeare's *Richard II*, the play of 7 February 1601, and the Essex Rising', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 59:1 (Spring 2008), 1 – 35.

Not worshipped with a waxen epitaph.¹⁰⁰

This speech underlines Henry's concern with posterity and he will expand on the theme later in the play in IV.iii, in the St Crispin's day speech. It highlights the role that history will play in remembering this war: essentially Henry is happy for anything to be said, 'history shall ... speak freely', so long as they win. In defeat, Henry would want simply to be forgotten.

In this chapter I will discuss how theatrical productions of Shakespeare's history plays have appropriated the actions of Shakespeare's characters, as Shakespeare appropriated the actions of historical figures, for their own historical moment. This chapter will focus on Nicholas Hytner's 2003 production of *Henry V* for the National Theatre, Jonathan Munby's 2007 production of *Henry V* at Manchester's Royal Exchange Theatre, Trevor Nunn's 2005 production of *Richard II* staged at the Old Vic theatre, and Sulayman Al-Bassam's 2007 adaptation of *Richard III*, *Richard III: An Arab Tragedy*. These are productions which we might fairly term twenty-first century histories because of the modern staging used by the directors and their attempt to speak to the current audience. In this chapter, through close readings of these productions, I argue that productions do not always experience the 'pull of history', and that it is not necessary for them to 'interact' with their Elizabethan past to be 'effective'; on the contrary, Shakespeare's plays do work in the modern era and do speak directly to the concerns of the day.

This has precedent in perhaps the most famous of Shakespeare's plays on film: Laurence Olivier's patriotic and hugely influential film of *Henry V* was prompted by the Second World War. Although set in a fairy-tale medieval past, Olivier's film was about

¹⁰⁰ *Henry V*, I.ii.225-231.

the 1940s: despite not being explicitly sponsored by the Ministry for Information, the film, as Emma Smith writes, 'enjoyed official support'.¹⁰¹ The Ministry for Information approached Olivier to make the film¹⁰² and brought him out of active service in the war for him to do so, and documents disclosed in 2006 detail how Olivier was contracted by the Tax office, paid so that he would not make any film to challenge his *Henry V* for the remainder of the war.¹⁰³ However, despite this contextual information which demonstrates the perceived importance of this play for the audience of the 1940s, the only explicit reference within the film to that period and the Second World War is the dedication at the beginning,

To the Commandos and Airborne Troops of Great Britain, the spirit of whose ancestors it has been humbly attempted to recapture in some ensuing scenes.¹⁰⁴

Coming at the beginning of the film, this dedication directly appeals to the emotions of the audience and establishes the patriotic tone of the film in general. However, after this point the film arguably contains no direct references to the 1940s. The film opens with an aerial view over Elizabethan London, the camera bringing the viewer into the Globe theatre where the first few scenes take place. The film is shot in vivid Technicolor using painted backdrops based on the *Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry*. Nevertheless, despite the absence of explicit allusions to the 1940s, the film is clearly made for the audience of its moment: aerial views of London would be familiar from newsreels of the Blitz, and the metatheatrical elements of the opening scenes set in the playhouse draw our attention to Shakespeare as the author, making reference to British culture and effectively celebrating what was being fought for in World War II. The brightness of the colour suggests the attempt at morale boosting and the bloodless depiction of the battle at Agincourt may indicate sensitivity to a war-weary populace:

¹⁰¹ Emma Smith, Introduction to *Henry V*, by William Shakespeare, Shakespeare in Production series (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 56.

¹⁰² Laurence Olivier, *Confessions of an Actor*, (Kent: Hodder and Stoughton, 1991), 130-131.

¹⁰³ Richard Norton-Taylor, 'How Olivier staged a tax coup', *Guardian*, March 1, 2006, Main section 11.

¹⁰⁴ Dedication from *Henry V* directed by Laurence Olivier (1944).

indeed Deborah Cartmell draws comparisons between Olivier's film and *The Wizard of Oz* in the escapism of both pieces. Olivier made dramatic cuts to the text in order to present Henry in an unproblematically sympathetic light, editing out passages including the execution of Bardolph, the bulk of the speeches at Harfleur and the order to kill the French prisoners. Deborah Cartmell writes that '[w]hat is revealing is that the myth of Henry V and the myth of Shakespeare in the 1930s and 1940s were too sacrosanct for readers to consider Shakespeare's diminishment of Henry's heroism'.¹⁰⁵ Consequently, Cartmell states, '[w]ithin such a critical context ... Olivier eliminates half of the play's lines'.¹⁰⁶ Cartmell gives quite an extensive list of cuts from the text, however, as she subsequently points out, the film was intended for morale boosting, thus

Henry's climactic arrival at the fairy-tale-like palace of the French King in Act V clearly echoes Dorothy's arrival in Emerald City. The comparison to *The Wizard of Oz* is pertinent, as the audience ... are allowed to escape into another world, a world of colour and excitement.¹⁰⁷

Although Olivier's film is generally accepted as a positive presentation of Henry which many productions, notably Kenneth Branagh's post-Falklands film, set themselves in opposition to, it is interesting that the Carlton DVD edition of the film omits the dedication. The effect this has is significant for an early twenty-first century audience who may be unfamiliar with the film's contextual background, because the 1940s dedication colours the audience's response to the subsequent action. It is therefore also interesting that in his book on *Henry V*, James Loehlin neglects to comment on the dedication. Loehlin's extensive chapter on the Olivier film attempts a balanced reading between seeing the film in terms of the Second World War and not doing so. Omitting

¹⁰⁵ Deborah Cartmell, *Interpreting Shakespeare on Screen*, (London:Macmillan, 2000), 96.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. Cartmell details these cuts as '[excluding] the treatment of the traitors, the speech before Harfleur ... Henry's exchange of gloves with Williams, Henry's acknowledgement of his father's guilt ... the hanging of Bardolph ... the order to slay the prisoners, Henry's bawdy exchanges with Burgundy and Katherine, and the final remarks of the Chorus who reminds the audience of the ephemeral nature of Henry's victory' (96).

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 97. *The Wizard of Oz* was released in 1939.

the dedication from such work seems strange as it divorces the film from its most important contextualising aspect. Indeed, Michèle Willems has argued that

[b]ecause spectatorship normally conditions interpretive choices and sometimes decisions of transposition, it is an essential parameter in the analysis of a film ... No one would dream of studying ... Olivier's *Henry V*, released in 1944, without taking into account the fact that it was dedicated (even though after the completion of principal photography) to the paratroops who landed in Normandy.¹⁰⁸

In contrast to Olivier's film which spoke to a 1940s audience about 1940s concerns but did so without making direct comparisons or references, two productions of *Henry V* in the opening decade of the twenty-first century very clearly used the play to speak to the current moment, making those references explicit. In 2003, Nicholas Hytner staged his first production as Artistic Director of the National Theatre, a modern-dress production of *Henry V* which seemed to speak directly about the war in Iraq, the beginning of which coincided with the start of the production's rehearsals. Although it may seem to be an accident of timing, it was in fact explicitly Hytner's intention to stage the play to speak to the war-mongering of 2003: 'I chose during the summer of 2002 to schedule *Henry V* to open in April 2003. The country had just fought the beginnings of a war in Afghanistan, and it seemed likely that we would soon be fighting another in Iraq'.¹⁰⁹ Hytner goes on to state that 'it would have been perverse not to play *Henry V* as a contemporary text'.¹¹⁰ Indeed, the play was staged in a manner that suggested direct parallels with the road to war taken by Tony Blair and George W. Bush: the first scenes were presented as a cabinet meeting complete with what appeared to be 'dodgy dossiers' at which the characters might have been 'discussing Security Council resolution 1441'.¹¹¹ The war in France was staged using army fatigues and Landrovers

¹⁰⁸ Michèle Willems, 'Video and its Paradoxes', in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Film*, ed. Russell Jackson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 41.

¹⁰⁹ Bate interview with Hytner, '*Henry V* in Performance: The RSC and Beyond', 179.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ Spencer, *Daily Telegraph*, May 15 2003. Hytner stated in a Platform Paper at the National Theatre that 'the dossier they hand round is indeed the Iraq dossier'.

with embedded television news journalists – a form of journalism that came into its own during the conflict.¹¹²

Hytner has made the claim that, in spite of the timing of the play and its apparently clear nods to immediate contemporary parallels, the production was not ‘*about* the Iraq war’.¹¹³ However, reviews of the production – both journalistic and academic – focussed very much on the alignments between Hytner’s production and what was happening at the time: Paul Taylor in *The Independent* made this evident, opening his review by saying

A youngish head of state commits his armed forces to the risky invasion of a foreign power. The grounds for this attack are morally and legally dubious and the justifications scraped together are strained. He scores victory, but not before his vaunted Christian morals and accountability to the common man have been exposed as wanting.¹¹⁴

In this first paragraph, Taylor is deliberately ambiguous about to whom he is referring, encompassing both Henry V and Tony Blair within his appraisal of the play/situation. This is evident as the first sentence of the following paragraph states ‘[y]ou don’t need to be Clare Short to feel that you have heard this one before’.¹¹⁵ Of course one may ‘have heard this before’ – it is after all *Henry V* – however, this seems to suggest that *Henry V* although written in 1599, responds rather to 2003. Charles Spencer’s review for the *Daily Telegraph* also alludes to this aspect of the production, writing that ‘there are many moments when the drama might well have been written last week, rather than

(<http://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/16746/platform-papers/nicholas-hytner-on-henry-v.html>. Last accessed 11th August 2010).

¹¹² Hytner joked to the company at the beginning of rehearsals as the real war began, that ‘the design team were having problems getting hold of army fatigues ... because the army had bought them all to replenish its dwindling stocks’ (Reynolds and White, Production Diary, Two: Meeting and Greeting, [http://www.stagework.org.uk/webdav/harmonise@Page%252F@id=6017&Document\[@id=3115\]%252FChapter%252F@id=1.html](http://www.stagework.org.uk/webdav/harmonise@Page%252F@id=6017&Document[@id=3115]%252FChapter%252F@id=1.html). Last accessed 11th August 2010).

¹¹³ Bate interview with Hytner, ‘*Henry V* in Performance: The RSC and Beyond’, 179.

¹¹⁴ Paul Taylor, ‘*Henry V*, Olivier, National Theatre, London’, *The Independent*, 15th May 2003.

¹¹⁵ Clare Short was an MP and Secretary of State for International Development until 2003 when she resigned her Cabinet position in protest over the UK going to war in Iraq without a clear mandate from the United Nations.

400 years ago ... this is emphatically a *Henry V* for our times'.¹¹⁶ Indeed, some of the timings seem to have been uncanny – and were entirely out of Hytner's control: Ian Hislop wrote that

[the] day that the accusations against Lt-Col Tim Collins appeared in the newspapers I went to see *Henry V* at the National ... the newspapers had screamed "War Crime" in large letters and the effect in the theatre was greatly enhanced by the coincidence.¹¹⁷

Lois Potter has put the success of Hytner's production down to his 'unusually successful use of a sixteenth-century text to convince audiences that they were seeing what war and politics were "really" like in the twenty-first century'.¹¹⁸ As if to support this idea, Hislop's piece was titled 'Shakespeare knew about war crimes first person'.

The responses to the production are interesting, not just because they detail how current the production was, but also because they throw up contrasts in how the play is viewed in this modern context: some reviewers seemed to suggest that Henry learned from 2003 ('Henry gets a few tips from Blair'), or that 2003 learned from *Henry V*, whether the fifteenth century Henry or the Elizabethan account of him ('Agincourt, near Basra', 'Agincourt echoes all the way to Iraq'). This seems to imply the fluidity of time that Weimann and Jones's works suggest: the interaction of the modern and the Elizabethan. However, in all of the reviews there was no mention of the Shakespearean Henry; the only point of reference other than the war in Iraq was Olivier's film precisely because it also spoke to its moment although in a different manner to Hytner's production.

¹¹⁶ Spencer, *Daily Telegraph*, 14th May 2003.

¹¹⁷ Hislop, *Sunday Telegraph*, 1st June 2003. Lt-Col Tim Collins was commanding officer of 1st battalion, Royal Irish Regiment and gave a famously rousing speech, akin to Henry V's St Crispin's day speech, on the eve of the invasion of Iraq, 19th March 2003. However, Collins was later accused of mistreatment of Iraqi civilians and prisoners of war by a US Army reservist. He was later cleared of these allegations by the Special Investigation Branch of the Royal Military Police.
(<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/3198047.stm>. Last accessed 21/05/10).

¹¹⁸ Lois Potter, 'English and American Richards, Edwards, and Henries', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 55:4 (Winter, 2004), 452.

Jonathan Munby's production of *Henry V* at the Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester can also be read as an Iraq war production, however, in contrast to Hytner's production where the parallels were obvious, Munby, rather than staging Iraq, employed the iconography of the First and Second World Wars in order to speak about more current conflicts and the culpability of those responsible for and involved in such actions. Quotations printed in the programme notes and fixed to the walls of the theatre building underscored this theme. A sound bite from President Bush stating that 'God told me to strike at al Qaeda and I struck them. Then he instructed me to strike at Saddam, which I did' was printed directly next to a quotation from *Henry V*; 'but this lies all within the will of God, / To whom I do appeal, and in whose name ... I am coming on'.¹¹⁹ The programme also included thoughts about the Falklands conflict from Margaret Thatcher and Raymond Briggs who stated that '[t]his issue ... was not worth the sacrifice of a single life' alongside an extract from a memoir of a soldier of the First World War: 'feeling that I had outlived my time ... trying to grow young ever since. In war, there are no unwounded soldiers'. These quotations which were presented with no editorial comment were printed on half of a double page spread signalling their importance. The quotation from President Bush reflects on that from *Henry V*: the implication being that hearing religious instructions is an irrational foundation for war. In turn, this makes the reader question Henry's own impetus for war when seen as being the will and in the name of God. The use of these particular (arguably pacifistic) quotations about conflicts from different periods of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries encouraged a sense of the futility of war across the whole of that period. Aligning the quotations and thus the conflicts with the play encouraged the audience to see these themes in Munby's production: the audience was expected to see the parallels between these texts and the play, so that each presented the other through their alignment. Again, this supports

¹¹⁹ *Henry V*, 1.ii.289 – 291.

Terence Hawkes's contention that meaning works two ways: the audience's response to *Henry V* is created through the lens of these ideas; equally the audience's response to these ideas is mediated through *Henry V*.¹²⁰

It was clear from the use of quotations and images of modern conflict in the programme that the production would appeal to modern conceptions of war;¹²¹ however, Munby's production was also closely focussed around two aspects that appealed to current emotions regarding warfare: remembrance and interrogation of the idea of justified war. The Chorus, played by Gerard Murphy who doubled the role with that of Exeter, wore a heavy, smart overcoat which was adorned with a red poppy and a bar of four medals over the left breast; his costume suggested a formal military occasion rather than the battlefield, an image which gained significance as the performance progressed. Indeed, the use of doubling suggested that the scenes of the play represented the Chorus' memories: the rest of the company, initially all wearing plain black costumes, emerged onto the stage as he spoke his introduction as if emerging from his memory, the characters being gradually clothed in more realistic suits and combat gear as the Chorus' imagination took over. Rather than aiding the audience's creation of the play by stimulating their imaginations, this Chorus represented those who survive war – one of Henry's returning 'band of brothers'¹²² – but he concluded the play by reminding the audience that Henry VI would 'make his England bleed',¹²³ lines often cut from standalone productions, and the statement that 'oft our stage has shown' was not simply about past productions of *Henry VI*, but referred literally to England bleeding in real life

¹²⁰ Hawkes, *Meaning By Shakespeare*, i.

¹²¹ These images included that of an angry mob from *The Football Factory* (a documentary-style film about football violence from 2004), Bosnian soldiers during the Bosnian/Croatian conflict from 1995, and Royal Marines marching to Port Stanley in the Falklands from 1982.

¹²² *Henry V*, IV.iii.60.

¹²³ *Henry V*, Epilogue, 12. It is ambiguous in this quotation as to whether the Chorus is referring to Henry V's or Henry VI's England, it may indeed be both.

wars, even if those wars were overseas. After Agincourt, as the company sang *Non Nobis*, poppy leaves fell to the stage from the flies, something that takes place and is broadcast on television every November as the climax of the Royal British Legion's annual Festival of Remembrance. At the conclusion, Murphy's Chorus again wore his overcoat with his poppy on the lapel, and at his final line, 'this acceptance take', he saluted: Munby's production which portrayed the cruelties of war was, through the Chorus, an act of remembrance, as much for the fallen of Agincourt as for the dead of two world wars and the war in Iraq.

Munby's production staged two threads of interpretation. One of these was memory embodied in the Chorus as discussed above, but Munby also conducted an interrogation of justified war. Olivier's film made the Salic Law scene a moment of comedy and many productions since have had to address the difficulties of staging the Archbishop of Canterbury's long and complicated speech. Richard Dutton has observed that '[on] the modern stage the scene is something of an embarrassment, overlong and technical', but that in contrast 'the audience that saw a 1599 performance would have had several reasons to be very interested in the subject' because 'outside the play's historical discourse, Salic Law was far from ancient history or merely a legal smoke screen, and the particulars were important'.¹²⁴ This is no longer the case and therefore the scene has the potential to create confusion. The result of this is that, as Emma Smith has noted, 'Canterbury's Salic Law speech has often been considered expendable, and heavy cuts have been the norm'.¹²⁵ The problem seems to arise from the fact that this moment of justification of the war against France is not only long and complicated and therefore potentially dull, but also that the response to this speech by both the on and off stage

¹²⁴ Dutton, 'Methinks the Truth Should Live from Age to Age', 185 – 186.

¹²⁵ *Henry V* edited by Emma Smith, I.ii.33 – 95 note.

audience can colour the response to the rest of the play and Henry's behaviour. In Olivier's film, as Loehlin points out,

the two bishops [are presented] as comically incompetent actors ... Canterbury's validation of Henry's claim to France is obscured by slapstick buffoonery involving a huge pile of documents, which all three actors end up scrabbling on their knees to sort out.¹²⁶

Nicholas Hytner addressed the appropriateness of this approach for Olivier's film asking

When Olivier made his film, who was interested in the justification of the cause? The cause spoke for itself, so Olivier cut the archbishop to the bone, and sent up what was left. And he was right to do so.¹²⁷

In contrast to this, Hytner's production staged this moment with great seriousness, because in 2003 the issue of justification had become very important. However, four years later the immediate importance of this issue had diminished slightly and Munby retained the comedy: the Bishop of Ely ran around the half dozen men onstage distributing paper handouts while the Archbishop of Canterbury spoke. Ely's running around created something of a farcical effect, not least because as soon as one handout had been given out, he had to pass another around, remembering each time to bow before Henry. Despite this comedy, the scene was a crucial point of the production, as it had been in Hytner's: a cloth map was sprawled on the floor at the beginning of the scene and Henry stepped onto it as he asked 'May I with right and conscience make this claim?' while he slammed his fistful of paper onto the floor.¹²⁸ Juxtaposed with the comedy created at the beginning of the scene, this sudden seriousness underlined the centrality of the issue. Both Munby and Hytner treated this moment seriously; however,

¹²⁶ Loehlin, *Henry V*, 31.

¹²⁷ Bate interview with Hytner, 'Henry V in Performance: The RSC and Beyond', 189.

¹²⁸ *Henry V*, I.ii.96. Activity with papers has been a theme of stagings of this scene: not only does Olivier's film use papers comically to highlight the complexity and messiness of the claim, but Smith also notes the BBC film, *An Age of Kings*, directed by Michael Hayes, 'has Canterbury hand round copies of a paper detailing the Salic Law, which means the nobles are able to follow his complicated account and thus give it more weight' (94 note, I.ii.33 – 95). However, in Munby's production, as in Olivier's, the comedy created around these papers actually detracted from the details of the speech.

Elliot Cowan's Henry in Munby's production was presented as an ethical king genuinely concerned with the legitimacy of the war, whereas Adrian Lester's Henry in Hytner's production posed the question 'more like a demand for a more explicit brief sound-bite than the urgent prompting of conscience'.¹²⁹

Munby's production developed the interrogation of justified war by attempting, in the illusionary theatre, to present something of the reality of war. The spectacular staging of Harfleur was a significant moment: the central walkway of the stage was raised at one end to the first balcony level of the auditorium, creating the breach. The underside of the walkway dripped with water, creating the sound of rain and a waterlogged trench which characters later had to wade through while keeping watch. The costuming of these characters in puttees and capes was very reminiscent of First World War uniform; coupled with the trench effect and the idea of water creating a miserable experience, invoking images of First World War trench warfare consolidated the idea that Munby was staging a time setting related not to the fifteenth or sixteenth centuries but to the twentieth. The battle of Harfleur was created with orange and yellow fiery lights in the breach, smoke from offstage and the sound of loud booms, one of which was heard while Pistol ran up towards the breach following Henry, the boom stopping him dead in his tracks and making him, in terror, run back down the ramp. The effect of this was to justify why these characters failed in the war: not because of cowardice but because although they had initially been presented as hard-talking, common thieves they were not soldiers. While Pistol and his cohorts attempted to deny this feeling with unconvincing posturing, the boy (played by Claire Cox who doubled the character with Katherine) was crouched throughout the scene at the side of the ramp, rocking

¹²⁹ Michael Dobson, 'Shakespeare Performances in England, 2003' in *Shakespeare Survey* 57, ed. Peter Holland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 281.

backwards and forwards on his haunches, while singing a song with his fingers in his ears. This image appealed to the quotation from the seventeen-year-old soldier who was 'trying to grow young' and presented the epitome of childhood terror. This image and the use of First World War narratives appealed to twentieth century notions of war, and by so doing condemned Henry and his war.

Thus Munby's production aimed to show something of the effect of war on the common man, an aim which had also been apparent in Hytner's production. Hytner showed the low characters watching Henry's speeches on a television screen in a pub before turning over to watch the snooker, and he highlighted the effect of brutality on the soldiers in their refusal to follow the order to kill the French prisoners. However, in spite of the mass refusal in Hytner's production, the murder of the prisoners was not performed by Henry but by Fluellen, and Adrian Lester's Henry remained distant from the real violence.¹³⁰ In contrast, in what amounted to a condemnation of Henry and his war, Munby staged the full brutality of Henry: he retained the speech at Harfleur and, in extra-textual directorial decisions, he chose to show Henry executing both Bardolph and the French prisoners. Initially hanged above the central area of the stage, Bardolph continued to kick and struggle and, observed by Mountjoy, an unemotional Henry shot Bardolph dead. Although arguably a moment of kindness in preventing further suffering, this moment was more to show Henry's uncompromising attitude and to intimidate the French: the now dead Bardolph remained hanging directly above Henry while he spoke to the French herald. This brutality was continued in the retention of the order to kill the French prisoners: Henry took part and slit the throat of one prisoner himself. The violence used here – slitting throats and shooting at point blank range –

¹³⁰ Kevin Ewert, *Henry V: A Guide to the Text and its Theatrical Life*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 112.

was calculated to bring Henry close to the killing. Henry was not just implicated in these characters' deaths by giving the orders, but was directly, physically, solely responsible.

Henry V is famously an ambiguous play when it comes to the negative image of Henry:

Karl Wentersdorf illustrated the opposing ways of interpreting the king, stating that

For some, the play presents the story of an ideal monarch and glorifies his achievements; for them, the tone approaches that of an epic lauding the military virtues. For others the protagonist is a Machiavellian militarist who professes Christianity but whose deeds reveal both hypocrisy and ruthlessness.¹³¹

Building on the idea of these two views and suggesting that *Henry V* contains both of these perspectives, Norman Rabkin famously wrote that '[if] one considers the context of *Henry V*, one realizes that the play could scarcely have been anything but a rabbit-duck'.¹³² However, although it is possible to see both of these perspectives on the page, and to take the context of the play into account, in performance the decision as to whether to show the more Machiavellian element of Henry's character and in what order to show these episodes has a direct effect on how Henry will be received by the audience. The context of the production and what the director is wishing to say through his production then has profound implications for these scenes and whether they are retained or edited out. This is true of the Olivier film which cut Henry's brutality to show an heroic king: as Loehlin discusses, a consequence of 'Olivier's cutting of the traitors, Bardolph's death, the Harfleur threats, the prisoner massacre and the guilty prayer for undeserved victory' is that he 'severely reduces his material for giving depth,

¹³¹ Karl P. Wentersdorf, 'The conspiracy of silence in *Henry V*', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 27:3 (Summer, 1976), 264.

¹³² Norman Rabkin, 'Rabbits, Ducks, and *Henry V*', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 28:3 (Summer, 1977), 280. A rabbit-duck is an optical illusion in which the image of a rabbit and a duck can be seen simultaneously in a single picture. In this context, Rabkin's invocation of the rabbit-duck suggests that both the positive and negative images of Henry can be seen in the play at the same time.

complexity and scope to the character'.¹³³ In contrast, Kenneth Branagh retained the scene of Bardolph's execution in order to show Henry's humanity: Cartmell states that 'Branagh's film ... is striking for its *inclusions* rather than its exclusions' and writes of the execution of Bardolph that '[t]he close-up and flashback ... rather than questioning his motives, ultimately soften and humanise the figure'.¹³⁴ In contrast to these productions, Munby extratextually involved the king directly in the brutality, thus creating an entirely negative presentation which played into his pacifist approach, appropriating Henry's actions for his own twenty-first century ends.

In the light of this, the 'Upon the King' speech in Munby's production seemed somewhat incongruous, although it continued to bring the theme of justification to the fore. Henry was very active during this scene – moving around, standing, kneeling, and raising his arms in prayer – a great contrast to Olivier's quiet stillness watching the dawn. The audience were reminded, from this Henry's perspective, of the heavy responsibility which the king bears, and were now encouraged to sympathise. This presentation of the king's character continued after the battle, being particularly noticeable in the emotion with which Henry spoke the line 'God ... fought ... for ... us',¹³⁵ pausing between each word thus emphasising the line. This encouraged an alignment between the play and the religious rhetoric which had infused discussions of the war in Iraq directly embodied in the quotation from President Bush already referred to, and in another from Lt-Col Collins who stated that '[as] a Christian myself, I believe that, one day, we'll all be called to account by God for our actions. And if Mr Blair lied

¹³³ Loehlin, *Henry V*, 42.

¹³⁴ Cartmell, *Interpreting Shakespeare on Screen*, 101, 104. Branagh used flashback footage of Henry's days in Eastcheap with Bardolph while Bardolph was being hanged, and followed this with a close-up to show 'his eyes to be moist – the tears blending with the rain' (Ibid., 104). This presented the difficulty of Henry's position while retaining a sense of humanity around his character.

¹³⁵ *Henry V*, IV.viii.120.

about why he was going to war, he'll have a big problem on Judgment Day'.¹³⁶ The emphasis placed on Henry's line reflected the theme of these quotations and continued to encourage engagement of the play with the current situation.

Two years before Munby staged his *Henry V*, Trevor Nunn directed a modern *Richard II* at the Old Vic in London that also attempted to engage with current rather than Elizabethan politics. However, the narrative of *Richard II* is focused on the deposition of a medieval king, and is deeply concerned with issues of divine kingship, pomp, ceremony and ancient rites, understanding of which can no longer be assumed to be held by a modern audience. It is the fact of *Richard II*'s historical matter that makes it, according to Margaret Shewring, 'arguably the most difficult [of Shakespeare's history plays] to accommodate on the twentieth-century stage'¹³⁷ precisely because it is a 'poetic account of monarchy in the late Middle Ages [and] is so deeply rooted in the political and cultural moment of the 1590s'.¹³⁸ Nevertheless, in spite of this apparent difficulty there were a number of productions of the play during the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, arguably the most striking of which have attempted to use the play to speak directly to their audience about current concerns. The English Shakespeare Company (ESC) staged a production with a particularly modern approach during the 1980s, however, in a statement that apparently reinforces Shewring's assertions, actor Michael Pennington 'reflected that the modern parallels [in the ESC production] made it difficult for him to engage with the complexities of kingship'¹³⁹ as described in Shakespeare's play which suggests the tension that is created in staging a modern rendering of a Shakespeare play. There seems to be an ultimatum: either stage a Shakespeare that engages with Shakespeare or lose Shakespeare in the process of

¹³⁶ Quote in production programme and on the theatre walls.

¹³⁷ Shewring, *Richard II*, 2

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹³⁹ Jones, *Shakespeare's Culture in Modern Performance*, 151.

staging modernity. This would seem to support Weimann's argument as set forward above. Nicholas Hytner also supports this conceding that with his Iraq war *Henry V* 'we gained a vivid impression that Shakespeare was writing for us, now. We lost, of course, its corollary: the indisputable truth that Shakespeare was writing for his own audience, then'.¹⁴⁰ However, it is not entirely clear what is actually lost - some intangible idea of Shakespeare? Or a deadly museum piece? The productions under discussion in this chapter did not attempt to engage with Shakespeare's moment, however, as Graham Holderness notes of Sulayman Al-Bassam's *The Arab League Hamlet*, Al-Bassam's modern adaptation actually 'took the British audience deeper into Shakespeare'.¹⁴¹

Michael Billington described Trevor Nunn's production of *Richard II* as 'aggressively modern'¹⁴² and it was regarded by reviewer Mark Wolf in the *International Herald Tribune* as a Blair-Brown production that presented the characters of the play as fictional representations of real politicians of the immediate moment: the then Prime Minister, Tony Blair, and Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown. Speculation had been rife for a long time about the turbulent relationship between the two and about when Gordon Brown would take over leadership from Tony Blair, and this was a current debate during the production rehearsal period and performances. If read in such a way, Nunn's production became an immediate discussion of relevant contemporary matters in the same way that the play initially was in the 1590s. However, it is my contention that Nunn's production was not so specific but was in fact a means to present a recognisable political state by which to question the more traditional processes that

¹⁴⁰ Bate interview with Hytner, 'Henry V in Performance: The RSC and Beyond', 180.

¹⁴¹ Graham Holderness, 'From Summit to Tragedy: Al-Bassam's Political Theatre', *Critical Survey* 19:3 (2007), 130.

¹⁴² Michael Billington, *Guardian*, 5th October 2005.

(<http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture/2005/oct/05/theatre.art>. Last accessed 14/05/10).

govern British politics and, by looking to more modern approaches of governance, to discuss the power that politicians have to manipulate the populace through the media. Rather than a discussion of an actual political relationship, Nunn's production used the play to look at specific issues of politics in a specific, while still general, setting.¹⁴³

The notion of 'aggressive' contemporaneity suggests a firmness of intent that occludes the opportunity to address other time periods, but, while the production did not reference pre-twentieth century eras, the opposition of tradition and modernity was a framing theme of the staging. This was visually evident throughout in the production design: the stage, for example, consisted of a mix of old and modern using bare white walls with dark wooden panelling. Although the panelling created a sense of antiquity, the white of the walls also gave the set a contemporary impression. However, it was the traditional that opened the production: there was a single glass case set centre stage at the opening, in which the crown and purple ermine robe of the king were displayed. This opening visual suggested a museum: the casing of the robe and crown created an impression of distant monarchy, something separate and untouchable, if not a dead relic from a bygone age. This impression was challenged and undermined though as a number of lords processed on to the stage at the opening of the production and the case was opened in order for Richard to be robed and crowned thus pulling the relic from the past very much into the present. Pomp, ceremony and ritual characterised the opening: Richard was formally robed to Handel's 'Zadok the Priest', the traditional theme for coronations in Britain since the coronation of George II in 1727; all of the lords in the first gage scene were also robed in red ermine in the manner of the House of Lords; and

¹⁴³ This is also the case, as will be discussed later, with Sulyman Al-Bassam's *Richard III: An Arab Tragedy*, which was initially titled *The Baghdad Richard*. Al-Bassam changed the title because he did not want to create so strong an alignment between his adaptation and the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein.

a 'stilted manner of speech was used by Richard that indicated ritual, formality and detachment in his part in the proceedings.

However, despite this nod to tradition, Nunn's was indeed a modern production, set in a recognisably twenty-first century England: the sets were reminiscent of the House of Commons. Such references to British politics justified the use of antiquity: the use of robes referenced the dressing up of members, for example, during the state opening of parliament. Although this kind of pomp and ceremony seems outdated, there remains a large section of public life in Britain that still retains these traditional elements. Nunn used *Richard II* to interrogate this style of modern politics, stating in the programme notes that, among a number of political issues, '[p]eople ... question our fancy-dress legal system' and this helps to 'lend Shakespeare's play an unexpected relevance'.¹⁴⁴ The very specific set and costumes reflected Britain's own use of tradition in politics back to the audience while raising questions about the reasons behind and the validity of it.

The use of these familiar traditions therefore encouraged the audience to draw parallels between the production and Britain at that moment and the theme of the old *versus* the new was consequently embodied in the death of Richard's old fashioned, divine right method of rule against the more hands on, in-touch-with-the-people approach of Bolingbroke. Despite the old fashioned introduction, the tone was instantly modern in the gage scene with Mowbray and Bolingbroke, who wore suits, standing and sitting while throwing accusations across the floor much like a parliamentary debate. Their fast and angry tone of speech contrasted heavily with Richard's deliberate manner. In this way the opposition between the old and the new was also created within the

¹⁴⁴ Trevor Nunn, *Richard II* production programme, 5.

characterisations and established early on. However, this was externalised and visualised, as for instance through the contrast between the suit which Bolingbroke wore and Richard's robes, a theme which extended later to the contrast in military costumes, Richard wearing a World War I style traditional khaki suit, while Bolingbroke wore modern black combat gear. In light of this it was significant that Bolingbroke deposed Richard, suggesting that Nunn's answer to the questions he raised about Britain's political system – 'the issue of the monarchy and the republican debate ... arguments about our parliamentary system: is it any longer valid, or just a kind of circus' – is that the old must die, literally presented here in the death of Richard. Nunn's production seemed to suggest that the British political system must change radically as it does in the play. However, that this Bolingbroke was played as a disingenuous manipulator suggested this change to the new would not necessarily be a positive thing.

This became increasingly apparent in the extensive use of modern technology and media linked to the idea of political manipulation of the populace through television visuals and recordings: four television screens adorned the stage, including two large sized screens over the auditorium boxes to stage left and right. All of the characters were conscious of the power of personal image, for example, the queen's first scene was set at a glamorous photo shoot (casting her as something of a Princess Diana figure), and Richard was aware of the need to look as though he was doing what was required of him during his moment of respect for Gaunt's death. Gaunt's 'This England' speech was staged as a television recording which evidently got out of hand, but the recording was replayed on the big screens throughout the production as a means by which the population, figured in the audience, could be stirred up to revolt. As Bolingbroke's rebellion took hold this film was shown alongside footage of contemporary and real, not

staged, riots in the streets: two emotive and provocative images. Through the repeating of the speech Gaunt's prophecies became believable rather than mystical, politically loaded and provocative, achieving a kind of authority because of the fact of his death. The use of television screens against the stage also illustrated the differences between television and theatre: that the audience viewed the manipulation of speeches for broadcast highlighted the television as a medium for lies and the stage, in contrast, as a place where the truth is if not told at least seen.

The use of riot images helped to create the idea of England as a place outside of the theatre. The sense of England as a large geographical space is something that is important to both the play and productions, as Margaret Shewring states:

The complex geographical sense conveyed in the play is more than an accumulation of historical detail for its own sake. It serves a structural purpose in embodying the confusion surrounding the final months of Richard's rule as the old order breaks down, in the troubled transition of power leading to the accession of Henry IV.¹⁴⁵

Nunn's use of modern media could have had the adverse effect of reducing the sense of the geographical size of England in the play and thus losing this confusion which Shewring writes of. This is particularly so because of the speed with which information can now travel globally, evident also in the fast-pace of the production, and Nunn's production made use, not only of television, but also newspapers and mobile telephones in order for information to be disseminated. However, that Richard, for example, was informed of the problems in Ireland through *The Daily Telegraph* newspaper actually served to show how out of touch he was and indeed helped to create a sense of chaos around the idea that the ruler had no idea of what was happening in his country and relied on the media above his courtiers to keep him informed. That it was *The Daily*

¹⁴⁵ Shewring, *Richard II*, 10-11.

Telegraph that was used, a traditionally conservative newspaper, was most appropriate for this conservative king.

In contrast, where media showed Richard to be out of touch, Bolingbroke's use of television recording served to show a manipulative, ruthless and, at times, brutal, side to him. In a move suggesting an influence from Hytner's production of *Henry V*, where that King used television media to record his speeches and broadcast them to the nation,¹⁴⁶ Bolingbroke was accompanied by a cameraman during his campaign. Key moments were filmed throughout, including Bolingbroke's departure speech which was spoken directly to camera in an airport set, and Richard's grief at Flint Castle which was heavily edited in order to present the king as mad. Bolingbroke used television media to manipulate his viewers to see him positively and Richard negatively. This use of camera footage to manipulate was most evident in relation to the deposition: a heavily edited version of Richard 'unkinging' himself that presented his giving up of the throne as a willing and happy abdication of his power was played during the switch between IV.i and V.i; that the theatre audience had just witnessed the scene in full highlighted the incongruity between the reality and the broadcast. Thus Nunn used television recordings to demonstrate the dangerous power that twenty-first century media wields to alter meanings and give speeches continued significance out of context beyond the initial moment of the speaking. Indeed, it was perhaps the screens that were more properly the 'mirrors' in the deposition scene, reflecting the events to a watching audience as so many significant events in public life are now shown such as funerals and weddings of public figures and also, on a more political front, pop concerts such as 2005's Live8 which took place a few months before Nunn's production and had an

¹⁴⁶ Hytner made extensive use of television media to record and broadcast Henry's speeches. In a move that showed the effect of such speeches on both sides of the battlefield, footage of the Harfleur speech was watched on television, complete with French subtitles, by Katherine and Alice and was used to represent Katherine's motivation for learning English.

explicit political agenda to influence the G8 meeting that took place in Scotland that year.

However, the interrogation and murder of Green and Bushy which drew on provocative and current images of hostage videos, such as those emerging from Iraq at the time of the production's run, turned the idea of Bolingbroke using media to generate sympathetic support for him on its head. In Hytner's production of *Henry V* the controversial speech at Harfleur, which was cut from Olivier's film, was recorded:

I will not leave the half-achieved Harfleur
Till in her ashes she lie buried.
The gates of mercy shall be all shut up,
And the fleshed soldier, rough and hard of heart,
In liberty of blood shall range
With conscience wide as hell, mowing like grass
Your fresh fair virgins and your flow'ring infants¹⁴⁷

However, Henry signalled for the sound to be cut before he 'got to the really nasty bits'¹⁴⁸ which included the threats to the inhabitants of Harfleur:

What is't to me, when you yourselves are the cause,
If your pure maidens fall into the hand
Of hot and forcing violation?¹⁴⁹

In contrast, in Nunn's production Bolingbroke recorded the interrogation of Bushy and Green and the order to take them away to execution. The hostages were dishevelled, blindfolded and forced to kneel, flanked on either side by two soldiers wearing balaclavas and carrying guns. The purpose behind Bolingbroke recording this scene seemed counterproductive as television filming had, until this point, been used to secure sympathy for Bolingbroke. However, this staging damaged that support by presenting Bolingbroke's inhumanity. The presentation of the scene as a hostage video made direct allusions to current news media, but in making the moment so recognisably

¹⁴⁷ *Henry V*, III.iii.91 – 97.

¹⁴⁸ Ewert, *Henry V: A Guide to the Text and its Theatrical Life*, 112.

¹⁴⁹ *Henry V*, III.iii.102 – 104. According to the production prompt book, held at the National Theatre archives, the cut took place between lines 101 and 102.

contemporary, Nunn created confusion: it was unclear why such a manipulative political operator, who understood the power of the media in creating sympathy, would film something that could only show him as barbarous. It would seem that the consistency of presentation of Bolingbroke's character was subordinated to consolidating the sense of contemporaneity.

The productions that I have discussed in this chapter so far have all been English productions on English stages performed in English. Sulayman Al-Bassam's production of *Richard III: An Arab Tragedy* was strikingly different from these other productions: Al-Bassam's was an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Richard III* performed in Arabic with English surtitles. Distinct from some other Arab Shakespeares, this was a full adaptation rather than an Arabic translation or performance of Shakespeare.¹⁵⁰ Critical study of Arab Shakespeares is an emerging area of Shakespeare scholarship. In a special edition of the journal *Critical Survey* given over to Arab Shakespeares in 2007, Margaret Litvin notes that '[t]o my knowledge, this is the first essay collection in any language to be devoted to Arab appropriations of Shakespeare'.¹⁵¹ Litvin notes that study of international Shakespeare has been growing since the early 1990s, but that '[u]ntil recently, scholars of Arabic literature and drama were mainly passive participants' although 'this situation is changing quickly'.¹⁵² One of the events that Litvin notes as evidence for this change was the Royal Shakespeare Company's welcoming of Al-Bassam in 2007. The RSC commissioned Al-Bassam's adaptation and production and it was staged during the Complete Works festival 2006 – 2008, playing for a week in the Swan theatre while Michael Boyd's *Richard III* was being performed in the Courtyard theatre. The factor of the RSC's commission again makes

¹⁵⁰ Al-Bassam adapted the play in English before it was translated into Arabic. The surtitles were then translated into English from the Arabic text.

¹⁵¹ Margaret Litvin, 'Editorial', *Critical Survey* 19:3 (2007), 1.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

this different from other Arab Shakespeares: this was commissioned for and first performed on an English stage, to a particular kind of audience that is arguably quite distinct from an Arab audience in an Arab country.

Litvin states that 'Shakespeareans and Arabists alike are taking a variety of approaches to the question of what Arab readers, translators, rewriters, producers, directors, critics and audiences do with Shakespeare'¹⁵³ and, in the same volume, Rafik Darragi quotes Mohamed Driss, the head of the Tunisian National Theatre, asking 'What is today the purpose of reproducing a Shakespearean tragedy, when all over the world directors are desperately searching for new creative ways, new means for attracting a public who is more and more disinterested in the theatre?'¹⁵⁴ Driss apparently views the staging of Shakespeare as a retrograde step in performance, and it may be an appropriate question to ask how Shakespeare, a dead white playwright, is relevant in modern Arab discourses despite claims that Shakespeare was not the man from Stratford but an Arab, Shaikh al-Zubair. Sulayman Al-Bassam is an Anglo-Kuwaiti writer, adapter, and director, and is the founder of the Sulayman Al-Bassam Theatre Company. This is an international theatre company of British and Arab performers whose projects focus on the 'recurrent theme ... [of] the relationship between the Arab world and the West'. *Richard III: An Arab Tragedy* was the fourth Shakespearean play produced by the company, the third which Al-Bassam has adapted. Al-Bassam works with Shakespeare over new dramatists because of 'the political parallels that can be drawn from the plays, and ... the classic status of Shakespeare that provides a kind of shield or mask for the radical dramatist'.¹⁵⁵ Graham Holderness states that '[t]o some extent Shakespeare was a "Trojan Horse" for Al-Bassam, a cultural monument that enabled him to smuggle

¹⁵³ Litvin, 'Editorial', 2.

¹⁵⁴ Rafik Darragi, 'The Tunisian Stage: Shakespeare's Part in Question', *Critical Survey* 19:3 (2007), 95.

¹⁵⁵ Holderness, 'From Summit to Tragedy', 128.

critical views on his own society past the authorities and to the greedy intelligences of the theatre audience'.¹⁵⁶ *An Arab Tragedy* was set in a non-specific Arab Gulf country at the beginning of the twenty-first century and consequently there was frequent reference to contemporary issues such as oilfields, the United Nations, spies, and external coalition forces. Although the adaptation mostly used scenes from Shakespeare's text it was a dramatically reduced version, running at only one hour and 55 minutes, and included numerous quotations from the Qur'an and Islamic prayers. In his article on Al-Bassam's adaptations, Holderness writes about the language of the play, stating that '[it] is Shakespeare and yet not Shakespeare', exploring how '[b]y the time the text reached performance it had been through what Al-Bassam calls "a layered process of 'arabisation' and reappropriation", and emerged as a dramatic medium with an entirely different rhythm and structure'.¹⁵⁷ In adapting the text, Al-Bassam fully appropriated *Richard III* into an Arab world, and the result was that the play was used to interrogate Arab and Western understandings of each other, to highlight injustices on both sides, to encourage discussion about the changing and evolving relations between these two worlds today: Al-Bassam used a play from English history, about English history to talk about international relations in the twenty-first century.

Al-Bassam's adaptation began life as *The Baghdad Richard*, such a title clearly drawing alignments between the character of Richard III and Saddam Hussein. However, the title was changed mid-way through the marketing campaign¹⁵⁸ because Al-Bassam deemed it too specific.¹⁵⁹ Al-Bassam argued that 'it would be selling both histories [of

¹⁵⁶ Holderness, 'From Summit to Tragedy', 128.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 126, 127.

¹⁵⁸ This was to the extent that tickets for the production were printed with the title of the production as *The Baghdad Richard*.

¹⁵⁹ Saddam Hussein was found, arrested and executed during this period and while Al-Bassam wanted to talk specifically about the Arab world, he did not want to limit his adaptation too specifically to Iraq and the events surrounding the Iraq war and capture of Saddam Hussein. Al-Bassam referred to this 'rapid

Richard III and Iraq] a bit short in trying to make a foolproof comparison between Richard III and the rise and fall of Saddam Hussein',¹⁶⁰ this reasoning reflects the potential limitations of staging contemporary adaptations of Shakespeare's history plays with explicit agendas to speak to current concerns. Al-Bassam said that his intention had been to link Shakespeare's *Richard III* and the history of the Arab world and, as Holderness states, '[t]he new title ... suggests a broader territory, not just Iraq, and broaches wider issues of concern to the Gulf States and the Arab world in general'.¹⁶¹ Al-Bassam suggested that there was a temptation in playing the 'linear' history or plot of *Richard III* and laying over it the linear history of an Arab tyrant such as Saddam Hussein, however, he also argued that this would be too controversial and that taking *Richard III* out of its tetralogical context would mean that a new historical context had to be created in order for the play to make sense.¹⁶² As a consequence, the adaptation was markedly non-specific, dramatising the relationship between the Arab world and external forces, and political themes of contemporary Arab society, particularly in relation to the role of women.

In her review of the play, Litvin notes the issue of the 'production's inaccessibility',¹⁶³ for the Stratford audience. This was in part related to the language barrier and reliance on surtitles, however, the audience were immediately thrust out of their comfort zones, having their expectations of *Richard III* challenged by the adaptation of the opening: the play did not begin with Richard's 'winter of discontent'¹⁶⁴ soliloquy but rather with

change of events in the region' as a reason for not simplifying his adaptation too much (interview with Holderness, 'From Summit to Tragedy', 134).

¹⁶⁰ Holderness interview with Al-Bassam, 'From Summit to Tragedy', 134.

¹⁶¹ Holderness, 'From Summit to Tragedy', 134.

¹⁶² Playing with History event at Courtyard Theatre, 14th February 2007. This event was a discussion with Sulayman Al-Bassam and Michael Boyd, facilitated by Deborah Shaw, the RSC *Complete Works* Festival director.

¹⁶³ Margaret Litvin, 'Review of *Richard III: An Arab Tragedy*', *Shakespeare Bulletin* 25:4 (Winter, 2007), 88.

¹⁶⁴ *Richard III*, 1.1.1.

the character of Margaret, something which Graham Holderness referred to as ‘an immediate disruption of convention and expectation’.¹⁶⁵ Margaret’s became a central role as she became the figure representing past history and present disenfranchisement.

Her soliloquy set the tone:

I am Margaret. You needn’t be concerned about me. We lost. It is your right to ignore me. I would ignore myself if my history let me. I don’t want your loans, your gifts, your reconstruction grants. I don’t want your pity: we lost. All I ask from you is not to question my thirst for revenge: it is not because I am Arab – I have a degree. And anyway, my name is not Margaret. But our history is so awful, even the victors have changed their names.¹⁶⁶

Margaret spoke these lines while moving around the stage, picking up clothes and placing them in a small suitcase, creating the familiar image of the refugee and suggesting the results of conflict. Litvin wrote that this opening ‘threw our ignorance [of Arabic culture] in our faces’,¹⁶⁷ something compounded by Margaret’s conflation of the ‘audience with the West’ in her use of ‘you’.¹⁶⁸ The terms used here – ‘loans’, ‘reconstruction grants’ – established the immediacy of the setting while the importance placed on history, twice invoked by Margaret, and loss reinforced the notion of identity and further distanced the audience from Margaret’s character: as Litvin states,

The sense of a back-story lent the show depth but also made a political point. Misunderstanding these complex historical and cultural dynamics was a moral crime and a strategic danger, but understanding them was impossible.¹⁶⁹

This is supported by Holderness’ reiteration of the fact that the ‘non Arabic-speaking British spectator has access to her words only through translation’.¹⁷⁰ This creates a Brechtian sense of alienation while further ‘disrupting’ expectations: the audience were no longer the cultural superiors who possess Shakespeare, but were in fact cast, as Litvin says, as an ignorant body of Westerners. This was an important theme in Al-

¹⁶⁵ Holderness, ‘From Summit to Tragedy’, 124.

¹⁶⁶ Sulayman al-Bassam, *Richard III: An Arab Tragedy*, unpublished text.

¹⁶⁷ Litvin, ‘Review of *Richard III: An Arab Tragedy*’, 88.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 89.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ Holderness, ‘From Summit to Tragedy’, 125.

Bassam's production which presented Richmond as an invading American who attempted to win 'hearts and minds' using ideas from the Qur'an to justify 'freeing' the Arabs but relying on Elizabeth to interpret for him; language again created a barrier.

Opening with Margaret foregrounded the important role that women had in the production: they were used to reflect and comment on the powerlessness of femininity within the Arab world. The humiliation of Margaret continued in the scene of her cursing: her power, which was emphasised not only through her language but by her position centre stage with all other characters scattered around her focusing on her, was diminished by the mocking laughter of Richard's men as he deflected her curse on to her. Rather than concentrating on her prophecies, this scene instead focussed on Margaret's humiliation: she was kneeling and bent double, groaning with distress and frustration, while the men whipped her at Richard's command as he stated that she was possessed by a devil, 'the jinn'. Richard commanded Catesby to 'ride the jinn' which he did, mounting her and riding her like a horse. Elizabeth, standing downstage, powerless to intervene although visibly uncomfortable, turned her back on Margaret's humiliation: because of her position, the audience mirrored and reinforced this response, further placing them outside of the sympathetic, superior position.

The irreverence, hatred and contempt of women and female tradition were further highlighted in the scene of Anne's seduction. This took place during a female mourning, a traditionally female and sacred event. The women all wore black, all except for Anne wearing the full veil. Ironically it was this costume that allowed Richard and Catesby to penetrate the proceedings, disguised in the veil.¹⁷¹ Richard and

¹⁷¹ This has precedent in real life: in 2006 a male terror suspect was arrested in Britain after trying to evade capture by travelling around dressed as a Muslim woman. However, although this was the first known male terror suspect in Britain to have allegedly disguised himself as a woman, 'the tactic has been

Catesby held the women hostage with a machine gun, presenting both the powerlessness of the women and the full extent of Richard's transgression, raping not only Anne but also the sacred feminine event with the phallic, masculine symbol of the gun. However, the significant absence of the Duchess of York's negativity to Richard had the effect of diminishing his perceived evil: he was not hated by his mother but, as one would expect, by his enemies. In some ways, the audience was encouraged to sympathise with Richard against the apparently unjust invasion of the country.

As in the other productions discussed in this chapter, the modernity of the setting was to some extent suggested by the use of modern media. A small office consisting of filing cabinets, computers, and four TV screens to stage right, visible while being just off stage, was evident throughout Al-Bassam's production and a black screen stretched across the stage was used throughout. Various images were presented via this screen: on entering the auditorium an image of Edward IV was projected; later, footage of the debauchery of Edward was shown; news items (which were also at times transmitted on the surtitle screens) were broadcast; and grainy video surveillance which often gave aerial views of the action was shown. The latter suggested not only a Big Brother-style totalitarian state but also that there was an external force at work observing the court. Email was also typed up on to the screen: as video of Edward partying was shown, an email to a mysterious Ambassador was seen typed up detailing the goings on at court and noting the dissatisfaction of Richard. Signed 'Yours, B.' this email suggested an atmosphere of subterfuge, the unreliability of players and the presence of external interests in the play. These emails were a feature of the production, commenting and reporting on the proceedings at the court, acting as the chorus which Richard usually

used frequently by Islamist fighters — including suicide bombers — in Iraq and Afghanistan. Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the former leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq, often dressed in a burka to evade American forces hunting him' (<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/crime/article666149.ece>. Last accessed 29/06/10).

performs for himself in Shakespeare's text, which altered the dynamics of characterisation in the play: Richard was presented more as the victim than the instigator of the narrative.

Al-Bassam expressed some concern about potentially staging *An Arab Tragedy* in an Arab country, stating that it 'needs to be understood' before such a staging could take place.¹⁷² In contrast to the obvious barriers to Western understanding of the play inherent in the nature of the production, Al-Bassam suggested it was the Arab states which might misunderstand, the risk of this being that the play could be used for a 'state occasion' as a celebration of Arab culture.¹⁷³ Such a stance suggests that Al-Bassam did not believe his adaptation to be such a celebration. Ironically, to the audience in Stratford, the adaptation appeared at least a condemnation of Western interference in the region, if not a celebration of Arabic culture. This was largely embodied in the character of Richmond, who was presented as a patronising and ignorant American invader.

Richmond made extensive use of television media, broadcasting his speech before the battle on all the available screens. Richmond stood alone in a desert camp, dressed in khaki combat clothes: the broadcast mirrored footage of the Iraq war. This was further apparent in the language used; references to 'hearts and minds' invoked the rhetoric of the US and UK led invasion of 2003. Richmond also attempted to use the Qur'an to convince of his good intentions, but the juxtaposition of this screening with the onstage image of Catesby kneeling in prayer undermined Richmond's attempt to present himself

¹⁷² Playing with History event.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

benignly. This was further convincingly compounded by Richard's statement that 'you saw us own oil and wanted it'.¹⁷⁴

However, the negative response to Richmond and the apparent victimisation of Richard did not mean that Richard was well received. Richard alienated the audience, who also represented the West as victims of Arab terrorism, by stating that 'I've studied how to plant bombs in the bowels of your democracy', and the effect of his misogynist humiliation of Margaret and Anne was compounded by his brutal treatment of Buckingham, a spy, who on discovery was executed – strangled with a plastic bag over his head.

The images, language, and theme of this adaptation firmly placed it in the realm of twenty-first century relations between the Arab world and the West. Al-Bassam used the general themes of Shakespeare's text – tyranny, succession, inheritance, responsible rule, war – to speak to current issues: Al-Bassam stated that

the modern Middle east, like so many of Shakespeare's tragedies, offers a painful plethora of examples of how not to rule. Modern imperialism, tyranny, barbarism, oppression, plots, assassinations and civil wars are sadly becoming the rule not the exception in our region.¹⁷⁵

As in Charles Spencer's account of Hytner's *Henry V* quoted above, Al-Bassam is initially ambiguous here about whether he is referring to *Richard III* or the Middle East in his list of issues. However, although Shakespeare is very heavily invoked by Al-Bassam and ostensibly it is Shakespeare's play that is produced, the issue of adaptation removes us from Shakespeare; the moment of the play's inception is taken a step further away from the audience. The issue of 400 years distance is compounded by adaptation. Nevertheless, Holderness has argued that in Al-Bassam's production Margaret

¹⁷⁴ *Richard III: An Arab Tragedy*, unpublished text.

¹⁷⁵ Holderness interview with Al-Bassam, 'From Summit to Tragedy', 114.

'[established] a link between the different "pasts" of the play – c.1400 and the early 1590s – and the present'.¹⁷⁶ In this statement Holderness collapses the different time periods, stating that they all coexist in the production. However, there was no suggestion or invocation of 'c.1400' or the 1590s in this production; rather the Arab aspect of the Arab Shakespeare gave the play a new context, a new history, and a new present.

Despite this there was an element of homage to Shakespeare's era: at the conclusion of the play, the women again took centre stage. The Battle of Bosworth was presented with a simple saddle placed centre stage upon which a wild Richard sat and 'played' war. The movement of this saddle, up and down and around, was manipulated by Margaret who moved the lever that controlled it.¹⁷⁷ Richard whirled a sword around his head but was literally stopped dead by a gun shot. Into this scene, Richmond came with Elizabeth to whom he ceded interim government control, thereby elevating the role of women within the Arab world, Al-Bassam offering a kind of historicism by leaving the state in the control of an Elizabeth, just as an Elizabeth ruled at the point of the play's original founding moment.

In concluding this chapter I come back to Henry V's idea that 'our history shall with full mouth / Speak freely of our acts.' In his history plays Shakespeare used the events of the fifteenth century to speak about his own society's concerns and it has been the trend since then to use these plays in order to invoke the past as a means of speaking to the present. Robert Weimann's and Maria Jones's works suggest both the inevitability

¹⁷⁶ Holderness, 'From Summit to Tragedy', 125.

¹⁷⁷ It may be significant that President George W. Bush presented himself as something of a cowboy; he was proud of his Texan roots and was pictured wearing a cowboy hat. It is possible to see an alignment between the cowboy-president and this presentation of Richard, however, the presentation of Richmond as a somewhat arrogant American would align Richmond rather than Richard with George W. Bush in Al-Bassam's production.

and necessity of this for productions of Shakespeare's plays to be effective. However, the productions discussed in this chapter show that the 'founding moment' is not inevitably present and that it is not necessary, or perhaps even desirable, for theatre companies to seek it. Hytner's interpretation of *Henry V* as 'a contemporary text' highlights how the themes of Shakespeare's plays apply as much to current situations as to history, however, Hytner also points out that something is lost when acknowledging only the present in the text. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the productions are ineffective: Hytner's production particularly showed Shakespeare responding to *now* not *then*, and Munby did invoke history, but a much more modern history, to address the issue of justification of war. Margaret Shewring's notion that *Richard II* is difficult to stage today because of the archaic ideas which are embodied within it in fact lent itself to Nunn's purpose of discussing the place of tradition in modern politics. This also allowed him to look at the danger of modern politics and the potential for manipulation contained within it. Perhaps the most obviously effective staging of history divorced from Shakespeare is Al-Bassam's *Richard III: An Arab Tragedy* which, in its adaptation removing the links to English history and language, created a new context for Shakespeare's play entirely separate from its 'founding moment'.

The 'speaking' which Henry wishes for as a celebration of his victory at Agincourt in Shakespeare's play is what the Olivier film set out to do; but Olivier was not celebrating Henry but showing 'the spirit of [our] ancestors' to celebrate and encourage twentieth century soldiers. Producers have used these history plays, in the post-world war years especially, as a means by which to condemn or interrogate their own leaders and the wars of their own times – using Shakespeare's history plays to create a narrative for now, effectively creating twenty-first century history plays.



1 Elliot Cowan as Henry V. *Henry V*, directed by Jonathan Munby, Royal Exchange Manchester.



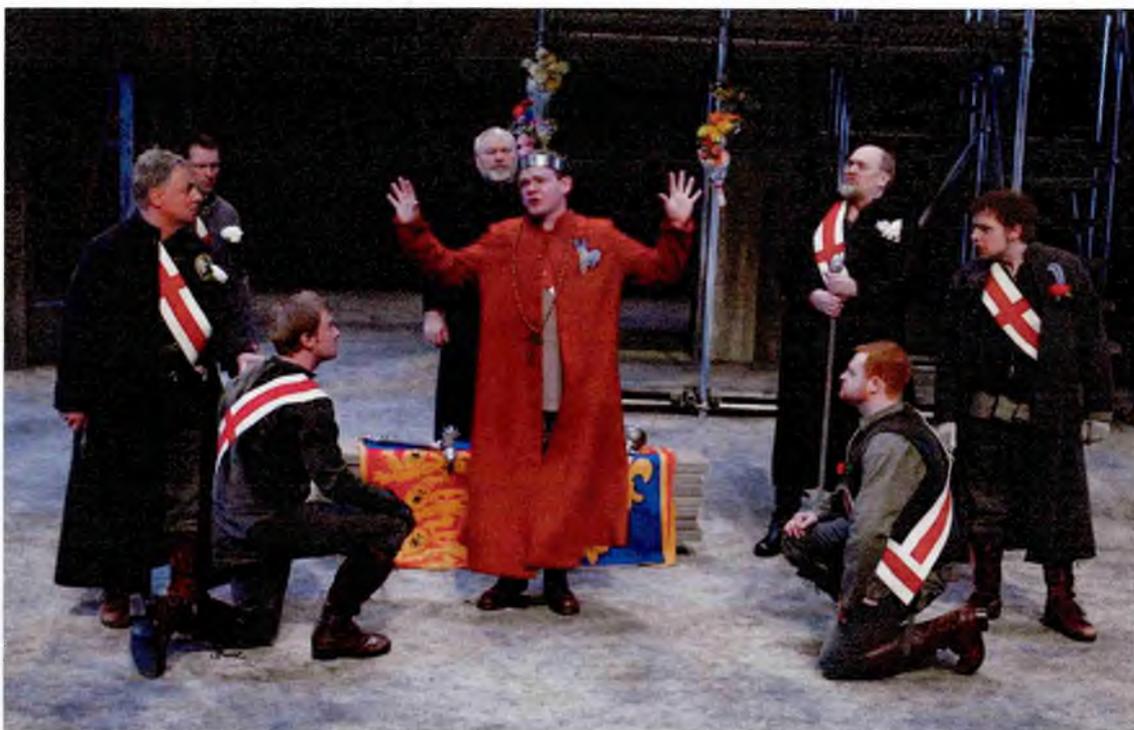
2 Elliot Cowan as Henry V outside Harfleur.



3 Opening scene of Loncraine's *Richard III*.



4 Citizens welcoming Richard as king, Loncraine's *Richard III*.



5 Andrew Whitehead as Henry VI. *The Wars of the Roses*, directed by Barrie Rutter, West Yorkshire Playhouse.



6 Maeve Larkin as Joan. *Henry VI*, directed by Barrie Rutter, Northern Broadsides, West Yorkshire Playhouse.

Chapter Three: Shakespeare *et al* or *The Wars of the Roses*

Naming a Shakespearean history cycle, as Barrie Rutter did in 2006, *The Wars of the Roses*, the title for both the Royal Shakespeare Company's 'landmark'¹⁷⁸ 1963 – 64 production and the English Shakespeare Company's 1986 – 87 cycle, conjures allusions specifically to the historical wars between the Houses of York and Lancaster. It also demands a consideration of the performance history of the plays. Peter Hall and John Barton's production at Stratford has achieved 'the enduring status of myth'.¹⁷⁹ It was a huge enterprise that underlined the importance of state funding for theatre, and it was also a production about radical change (of theatrical norms and audiences, and of the text), which challenged institutional 'sanctions'.¹⁸⁰ According to Stuart Hampton-Reeves and Carol Chillington Rutter, Hall 'discovered "political Shakespeare" ... a Shakespeare who articulated "the pressure of now"'.¹⁸¹ Hall's idea was heavily influenced by the philosophy of Jan Kott and the Elizabethan world-picture as set down by E. M. W. Tillyard.¹⁸² The cycle, which was an adaptation of the three parts of *Henry VI* and *Richard III* into a trilogy, was extremely influential, '[casting] its huge shadow over the RSC's work for nearly a decade and ... [acting] as a reference point for most stage productions of the histories in Britain ever since'.¹⁸³

The English Shakespeare Company's first production, a history cycle, was also a huge undertaking. Established by director Michael Bogdanov and actor Michael Pennington, the ESC's *Wars of the Roses* featured the plays of the two tetralogies in a seven play

¹⁷⁸ Robert Shaughnessy, *Representing Shakespeare: England, History and the RSC* (New York and London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994), 43.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹⁸⁰ Peter Hall and John Barton, Introduction to *The Wars of the Roses: adapted for the Royal Shakespeare Company from William Shakespeare's Henry VI, Parts 1, 2, 3 and Richard III* (London, British Broadcasting Corporation, 1970), x.

¹⁸¹ Stuart Hampton-Reeves and Carol Chillington Rutter, *The Henry VI Plays* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 55.

¹⁸² Hall and Barton, *The Wars of the Roses*, x – xi.

¹⁸³ Shaughnessy, *Representing Shakespeare*, 41.

cycle (the three *Henry VI*s were adapted into two plays titled *House of Lancaster* and *House of York* and were joined by *Richard III* which was essentially the play as we know it). The ESC was to some degree established as a challenge to the theatrical institutions of the RSC and the National Theatre; with no theatrical base their regional tours instead attempted to create something of a truly 'national theatre', taking Shakespeare to 'short-rationed audiences'.¹⁸⁴ The Company was therefore also a politicised venture and its *Wars of the Roses* was a part of this: a highly controversial production remembered as much for its invocation of the First and Second World Wars and the Falklands conflict, as for its 'Fuck the Frogs'¹⁸⁵ motif. Indeed, the significance of the ESC and its *Wars of the Roses* is apparent as Hampton-Reeves and Chillington Rutter state that 'the ESC's bold, mad tour ... challenged the RSC's ownership of those plays and their link to narratives of national culture'.¹⁸⁶

Consequently staging a cycle production of the first tetralogy of Shakespeare's history plays in an adapted form under the title of *The Wars of the Roses* suggests that such a production is deliberately placing itself in the context of these famous past productions. This chapter will discuss how a new production fits into the performance history of Shakespeare's history plays, specifically in the context of adaptation, looking at Barrie Rutter's production for Northern Broadsides, which was adapted and directed by Rutter and performed at the West Yorkshire Playhouse in April 2006. The chapter will consider the process, results and problems of adaptation and, concentrating on the example of Joan la Pucelle, will examine how adaptation can have great consequences for the story and interpretation of a single character, perhaps even flying in the face of accepted interpretations and textual criticism.

¹⁸⁴ Bogdanov and Pennington, *The English Shakespeare Company*, 4.

¹⁸⁵ Emma Smith, Introduction to *Henry V*, 73.

¹⁸⁶ Hampton-Reeves and Chillington Rutter, *The Henry VI Plays*, 135.

Rutter is the founder and artistic director of the Yorkshire based theatre company Northern Broadsides,¹⁸⁷ which has its usual home at Dean Clough Mill in Halifax but also tours its productions around the north of England, the north of Nottinghamshire being about as far south as it usually travels.¹⁸⁸ The company is made up of actors from the north of England, specifically Yorkshire and Lancashire, and has the performance of early modern plays in regional accent as a central tenet.¹⁸⁹ Such an audible challenge to the expected norms of theatrical performance of early modern plays to some extent places Northern Broadsides in line with the radical challenges posed to the theatrical 'romanticism',¹⁹⁰ of the 1950s by Hall's RSC company. This also, to some degree, aligns Northern Broadsides with the ESC, part of whose political approach to the plays was embodied in its own use of regional accents: Bogdanov and Pennington stated that they decided '[i]f an actor had a regional accent, a virtue should be made of it. Nothing is more deadly than to hear someone struggling for a received accent because it's Shakespeare and posh'.¹⁹¹ However, the intention was actually far more political than this sympathetic pragmatism might suggest: some characters did use Received Pronunciation (RP), specifically those of the 'established order':¹⁹² Henry VI, Margaret, Suffolk and Somerset. The effect of this, as Hampton-Reeves and Chillington Rutter point out, was that '[i]n this England, to have an accent that was not RP was to be

¹⁸⁷ See www.northern-broadsides.co.uk for more information about the company's background and mission.

¹⁸⁸ The 1995 production of *Richard III* transferred to the Riverside Studios in London and was also performed at the Tower of London, and, in 2009, the company transferred a successful production of *Othello* to the West End. Of the *Richard III* transfer, Peter Holland stated that 'it was only when seen in the capital, displaced from its own context, that Rutter's *Richard III* was widely reviewed in the national press' (Peter Holland, *English Shakespeares: Shakespeare on the English Stage in the 1990s*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1997), 152). While *The Wars of the Roses* was reviewed in the press, it seems to have fallen under the radar of the academic performance community.

¹⁸⁹ Such productions include *A Woman Killed With Kindness*, *Richard III*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Henry V*, *Othello*.

¹⁹⁰ Shaughnessy, *Representing Shakespeare*, 43.

¹⁹¹ Bogdanov and Pennington, *The English Shakespeare Company*, 18.

¹⁹² Hampton-Reeves and Chillington Rutter, *The Henry VI Plays*, 138.

excluded from power',¹⁹³ indeed, they also stated that a consequence of this deliberate use of accents was to '[frustrate] any attempts to homogenise the people represented onstage as a single culture'.¹⁹⁴ There are clear parallels between the ESC's deliberate use of accent and Northern Broadsides' approach. However, where the ESC politicised their productions through accent and created a divide of exclusion, Northern Broadsides' use of accents firmly entrenched the story in this region as a part of the story of the area and thus the collective history of the audience.

Peter Holland addresses the positive effect of the company's use of accents in discussing Northern Broadsides' first production, a different production of *Richard III*, stating that 'the text was not mediated by an imposed accent ... Audiences in the north of England, for whom the production had been conceived, were not required to see Shakespeare as an expression of a Home Counties middle-class culture which patronised them.'¹⁹⁵ Although written about a production some 14 years previous, this remains true of Northern Broadsides. It is apparent from this extract that Holland views Northern Broadsides as a kind of inheritor of the ESC; indeed he draws a clear link between the two, stating that Northern Broadsides '[took] over the mantle of popular Shakespeare after the collapse of Michael Bogdanov's English Shakespeare Company which had lost its Arts Council funding'.¹⁹⁶ Somewhat ironically, the matter of public funding, the importance of which was highlighted by Hall and Barton's RSC production, remains an issue, directly affecting the rise and fall of the other companies under discussion here.

¹⁹³ Hampton-Reeves and Chillington Rutter, *The Henry VI Plays*, 139.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 138.

¹⁹⁵ Holland, *English Shakespeares*, 152.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 151.

Where Hall and Barton created a politicised production, and Bogdanov and Pennington sought to present a Shakespeare of the 1980s, Rutter's cycle was more concerned with the notion of staging England's history as 'damn good stories'.¹⁹⁷ In an article accompanying the productions, Mike Poulton describes the history plays as 'Shakespeare's contribution to the idea of a national epic'.¹⁹⁸ In this context performing the plays that are prior to *Richard III* in the narrative presents them as 'prequels' so that '[n]ow at least all those mystifying references to dead characters in *Richard III* can make sense'.¹⁹⁹

It seems an appropriate aim for a company whose first production was *Richard III* in 1992, and which through its emphasis on region is so rooted in its geographical space, to want to perform the 'national story' of that space. The idea of history as story was evident within the design of the productions: the three parts were unified by the use of the same sandy coloured thrust stage which had two set pieces consisting of upright concrete plinths and a concrete and scaffolding balcony. The set at once appeared like a building site and, more appropriately for the cycle of history, a renovation site, a ruined building being refurbished, thus a work in progress. This was designer Jessica Worrell's intended impression: she described the set design as

symbolic of the topsy-turvy state of England depicted in Shakespeare's history plays, in which it sometimes appears impossible to tell if those in power are trying to build the country up or are dead-set on dismantling it.²⁰⁰

Such a design was impossible to set in time: the narratives could have been playing out in some future post-apocalyptic environment, or could equally have been images from

¹⁹⁷ Barrie Rutter, *Playhouse Quarterly* 1, (February – April 2006), 36.

¹⁹⁸ Mike Poulton, *Playhouse Quarterly* 1, 41.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 40. These productions were also intended to be viewed as a cycle: the promotion of all three together in the marketing campaign and a ticketing promotion allowing audiences to pay less when booking all three plays clearly suggests the three plays were to be seen as a whole.

²⁰⁰ Jessica Worrell quoted at Stagemark

(www.stagemark.org.uk/webdav/servlet/XRM?Page/@id=6007&Session/@id=D_zf1VBHuB6ixblt836j6E&Section/@id=1164. Last accessed 24th May 2007).

the distant past. This created a moment that could be both *now* and *then*. Indeed, because of the sparseness of the design, although the performers interacted with the set, they seemed more to be performing the plays against a backdrop of time rather than existing within that timeframe. Complementing this, the costume design and developments also suggested that the characters were transitory and impermanent within the constant flow of time: keeping with the work site theme, for the first two productions characters wore rustic working clothes with the lords wearing long coats, their dynastic seat identified by a symbol on the left breast. Although these costumes were suggestive of medieval clothing, they were also timeless. However, the costumes changed to modern dress for *Richard III*, visually showing that the action had come forward in time. Juxtaposed with the unchanging set, these costumes created an impression of history as an ongoing story that reinvents itself, in this respect to accompany regime change and peacetime. This was the rationale of both the designer and director; their 'decision to use a mix of period was intended to reinforce the idea that although these plays tell an ancient story, the politics of power, envy and malice they depict are very recognisable and applicable today'.²⁰¹ That it was only *Richard III* which was costumed in modern dress suggests that it is only the politics of that play which appear current and that the issues raised by the first two productions are in fact more distant. However, none of Rutter's productions attempted to appeal to current topics of concern; instead the focus was on story. The programme notes suggest that this was part of the intention in staging the cycle of plays as Mike Poulton wrote that

if you've ever wondered ... "who that corpse is that Lady Anne is doing all that weeping and wailing over" ..., or what it was in Richard III's youth that turned him into the butcher of his own family, or why York hates Lancaster, why Queen Margaret hates everybody, or why it's natural to hate the French, or

²⁰¹ 'The Productions: *Richard III*: Design', Stagework
(<http://www.stagework.org.uk/webdav/harmonise@Page%252F@id=6007&Section%252F@id=1189.html>). Last accessed 1st December 2010).

indeed what happened in the Wars of the Roses and why they are so called, then you should see all these plays.²⁰²

Although this is written in a promotional tone, it also reflects the approach of the cycle. The notion that the cycle showed 'Richard III in its proper context'²⁰³ underpinned the cycle and demonstrates that the productions were conceived as narrative.

In adapting the first tetralogy into a three part play, it has historically been the *Henry VI* plays that suffer: Barton, Bogdanov, and Adrian Noble²⁰⁴ all forced the three parts into two plays. Alan Dessen has noted this trend that unifies these productions, stating that in the ESC and Noble productions

material from Part One was allotted roughly ninety minutes so as to be completed by the first interval; the second half of the first play then contained the first three acts of Part Two; the last two acts of Part Two and the first two acts of Part Three ... occupied the pre-interval section of play number two; the remaining three acts of Part Three then finished the job.²⁰⁵

This is also, whether consciously or not, the pattern that Rutter followed, adapting the three parts of *Henry VI* into two plays, styling the parts as *Henry VI* and *Edward IV*, before joining them with *Richard III* as a trilogy, as Barton also had done in 1963. Barton, 'responsible for reviving the craft of wholesale Shakespearean stage adaptation',²⁰⁶ cut a significant number of lines from the plays and augmented the remainder with lines from Edward Hall's *Chronicles*, *Gorboduc*, *Edward III* and, famously, his own invention.²⁰⁷ Rutter's argument for adaptation is put forward in the

²⁰² Mike Poulton, *Playhouse Quarterly*, 41.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 40.

²⁰⁴ Adrian Noble produced a history cycle entitled *The Plantagenets*, an adaptation of the three parts of *Henry VI* and *Richard III* into three plays entitled *Henry VI*, *Edward IV* and *Richard III* in 1988 – 1989. This production is not covered in this thesis because the overall title distinguishes it from the other cycles which Rutter's production by virtue of its name, *The Wars of the Roses*, can be aligned with and, unlike *Rose Rage*, it was not performed during this decade.

²⁰⁵ Alan C. Dessen, 'Stagecraft and Imagery in Shakespeare's *Henry VI*', in *Shakespeare's Histories*, ed. Emma Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 67 - 68.

²⁰⁶ Shaughnessy, *Representing Shakespeare*, 52.

²⁰⁷ Hampton-Reeves and Chillington Rutter, *The Henry VI Plays*, 58.

education pack²⁰⁸ that accompanied the productions: the writer first lists previous adaptations of the plays, suggesting that Rutter is aware of his place in the theatrical history of the plays,²⁰⁹ before going on to state that reasons for adaptation include financial practicalities, narrative clarity, and the perhaps more dubious justification that 'the authorship is uncertain' and 'because the plays are [Shakespeare's] earlier and fairly rough work, [it] is justifiable to adapt them'.²¹⁰ Interestingly, these explanations and defences of the adaptation all mirror those put forward in the introductions to their published text by Hall and Barton. Both director and adaptor argue that the questionable authorship makes adaptation more acceptable. Barton is most strong on this: after first questioning the quality of the plays and then asserting that the plays are not practical in their original form, Barton states that 'if I was challenged to defend my version I should argue my case on a third quite different ground. I refer, of course, to the vexed old question of the extent to which the plays are Shakespeare's'.²¹¹

This 'vexed old question' raises issues of whose text is being performed when an adaptation is produced. Five years before Rutter staged his production Edward Hall produced an adaptation of the three parts of *Henry VI* as a two part play under the title of *Rose Rage* (2001 – 2). In an excellent article about Hall's production, Patricia Tatspaugh briefly addresses what was cut from Shakespeare's texts in Hall's editing before stating that her 'focus, is however, on the twenty-five scenes of *Rose Rage* and [Hall's theatre company] Propeller's presentation of that script'.²¹² Unlike all of the other productions discussed here, Edward Hall cut the characters of Joan la Pucelle, the

²⁰⁸ Available from <http://www.northern-broadsides.co.uk/PAGES/education.htm>. (Last accessed 23 April 2010).

²⁰⁹ Such awareness may spring from Rutter's previous involvement in a cycle production (he performed in Terry Hands's 1975 cycle which used Shakespeare's full text), and he has also been married to the Shakespeare academic Carol Chillington Rutter.

²¹⁰ Northern Broadsides *The Wars of the Roses* Education pack, 12.

²¹¹ Hall and Barton, *The Wars of the Roses*, xxii.

²¹² Patricia Tatspaugh, 'Propeller's Staging of *Rose Rage*', *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 17 (2005), 240.

Duchess of Gloucester, the Countess of Auvergne and Edmund Mortimer entirely. The scenes in France all but disappeared too. But this was a deliberate consequence of Hall's desire to focus his plays tightly on 'the dynastic struggles in England between two well-defined historical moments – the deaths of Henry V, in 1422, and Henry VI, in 1471'²¹³ and Hall only used Shakespeare's text, simply cutting rather than adding new words. Through this Hall created a concentrated theatrical experience which addressed the horror of political power struggles. Rutter's adaptation was not so complete a theatrical experience in terms of ideological approach, aesthetics, doubling, narrative and music, and while Tatspaugh praises the clarity of narrative purpose in *Rose Rage*, Rutter seemed to lack the same simplicity of focus, cutting while retaining and ultimately creating something of a hodge-podge. It is my intention here, in contrast to Tatspaugh's discussion of *Rose Rage*, to address what was lost in translation from Shakespeare to adaptation in Rutter's *Wars of the Roses*.

Rutter's title of *The Wars of the Roses* not only places him in the context of the cycle's performance history, but also highlights how attention was placed on the background to the wars, the wars themselves, and their consequences in the rise of Richard III: other extraneous events, such as the war in France, were significantly reduced. This was a result of Rutter's desire to 'capture the essence of the Wars of the Roses and concentrate on the characters that were key to the civil war'. Rutter has stated that

I ended up cutting many of the French characters because I didn't feel they had that significant a role to play in the proceedings. Joan of Arc still appears because she's famous and was involved in the events that kick-started the war. But even she's dead by the first interval.²¹⁴

²¹³ Tatspaugh, 'Propeller's staging of *Rose Rage*', 239.

²¹⁴ Rutter, *Playhouse Quarterly*, 36.

Indeed, in Rutter's adaptation Joan's role was reduced by nearly two thirds to only ninety-nine lines out of the total of 263 that Joan speaks in Shakespeare's text.²¹⁵ The first half of Rutter's *Henry VI* offered a rapid succession of scenes to illustrate historical background. The Hundred Years War was largely glossed over with the scenes in France mostly cut or reduced to one-on-one fights between Talbot and Joan. As a result of such heavy adaptation, French characters other than Joan were largely absent: even the Dauphin only appeared in a single scene to parley with the Englishmen after the demise of Joan. The early part of Rutter's adaptation offered something like 'cartoon history': reduced in terms of lines and time while still representing a large part of English history, and to this end the garden scene was placed very early in the play which immediately took attention off the scenes in France and focused it firmly on those tensions in England. This demonstrates a problem with Rutter's adaptation: he could have successfully cut Joan and Talbot as Edward Hall did in order to entirely focus on the Wars of the Roses. By retaining these other characters to a lesser degree, something was lost because they were in the most part used only to provide a context: there was little interpretive value to their presence. The tone of the productions developed across *Henry VI*, particularly when this 'story so far' approach to history gave way to Rutter's central focus on the civil wars. The change in tone is most apparent in the emergence and development of Henry VI in the first play and Richard of Gloucester in *Edward IV*. However, the change in tone created a sense of a disjointed production, the scenes in France featuring Joan and Talbot did not sit entirely easily with scenes involving other characters. This, again, highlights a problem of adaptation.

²¹⁵ There are 2678 lines in Shakespeare's *1 Henry VI*, of these Joan speaks 263. In the first half of Rutter's *Henry VI* (Joan only features in the pre-interval part of the play) there are 950 lines, of which Joan speaks only ninety-nine.

Andrew Whitehead's Henry is a particularly strong example of how the superficially cartoon developed in to the serious. Henry was initially presented as an honest and childlike simpleton. Although, of course, the king is a child, Whitehead's presentation was comic because he looked like a grown man, in contrast to other very young-looking Henrys such as Chuk Iwuji and David Oyelowo who played the role in Michael Boyd's productions, Jonathan McGuinness who 'closely resembled a schoolboy'²¹⁶ in Edward Hall's *Rose Rage* and David Warner who was 'sweetly boyish' in Hall and Barton's production.²¹⁷ Whitehead's Henry shuffled onto the stage in a robe that was slightly too large, spoke with deliberate pronunciation, held his sceptre and orb with obvious discomfort and uncertainty, and looked with a furrowed brow to his uncles for approval. Although previous stagings of Henry have emphasised the tragic, the early performance and tonal habits of Whitehead's Henry made him pathetically funny.

However, the tone of the character became much more serious in the second half of *Henry VI*: Henry developed into an intelligent, articulate, and compassionate man who increasingly spoke with anger and force in his grief. Rutter's *Henry VI* concluded with the deaths of Suffolk, Gloucester and Winchester and the closing image of the production with the three corpses across the stage referred back to the opening where the characters bickered over the coffin of Henry V about the infant Henry, but now a mature Henry VI left the stage speaking the heavy prophecy 'Yet may England curse my wretched reign'²¹⁸ before the lights went down. This developmental arc of Henry's character continued through *Edward IV* with the interval marking another change in tone: Henry's devotion and sense of duty led to his increasing marginalisation and was contrasted to the arrogance of Edward. Indeed, Henry became a simply pathetic

²¹⁶ Tatspaugh, 'Propeller's Staging of *Rose Rage*', 248.

²¹⁷ Hampton-Reeves and Chillington Rutter, *The Henry VI Plays*, 71.

²¹⁸ *2 Henry VI*, IV.viii.49.

character, left to wander around the stage praying with his beads and philosophising over the burden of kingship and the horror of war.

Where the development of Henry was central to the first play, *Edward IV* was dominated by the emergence and development of Richard. The audience was initially presented with a sympathetic character concerned for his family's welfare: it was Richard who influenced and persuaded York to fight for the crown. Richard increasingly developed his selfish and single-minded approach to power as Edward became a lusty arrogant king; the slight hump on Richard's back became more pronounced and visible as a more evil and deformed character was revealed. This seems to suggest a link between Richard's physical and mental deformity.²¹⁹ However, although emphasis was placed on Richard's dissatisfaction with his physical shape throughout the second half of *Edward IV* and, of course, in *Richard III*, Rutter as adaptor/director and Conrad Nelson as performer did not clearly explore the psychological implications of this on his character, rather, as throughout the cycle, the narrative development and engagement with the audience was given prominence.

Although it was the French scenes that suffered most from Rutter's adaptation in terms of being cut from the plays, *Edward IV* suffered from Rutter's apparent desire to retain a number of narrative threads and a lot of detail. Jack Cade's Kentish rebellion is a good example of this problem. In other productions of adaptations Cade has remained an important presence: in the Hall and Barton production 'the Cade material remains intact'²²⁰ and was in fact added to with 'eighteen lines of prose which reinforce Cade's

²¹⁹ The design of Conrad Nelson's deformed Richard was clearly influenced by Richard Loncraine's 1995 film: Nelson's arm was useless and his hand shrivelled in a similar manner to that of Ian McKellen's Richard.

²²⁰ Barbara Hodgdon, 'The Wars of the Roses: Scholarship Speaks on the Stage', *Deutsche Shakespeare-Gesellschaft West Jahrbuch* (1972), 180.

wit and the abruptness of his actions’;²²¹ in Bogdanov and Pennington’s productions he was a representative of the far-right National Front; and even Edward Hall, who cut a large number of scenes and retained only thirty percent of Shakespeare’s text,²²² retained Cade as an important story which was presented as a rap and followed him ‘from charismatic leader of a unified group to maniacal leader of a dissipated band’.²²³ As the ESC had, so Edward Hall also read Cade as a ‘prototype of the football hooligan or member of an extreme right political group’ but now, rather than the National Front of the 1980s, he reminded Tatspaugh of the British National Party.²²⁴ This is evidence of the importance of an anarchist character in plays concerned with power struggles and structures, yet in Rutter’s production Cade’s rebellion was not politicised for the current audience: although Andrew Cryer created a strong and powerful Cade through the combination of his harsh accent with violent language the character was not able to make any lasting impact. The whole rising, which lasts most of act IV, covering six scenes in Shakespeare’s text, was over in the first fifteen minutes of Rutter’s *Edward IV* and with so many other episodes taking place after this, particularly with spectacular visual demonstrations of battles, Cade was easily forgotten. The staging of the rising had an important effect in this regard because it was less visually impressive than some of the other battles: the rebels emerged from behind the concrete pillars stage right, moved to down stage right and then back and forth to the scaffolding balcony stage left. Each was dressed in their beige work clothes and there was visually little to latch on to; the more colourful and visually engaging battles that came later therefore necessarily replaced this rising in the mind.

²²¹ Hodgdon, ‘*The Wars of the Roses: Scholarship Speaks on the Stage*’, 180.

²²² Tatspaugh, ‘Propeller’s Staging of *Rose Rage*’, 240.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 247.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*

A further example of the problems with Rutter's adaptation is the character of Clarence who had the majority of his lines cut, especially before the death of York. This reduced the opportunity for character development and made him appear slightly stupid. Although physically present, he was uninterested in the events of the play. As there had been no real presentation of the character to give the audience any expectations of him, his move to the Lancastrians and his rapid return to the Yorkists was therefore neither shocking nor unexpected.

Thus Rutter's adaptation suffered from his attempts to retain characters and plot lines while also cutting significant amounts of text which left characters such as Clarence and Cade under presented. However, by creating a new text Rutter also created or unearthed unconventional interpretations as well, as I will now explore, in the character of Joan la Pucelle. Joan's story became somewhat insignificant and her contribution to the development of the cycle was negligible as a result of the adaptation. Nevertheless, despite Rutter's apparent dismissal of the character, it was noteworthy that her character was retained, specifically because she was invested with benign spiritual meaning. Joan is a character who is textually ambiguous and frequently altered in adaptation. I will discuss the role of Joan in relation to Rutter's adaptation in depth as a character study in order to address the potential impact of adaptation on a dispensable character.

Famously ambiguous, Joan is variously presented in Shakespeare's text as a virgin and a whore; a saint and a demon; divinely inspired and a sorceress; and as a practical fighter and supernaturally influenced.²²⁵ Her character has encouraged various critical readings that have embraced her as an early feminist, as evidence of Shakespeare's

²²⁵ These readings of course depend on who is making the judgement: most frequently the witch presentation is given by the English while the French wish to glorify Joan as a saint from as early in *Henry VI* as I.viii.

misogyny,²²⁶ or as, according to Leah Marcus, 'a distorted image of Queen Elizabeth I'.²²⁷ These interpretations are founded on analyses of Shakespeare's full text. Nevertheless, as noted above, the adaptation of the plays can offer different interpretations of the character: Edward Hall cut the characters of Joan and Talbot entirely.²²⁸

As Hampton-Reeves and Chillington Rutter note, in Barton's adaptation it was 'the women's parts [that] mostly fell victim to the adapter's blue pencil'.²²⁹ In spite of this assertion the character of Joan has usually been retained, although her fiends have frequently faced the chop: Alan Dessen has discussed the significance of Shakespeare's thorough stage directions for the fiends in V.iii and the effect of their removal which, Dessen asserts, is the result of the modern audience's inability to give credence to such staging of spirituality.²³⁰ For example, Dessen discusses Jane Howell's full text production for the BBC in which Joan directly addressed the camera without spirits and, most significantly for this discussion, he analyses the adaptations of Adrian Noble for the RSC's *Plantagenets* (1988) and Bogdanov for the ESC production, stating that in the Noble adaptation 'various corpses ... rose as if animated to provide an onstage audience but without the [Folio] reactions' and that

Bogdanov cut the fiends and altered the text, so that, alone onstage and looking at the audience, his Joan directed her appeal not to any diabolic entities but rather to the Virgin Mary, a change that eliminated any infernal climax.²³¹

How Dessen knows that Joan was addressing the Virgin rather than the audience is unclear, especially in the light of Bogdanov's own account of his problems with the

²²⁶ Bogdanov, *Shakespeare: The Director's Cut*, 121.

²²⁷ Leah Marcus, 'Elizabeth', in *Shakespeare's Histories*, ed. Emma Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 149.

²²⁸ Edward Hall and Roger Warren, *Rose Rage: Adapted from Shakespeare's Henry VI Plays* (Bangor: Watermill Theatre, 2001).

²²⁹ Hampton-Reeves and Chillington Rutter, *The Henry VI Plays*, 74.

²³⁰ Dessen, 'Stagecraft and Imagery in Shakespeare's *Henry VI*', 70.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 71.

issue of 'believing in the divinity of Joan',²³² the apparent result of which was to simply avoid the implications of her spirituality.

As previous productions had, so Rutter also significantly reduced while retaining the role of Joan. In his production she was a sympathetic tomboy character: she first entered on the balcony and spoke as an idealistic young woman, at times sitting and dangling her legs over the side. Rutter's Joan (Maeve Larkin) was presented as the shepherdess of Shakespeare's text; her work clothes costume, with a crucifix around her neck and a blue sash around her waist, at once represented both her nationality and religion. Such divine, Catholic influence is explicitly described by Joan in her first speech, stating that 'Heaven and Our Lady gracious hath it pleased / To shine on my contemptible estate',²³³ and that

God's mother deigned to appear to me
And, in a vision full of majesty,
Willed me to leave my base vocation
And free my country from calamity.²³⁴

However, where in Shakespeare's text this is spoken to the Dauphin in order to convince and with the intention to manipulate and mislead, in Rutter's adaptation, this speech was spoken as a soliloquy directly addressed to the audience. This altering of the staging alters the meaning of the text and, with the lighting and manner of performance, suggested Joan's honesty and encouraged the audience to empathise with her. Joan's words, tone and behaviour, with the warm lighting and soft music played during her character's presence onstage, presented a positive image of her. Significantly the absence of the other French characters and general reduction of the scenes in France meant that this representation was not challenged as the audience did not see or hear about behaviour that could suggest the rampant sexuality of which Joan

²³² Bogdanov and Pennington, *The English Shakespeare Company*, 109.

²³³ *1 Henry VI* I.ii.74-75.

²³⁴ *1 Henry VI* I.ii.78-81.

is accused in Shakespeare's text.²³⁵ Neither was the cruelty that the character has displayed in previous productions, such as the dismemberment of Bedford in Michael Boyd's 2000 and 2006 productions for the RSC, portrayed onstage or verbally referred to. Rather, the use of lighting and music that accompanied Joan's character created sympathy. This has precedence in Bogdanov's production where Joan had 'her own distinctive music'.²³⁶ However, where there was uncertainty in whether the music for Bogdanov's Joan was 'holy or witchly',²³⁷ in Rutter's production music was used very clearly to support the sympathetic, spiritual presentation of her character: soft music underscored Joan's speeches while a French Christmas carol, 'Dans cette étable', was played in celebration of her victory at Orleans.

However, there was some evidence of supernatural powers displayed in the staging of Joan's battles: for example, Joan banged on the scaffolding with a metal bar which had a physical effect on Talbot's body. In the accompanying education pack the writer states of these battles that '[e]ach strike is choreographed with a beat and signifies a hit', such 'stylised battle [allowed] the drama to be conveyed without unnecessary fake blood or elaborate stage fighting'. Arguably such 'stylised battle' is elaborate and it had a two-fold effect, at once suggesting both supernatural ability (Joan could 'hit' Talbot without needing to be near him but with the aid of accompanying music and choreography) and counteracting such a suggestion: that battles throughout the plays were generally abstract negated such sense of the supernatural.²³⁸

²³⁵ For examples see *1 Henry VI*, II.iii.26-31, III.v.13, V.iv.9, V.vi.65-81.

²³⁶ Dessen, 'Stagecraft and Imagery in Shakespeare's *Henry VI*', 287 note.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Northern Broadside is famous for its use of clog dancing and many of the battles in these productions were performed abstractly as a clog dance or through the use of drums. Soldiers were anonymously represented by red or white hooded sweatshirts signifying Lancastrians and Yorkists, thus making each side clearly identifiable during battle: one hood represented both the individual character and many soldiers. The first battle consisted of the men onstage accompanied by offstage percussionists: the actors met centre stage in formation and simply but forcefully banged their weapons together. The battle used simple movements around the stage with a clash of weapons concluding each movement. The constant

The sympathetic presentation of Joan established the approach to religion and spirituality throughout Rutter's productions. Joan has frequently been aligned with Margaret both in performance and criticism; Phyllis Rackin has written of the two as 'connected, not only by the similarity of their roles and characterisations but also by the unhistorical but emblematic scene in which Margaret is first introduced'.²³⁹ However, the character with which Joan was most associated in the Northern Broadside production was that of Henry VI. Henry was the most clearly spiritual character in the production but simple similarities in costuming created a parallel between the two: in a basic sense, both characters either wore or held rosary beads; Joan wore hers around her neck, while Henry most frequently held them wrapped around his hand. Whichever way he wore them, Henry was never onstage without them and they were constantly apparent to the audience: the significance of their attachment to the character was underlined as Richard of Gloucester took them off Henry's corpse while wooing Lady Anne. The use of beads, at one level, presented the historical religiosity of both Henry and Joan, however Rutter drew an alignment between the two through which he addressed the spiritual and the devout in these plays. This association does not have precedence in the performance history of these plays. Rather, Joan has frequently been interpreted in the light of Margaret and *vice versa* which seems a logical connection: two women of the same nationality who both have something of a malign effect on England. That alignment does have precedence, but there is no equivalent for linking Joan and Henry and to some degree it seems inappropriate to link the English man with

and forceful drums created momentum and an atmosphere of noise, chaos and danger. At the battle of Tewkesbury the drums were the battle: four kettle drums were held over actors' shoulders in a line across the stage while the two red and two white soldiers played. In order to display the Yorkist's victory the drummers turned in circles and red hoods were gradually replaced by white hoods as they made the turn to the rear of the stage.

²³⁹ Rackin, Phyllis, 'Women's roles in the Elizabethan History Plays', in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare's History Plays*, ed. Michael Hattaway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 72.

a French woman. However, in Rutter's adaptive interpretation, the alignment was wholly successful in creating a narrative arc for an overall reading of the spiritual in the world of the plays.

That many critics refer to the demonisation of Joan in the final act of the play encourages the view that Joan is a threatening character and that the lasting impression of her for the audience is of a demonised fraud.²⁴⁰ This demonisation takes place in *I Henry VI*, V.iii in which Joan calls on what critics have referred to variously as fiends,²⁴¹ familiars, demons, and devils.²⁴² Indeed, James Paxon writes that Joan is 'indisputably a sorceress in this play'²⁴³ and that the 'physical realness of [her] fiends is not to be disputed – thus insuring, as criticism has long noted, the character's guilt as a witch'.²⁴⁴ However, this presentation can be disputed especially in performances of adapted texts: Rutter's Joan was not presented as a witch. Rather, when she finally left the stage it was plausible to suggest that she had in fact been divinely inspired by saints. Joan's fiends were figured as the two saints which are reputed to have appeared to the historical Joan of Arc. Joan began the scene in which she calls upon her familiars, V.iii in Shakespeare's *I Henry VI* but before the interval in Rutter's adaptation, by kneeling to pray. She held her sword with the hilt up forming a cross, and spoke with a desperate tone in subdued blue lighting, a contrast to the mostly soft and bright lighting which dominated the production. As Joan prayed, two women, one carrying a cross and the other carrying a book and quill, entered to the rear of the stage, behind and therefore unseen by Joan. Although nameless, it can be inferred that Rutter intended these figures

²⁴⁰ Marcus, 'Elizabeth', 160, Rackin, 'Women's roles in the Elizabethan History Plays', 75, and Gabriele Bernhard Jackson, 'Topical Ideology: Witches, Amazons, and Shakespeare's Joan of Arc', in *Shakespeare's History Plays*, ed. R. J. C Watt (Harlow and London: Longman, 2002), 32.

²⁴¹ Dessen, 'Stagecraft and Imagery in Shakespeare's *Henry VI*', 277-280.

²⁴² James J Paxon, 'Shakespeare's Medieval Devils and Joan La Pucelle in *Henry VI*' in Thomas A. Pendleton, *Henry VI Critical Essays* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 128-131.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 129-130.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 131.

to suggest Saint Margaret who was swallowed by a dragon-shaped Satan but escaped when the cross she carried irritated the dragon's throat, and Saint Catherine, a noted scholar. The presence of saints suggested Joan as an honest Christian who had been led by benevolent visions and therefore divinely inspired. It is perhaps significant that for a large part of her pleading with the saints, Joan addressed the audience rather than the figures onstage behind her. As Dessen remarks of Bogdanov's production, addressing the audience has the effect of '[eliminating] any infernal climax for this sequence'.²⁴⁵

This was also the effect in Rutter's production.

In Shakespeare's text it is Joan's speech at this point which largely condemns her as a witch:

Now help, ye charming spells and periapts,
And ye choice spirits that admonish me
And give me signs of future accidents ...
You speedy helpers, that are substitutes
Under the lordly monarch of the north,
Appear, and aid me in this enterprise ...
Where I was wont to feed you with my blood,
I'll lop a member off and give it you
In earnest of a further benefit,
So you do condescend to help me now.²⁴⁶

This contrasts very sharply with what Joan says at the beginning of the play about her calling from 'Heaven and Our Lady', in both Shakespeare's and Rutter's texts, and in Rutter's adaptation the speech largely retained Shakespeare's words:

Now help, ye charming spells and periapts,
And ye, choice spirits that admonish me
And give me signs of future accidents.
Appear, and aid me in this enterprise...
Where I was wont to feed you with my blood,
I'll lop a member off and give it you
In earnest of a further benefit
So you do condescend to help me now.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁵ Dessen, 'Stagecraft and Imagery in Shakespeare's *Henry VI*', 278.

²⁴⁶ *1 Henry VI*, V.iii.2-17.

²⁴⁷ Barrie Rutter, *Henry VI*, unpublished adapted text.

However, the striking absence here of the direct call to the 'Monarch of the North', a term for the Devil, in Rutter's adaptation and that it was saints that appeared and did not respond to her request, along with the visual image of Joan kneeling and her frantic tone suggests that overall Joan was a positive character fallen on desperate times. This was also the case in Joan's short speeches to York before her execution: although Rutter retained Joan's attempts to find reprieve on grounds of pregnancy, she prefaced these pleas with her account of her own holiness ('First let me tell you whom you have condemned ... / Virtuous and holy, chosen from above') which in this production was truthful. Even after her lies of pregnancy, the lines which reverberated were Joan's own '[w]ill nothing turn your relentless hearts?' indicating her desperate state, and York's 'here's a girl' which, while mocking Joan, underlines her immaturity and thus her innocence.

The most significant point about this scene for the cycle, and one which was associated with religion and spirituality throughout the production, is that, rather than confirming Joan as a witch, she was instead shown to be abandoned by God: with a roar made from instruments to the side of the stage, the two saints left together leaving Joan onstage alone. Where Dessen sees parallels between the fiends and Joan, and the squabble between York and Somerset,²⁴⁸ in Rutter's production the abandonment of Joan by her saints more clearly paralleled the abandonment of Henry and, more broadly, of Britain by God, shown ultimately in the culmination of the cycle with *Richard III*. Henry's abandonment was evident in his anger and grief at the deaths of Gloucester and Winchester, and the constant presence of his beads drew attention not just to his devotion but to the absence of God in what was happening around him; that Richard used these beads to woo Anne consolidated this impression.

²⁴⁸ Dessen, 'Stagecraft and Imagery in Shakespeare's *Henry VI*', 279.

That Northern Broadsides is so much rooted in its geography and related culture suggests that it might be a company that speaks to and for that community. Staging a production of *The Wars of the Roses* in the north of England, with accompanying materials that discuss it in terms of a national epic, encourages the notion that in some way this production is about its audience and their story. However, this was not the case with this production. Barrie Rutter is very much the founder of Northern Broadsides and is deeply involved in its productions, in this case adapting, directing and taking a major role, the character of York. He is held in some affection by the company's regular audience. This was, I think, a stumbling block to the success of this production. Rutter's role involved having soliloquies with which he can speak directly to his audience: this was evident in this production during York's molehill scene where he covered a range of emotions from ambivalence and shock, to shouted grief. To Rutter's credit, it was an absorbing performance, but there was little drama because none of the other characters responded to him in any way and were hardly noticed. This contrasts greatly to Terry Hands's cycle production in 1977 – 79 (in which Rutter also had a role) when at this moment, York turned the conflict between himself and Margaret into a sexually charged exchange, making her 'sexuality monstrous' and 'taking a final violent clutching at life, grabbing Margaret, forcing her down under him, her legs apart'.²⁴⁹ As Hampton-Reeves and Chillington Rutter note, '[h]is climax was a curse'.²⁵⁰ The importance of Margaret in this scene was also evident in Edward Hall's production where she 'sang a madrigal while she tortured the Duke of York'.²⁵¹ Rutter's production, then, suffered from his desire to showcase himself. His adaptation also suffered from his apparent desire to tell lots of stories; in many ways it lacked

²⁴⁹ Hampton-Reeves and Chillington Rutter, *The Henry VI Plays*, 104

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁵¹ Tatspaugh, 'Propeller's Staging of *Rose Rage*', 245.

focus, especially at the beginning, and the concentration of interpretation was not present as it had been in Edward Hall's *Rose Rage*: Tatspaugh noted that 'the overall effect of the text for *Rose Rage* is of a swift, clear narrative'.²⁵² Despite Rutter's attention to stories, this was missing from his text. Nor was there the political immediacy and desire for a retelling or reinterpretation of the national story, as there had been when the ESC staged their *Wars of the Roses*. Perhaps the perception of attack on the national identity is required for such contemporary and immediate productions, as discussed in relation to the Globe theatre, or perhaps Rutter's production of *The Wars of the Roses* was overshadowed by the promise of a new RSC production of *The Histories* which opened later in the same year.

²⁵² Tatspaugh, 'Propeller's Staging of *Rose Rage*', 251.

Chapter Four: 'Same sh*t, different decade':²⁵³ Michael Boyd, the Royal Shakespeare Company, and the Glorious Moment

The Royal Shakespeare Company has a record of staging cycles of Shakespeare's history plays, at times either of difficulty or celebration in the Company, which are often the domain of the RSC's artistic director. Indeed, so strong is the link between British productions of history cycles and the RSC that, in their discussion of productions of the *Henry VI* plays, Hampton-Reeves and Chillington Rutter state that '[t]he history of the *Henry VI* plays ... is bound up with issues of nationhood and national culture as seen from the perspective of the [RSC]'.²⁵⁴ The most recent of the RSC's history cycles was staged by Michael Boyd at the Courtyard Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon during 2006 – 2008, and it is this production which will form the focus of this chapter.

Boyd produced the eight plays of the two tetralogies of Shakespeare's English histories beginning in the summer of 2006 as part of the RSC's *Complete Works Festival* which saw all of Shakespeare's plays performed over the year, many performed by visiting theatre companies and quite a number by the RSC itself, and also included the dramatisation or reading of many of Shakespeare's poems. Boyd named his cycle *The Histories* and it opened as the centre piece of the Festival, the first productions to play in the newly built Courtyard Theatre.²⁵⁵ *The Histories*, the *Complete Works Festival* and the opening of the new theatre are all significant in understanding the context of the cycle. The *Complete Works Festival*, in the opening years of Boyd's directorship, was an audacious celebration of the Royal Shakespeare Company, and it showcased Boyd's

²⁵³ V. V. Montreux, '32 Short Thoughts About the Glorious Moment', *Shakespeare Bulletin* 26:4 (2008), 68.

²⁵⁴ Hampton-Reeves and Chillington Rutter, *The Henry VI Plays* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 1.

²⁵⁵ 1, 2, 3 *Henry VI* first performed 7th July, 14th July and 21st July 2006 respectively, *Richard III* first performed 11th January 2007. *Richard II*, 1 and 2 *Henry IV* first performed 7th July, 17th July and 25th July 2007 respectively, *Henry V* completed the octology on 25th October 2007.

history cycle. Directors of the RSC have used history cycles in the past as a means by which to raise revenue for the Company, however, in his first two seasons at the helm, Boyd had already cleared the Company's debt so such an aim was less significant, although quite probably a happy side-effect.²⁵⁶ Boyd had taken over the directorship in 2003 from Adrian Noble, a director who had successfully staged his own history cycle, *The Plantagenets*, in the 1980s and who had left the Company under something of a shadow because of his radical plans for the Company.

Towards the end of his tenure, although that was not known at the time, Noble had overseen another history cycle: *This England* was the RSC's millennium project which also staged all eight plays of the two tetralogies during 2000 – 2001. However, in contrast to Boyd's cycle later in the decade, this was staged by four different directors with two different companies of actors in three different theatre spaces: Steven Pimlott opened the cycle with *Richard II* in The Other Place; Michael Attenborough helmed both *Henry IV* plays in the Swan theatre; Edward Hall directed *Henry V* in the Royal Shakespeare Theatre; while Michael Boyd, then an associate director of the RSC, staged the three parts of *Henry VI* and *Richard III* in the Swan. Robert Smallwood has stated that 'to get all eight plays in repertoire together was the unprecedented achievement of the "This England" project'.²⁵⁷ However, although such a feat, with its titular nod to the nation, would seem to suggest unity, the fact of its numerous directors and different acting companies undermines this impression. Indeed, Michael Billington has written

²⁵⁶ Boyd achieved this by staging a season of Tragedies and a season of Comedies during the summer seasons of those two years, producing guaranteed bums-on-seats plays such as *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, *As You Like It* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In his preface to an interview with Michael Boyd, Stuart Hampton-Reeves notes that when he took over the reins from Adrian Noble 'Boyd was determined to return the RSC to its core mission, to restore not only its financial fortunes but its artistic purpose as well'. Hampton-Reeves states that 'Boyd's first season [the Tragedies] was planned conservatively and he went straight for known box office hits ... All were commercial and artistic successes and in late 2004, Boyd was able to announce that the RSC's debt had been cleared' (Stuart Hampton-Reeves, 'New Artistic Directions: An Interview with Michael Boyd', *Shakespeare* 1:1 (2005), 92).

²⁵⁷ Robert Smallwood, *Players of Shakespeare 6* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 4.

that '[i]n 1964, when the cycle had last been attempted [in its entirety as eight plays], it was the product of a unified and directorial vision. Now, [the productions were shared out] as if in recognition of our fractured sense of national identity'.²⁵⁸ The productions themselves underlined this: not only staged by different directors, the presentation of the plays was strikingly different. Pimlott's *Richard II* was staged as a postmodern existentialist exploration of self and identity with a minimal set in a 'White Box' stage with modern costuming.²⁵⁹ At the other extreme, Boyd's *Henry VIs* were staged as medieval plays taking inspiration from the paintings of Hieronymus Bosch. Even within the productions the emphasis was on disintegration: to Russell Jackson, Boyd's *Henrys* '[invoked] a grotesque vision of eternal punishment', suggesting 'a world turned to chaos'²⁶⁰ which was, according to Marcus Field, the reviewer for *The Independent*, literally staged on 'a splayed out body with a trap for guts'.²⁶¹

The interpretation of the project as focussing on disunity may have been influenced by Noble's announcement of Project Fleet 'only a matter of weeks'²⁶² after the opening of *Richard II*. This Project would transform the RSC, possibly beyond all recognition – axing jobs, closing The Other Place, losing the Company's London base, and demolishing to rebuild the Royal Shakespeare Theatre as a 'Disneyfied monstrosity'²⁶³ – and was seen by many in a most negative light. Indeed, as an indicator of the uncertainty which came with the Project, Michael Dobson stated that the opening of

²⁵⁸ Michael Billington, *State of the Nation: British Theatre Since 1945*, (London: Faber and Faber, 2007), 371.

²⁵⁹ Sam West has written about his experience in Pimlott's production, stating that '[t]he play seemed to us to articulate a peculiar sort of existential angst' and that '[a]nything that went into the box was thrown into huge relief by the white walls – someone said that everything had inverted commas around it', thus the set was very minimal consisting of a mound of earth, a chair, and a coffin (Samuel West, 'King Richard II', in *Players of Shakespeare 6*, ed. Robert Smallwood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 87.

²⁶⁰ Russell Jackson, "'This England": Shakespeare at Stratford-upon-Avon, Winter 2000 – 2001', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 52:3 (2001), 388.

²⁶¹ Marcus Field, *The Independent*, 10th December 2000.

²⁶² Smallwood, *Players of Shakespeare 6*, 4.

²⁶³ Billington, *State of the Nation*, 369.

This England was 'the last flowering of the RSC as we thought we knew it'.²⁶⁴ Uncertainty of what the future held was accompanied by condemnation: although stating that the Introduction to *Players of Shakespeare 6* 'is not the appropriate place to re-examine the issues [Project Fleet] raised', Smallwood frequently refers to it in negative terms, for example, calling it 'lamentable' and talking about 'its raft of regrettable decisions' and its 'destructive legacy'.²⁶⁵

Project Fleet was halted, quietly altered and abandoned with the abdication of Noble and the ascendancy of Boyd. In contrast to Noble's history project of disunity and the accompanying pessimism of Project Fleet, *The Complete Works* was a celebration. Indeed, not only stating that it staged Shakespeare's complete works, the title of the festival suggests a unity within the RSC and with its partners that the staging of *This England* belied. That Boyd staged *The Histories* in the middle of the festival suggests that he was drawing a parallel between his rule and that of his predecessor, directly showing how he had, literally in some cases, turned the Company's fortunes around. Retrospectively highlighting this, Smallwood wrote that Noble's plans to 'dismantle the ensemble company tradition' would make 'a repetition of the "This England" project inconceivable in the foreseeable future',²⁶⁶ yet only five years later Boyd achieved it with a single company of actors contracted for two years. Indeed, so long were the actors' contracts for the 2006 ensemble that Nick Asbury dedicated his account of his experiences in *The Histories* to 'Rua Liliias Masson Roberts. Conceived, born and had her first birthday during the whole project'.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁴ Michael Dobson, 'Shakespeare Performances in England, 2001' in *Shakespeare Survey 55* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002), 286.

²⁶⁵ Smallwood, *Players of Shakespeare 6*, xiii, 16.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁶⁷ Nick Asbury, *Exit Pursued by a Badger*, 11. Rua Liliias Masson Roberts is the daughter of ensemble performer Forbes Masson.

The parallels that Boyd's productions drew between the RSC in 2006 and 2000 point to the idea of doubling. Doubling was a device that dominated and characterised the productions in 2006, both in these terms of remembering 2000 and within the productions themselves: Boyd's 2006 – 2008 productions used a single cast of 34 actors playing 264 roles, and each actor played a significant number of characters over the eight plays.²⁶⁸ Beyond the actors, stage properties, such as the crown, were also used over and over, as were musical themes and visual images. The effect of this extensive doubling was to create links, often in a complex network, across the eight plays, so that images, ideas, sounds, and actors at the end of the eight plays could refer back to the first of the eight, regardless of which order the plays were viewed in. This emphasised the cyclical, unified nature of the plays. Outside of the play-world, the notion of doubling, particularly in relation to actors, a number of whom returned from the 2000 cast, creates some controversy in relation to the casting approach taken by Boyd.

Boyd's 2000 productions had caused something of a stir in the press when he cast David Oyelowo, a 24-year-old Nigerian actor, as Henry VI, generating a number of newspaper articles because the RSC had '[broken] the mould'²⁶⁹ by casting its first black actor in the role of a king of England. The decision was downplayed by the RSC, Boyd, and Oyelowo himself as a colour-blind casting choice. Colour-blind or non-traditional casting is the process of casting of 'ethnic and female performers in roles where race, ethnicity, or gender are not germane to the character's or the play's development'.²⁷⁰ However, non-traditional casting can be problematic: an article at the time in *The Times* highlighted a problem of non-traditional casting ('you aren't supposed to mention it')

²⁶⁸ This excludes David Warner who played the single role of Falstaff in the *Henry IV* plays. See the appendix for a detailed cast list of Boyd's productions.

²⁶⁹ Hugh Quarshie, *The Guardian*, 20th September 2000.

²⁷⁰ Harry Newman. 'Holding Back: The Theatre's Resistance to Non-Traditional Casting', *The Drama Review* 33:3 (1989), 24.

before going on to discuss what the writer perceives as complications in relation to staging historically white characters in film or on television: the apparent absurdity of ‘Queens Elizabeth and Victoria played by black actresses’.²⁷¹ Nevertheless, despite not being supposed to mention race,²⁷² some reviewers did, most notably the reviewer for the *Mail on Sunday* who stated that ‘I’m not sure you could have a black actor playing a monarch with a familiar face, but with *Henry VI* it’s fine because your average theatre-goer starts with a pretty blank slate’.²⁷³ Despite such press attention, the blackness of Henry VI was something of an irrelevance to the production, although Hampton-Reeves and Chillington Rutter state that through employing a multi-racial cast Boyd ‘reflected a very contemporary theme’.²⁷⁴

However, in 2006 Oyelowo did not reprise his role; instead Henry VI was played by Chuk Iwuji, another black actor. Although this casting decision may have been another non-traditional casting choice, that a different black actor was cast in the same role after the attention a similar choice had generated in 2000 suggests that, contrary to Boyd’s claims, this was a deliberate casting choice. Even if this was not so for the director, it arguably was for the audience whose attention may have been drawn to Iwuji’s skin colour because it referred to Oyelowo’s.²⁷⁵ Indeed, in V. V. Montreux’s ‘32 Short Thoughts About the Glorious Moment’, the writer makes the observation that ‘it is hard to believe that there is anything accidental about this’.²⁷⁶ In observing that ‘black actors

²⁷¹ Geoffrey Wheatcroft, *The Times*, 21st September 2000.

²⁷² This is an issue that Ayanna Thompson also raises in her more recent article ‘To Notice or Not to Notice’ which addresses the problems of how to review non-traditionally cast productions.

²⁷³ *Mail on Sunday*, 7th January 2001.

²⁷⁴ Hampton-Reeves and Chillington Rutter, *The Henry VI Plays*, 189.

²⁷⁵ Indeed, in a 1989 article about ‘Race Free, Gender Free, Body-Type Free, Age Free Casting’, Richard Schechner pointed out that ‘audiences are not color [*sic*] or gender blind anymore than they are body-type or age blind’ (Schchner, 5).

²⁷⁶ Montreux, ‘32 Short Thoughts About the Glorious Moment’, 70.

are recurrently cast as martyr figures',²⁷⁷ Montreux states that 'simultaneously the audience is implicitly asked to see (or rather not see) this particular pattern as colour-blind [*sic*] and non-interpretive'.²⁷⁸ However, Montreux found that 'no tidy message can be extracted' and, indeed, it is hard to pinpoint what, if anything, Boyd was attempting to do by recasting roles in 2006 with actors of the same race as those who had performed the parts in 2000. A notable exception to my suggestion that the casting in 2006 was more colour-conscious than colour-blind is the casting of Prince Edward in *3 Henry VI*: in both 2000 and 2006 a black Henry married a white Margaret (both performed by different actors in 2000 and 2006). However, in 2000 the role of Edward had been played by Neil Madden, a white actor, whereas in 2006 the role was taken by a black actor, Wela Frasier. The casting of both Madden and Frasier made no comment on the relationship between Henry and Margaret,²⁷⁹ however Frasier's casting in the role responded to the use of doubling throughout the cycle: Frasier specialised in playing young doomed boys. The only thing that it seems safe to state that Boyd was seeking to achieve by recasting a black actor as Henry, was to reference his previous productions and by so doing to make a statement about the RSC then and now: less 'Same shit, different decade',²⁸⁰ more '*Look! We have come through*'.²⁸¹

²⁷⁷ Montreux includes Patrice Naiambana, who played Warwick, in this assertion. However, Warwick does not strike one as a particularly martyr-like figure. Montreux supports this idea by arguing that Naiambana may have been familiar to audience members as having played Aslan, the Christ figure, in a previous RSC production of *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*. However, this argument seems somewhat tenuous. Had all the black actors been linked with a single house, such an argument for noticing the colour of their skins may have been obvious, however, it is more Boyd's recasting of actors of the same ethnicity that drew attention to their colour rather than the particular characters that the actors of colour played.

²⁷⁸ Montreux, '32 Short Thoughts About the Glorious Moment', 70.

²⁷⁹ This is an important point because the casting could have made comments on the relationship between Henry, Margaret, and Suffolk, suggesting, for example, that Suffolk was Edward's father in 2000, and that Henry was his father in 2006. However, this interpretation was not signalled as Boyd's reading of the play and the characters' relationships, which seems to support his claim that his approach was colour-blind.

²⁸⁰ Montreux, '32 Short Thoughts About the Glorious Moment', 68.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 66.

The reference to Boyd's earlier productions that was potentially created through the casting of actors of the same ethnicity in two key roles is a microcosm of a much larger comparison that Boyd's restaging achieved. In the brochure that advertised *The Complete Works*, Boyd's contributions were referred to as 'revisited productions'. Such revisitation might suggest that Boyd had unfinished work with his cycle, and indeed, he showed this to be the case by adding the other four plays to his tetralogy. However, deeper than this, Boyd's restaging in fact offered a different interpretation: from division in 2000, Boyd now focussed in 2006 on unity. By referencing the earlier productions, Boyd invited his audience to see the differences between his reign and that of Noble, inviting the audience to see his cycle as the artistic director's triumph.

That Boyd revived and re-staged his contribution to *This England in The Histories* as the RSC's only historical contribution to *The Complete Works* encourages comparisons between the two stagings.²⁸² It is fair to call the revivals restagings: many actors from the 2001 productions returned, and those who did not, significantly Aidan McArdle and Fiona Bell,²⁸³ were approached; the stage sets for the productions differed only slightly; and much of the costuming and blocking remained the same. In 2000, Boyd's productions had been staged in the Swan Theatre which had been radically altered: seating was created at what would usually have been the rear of the thrust stage, creating a theatre in the round with entrances from all four corners suggesting the corpse image to critics – the stage as the torso and the entrances as splayed limbs. Large metal

²⁸² Boyd's productions of the second tetralogy were staged after *The Complete Works* officially ended. History plays of the two tetralogies, aside from *Henry VI* and *Richard III*, were staged by visiting international theatre companies: *Richard II* was performed by the Berliner Ensemble (16 – 18 November 2006), *Henry IV Parts I and II* were performed by Chicago Shakespeare Theatre (6 – 15 July 2006), and *Henry V* was performed by Campagna Pippo Delbono in collaboration with ERT-Emilia Romagna Teatro (1 – 3 February 2007). The absence of RSC productions of these famous plays as part of the festival placed the focus onto Boyd's cycle and continued the sense of an event after the festival had finished.

²⁸³ Aidan McArdle played the Dauphin and Richard of Gloucester; Fiona Bell played Joan la Pucelle and Queen Margaret in the 2000 - 2001 company.

doors dominated the opposite end of the stage and the first floor of the auditorium directly above them was used as a balcony. The wooden columns and railings of the theatre had been bound with black cloth as if to reinforce Humphrey of Gloucester's lamentation at the opening of *1 Henry VI*, 'Hung be the heavens with black',²⁸⁴ and at the opening, Henry V's corpse hung above the stage.

Although no longer in the round, in 2006 the Courtyard opened with a similar stage: a large thrust which was dominated at the rear by a metal tower with double doors and a balcony. There were five entrances onto the stage, most notably through the doors in the tower which acted as something of a hell-mouth, especially during the *Henry VI* plays, through which characters emerged and the dead were carried away. However, although there were five, what we may call, horizontal entrances, actors also entered vertically via various devices: these included, from the flies, trapezes, picture frames, and ropes; ropes from the balconies of the auditorium; and ladders at the rear of the stage. Boyd retained his design team from the 2000 productions and Tom Piper, the designer, has stated that the new theatre and the restaged history productions had influences on each other as Piper was able to work with the architects as they designed the theatre, bringing his production requirements to bear on the physical design of the auditorium.²⁸⁵ The different modes of entrance for actors was an aspect that was also retained from the 2000 productions, an element which Hampton-Reeves and Chillington Rutter comment on, stating that '[a]ction on all four sides of the galleries ensured that no-one in the audience ever had anything more than a partial view' and that audience inclusion and involvement in the unfolding drama made spectators 'unwilling participants in the national spectacle', something which they describe as an

²⁸⁴ *1 Henry VI*, 1.i.1.

²⁸⁵ Tom Piper, *Playing with History* event, 15th February 2007, Courtyard Theatre.

'uncomfortable experience'.²⁸⁶ Boyd retained many aspects from his original *Henry VI*s in the restaged productions: for example, the use of the hell-mouth; blocking which helped to present characterisations; the extra-textual Keeper character; the ghostly aspects; and the costuming and set designs. However, it is important to note that the restaged productions were staged as part of Boyd's own complete cycle of the two tetralogies and, rather than staging a disunified nation, Boyd's *Histories* staged a coherent cycle as a single piece.

Boyd created a unified history cycle, indeed in his introduction to the short book that accompanied the final performances of the complete cycle, he seems to take for granted that Shakespeare conceived the plays as a whole: for example, Boyd states that his productions were staged 'back to front' because 'Shakespeare conceived them in that order'.²⁸⁷ In this short essay Boyd is quite firm in his understanding of Shakespeare as an inheritor of medieval cycle plays, and Boyd himself seems to have become heir to this tradition as he discusses how the medieval cycles used different devices in order to create unity and meaning over those plays:

In the Chester mystery cycle, Christ's final cry is half way through the twelve hour cycle, numerically and literally at the centre. But we have already met Christ as Isaac, and his cross as the apple tree in Paradise. Herod reminds us of the Pharaoh, who in turn reminds us of Satan. They all three share exactly the same distinctive rhyme scheme, as well as the vividness of tyrannical pride.²⁸⁸

Boyd also used these kinds of devices – the doubling of actors and props – across the eight plays to create this sense of '[s]imultaneous time',²⁸⁹ of having seen these characters and actions before and thereby create a sense of coherent meaning in the cycle of eight plays.

²⁸⁶ Hampton-Reeves and Chillington Rutter, *The Henry VI Plays*, 193.

²⁸⁷ Michael Boyd, *The Histories*, 5.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

It is noteworthy that Boyd highlights his decision to stage the plays 'back to front'. Arguably the decision seems more related to the aspect of restaging a successful production than to Shakespeare's own composition (after all, if Boyd had truly been working to the order of the plays' composition, he would have staged *1 Henry VI* after 2 and 3 *Henry VI*).²⁹⁰ Nevertheless, if the audience were seeing the productions over the two years, they would have begun with *1 Henry VI – Richard III* and concluded with *Richard II – Henry V*. However, the project led up to two weekends when the whole octology was staged continuously over four days: during the first weekend the staging began on Thursday night with *1 Henry VI* and concluded on Sunday afternoon with *Henry V*, while the next weekend the productions began again on Thursday night but this time with *Richard II*, and concluded on Sunday afternoon with *Richard III*. The first of these weekend extravaganzas was titled 'Staging History', the second, 'The Glorious Moment'. In his article about music in Boyd's cycle, Coen Heijes states that he approaches the productions in order of composition because 'the individual productions were constructed in that order by Boyd ... [and] both the director [Boyd] and the assistant director [Richard Twyman] stated unequivocally that the best way to appreciate this version of the cycle was to see it in the order of writing'.²⁹¹ I saw the productions both in Boyd's tacit order of composition over two years, and, in the second of the weekend extravaganzas, in narrative order. It is my contention that, despite, Heijes' claims about Boyd and Twyman's statement of preferred viewing order, the productions worked best when seen as a chronological progression. I contend that Boyd's history cycle is a providential cycle in the tradition of Tillyard's Tudor Myth

²⁹⁰ Ronald Knowles, in his introduction to the Arden edition of *2 Henry VI* is thorough in his account of the debates surrounding the dating of the *Henry VI* plays. He notes that there are significant 'discrepancies and inconsistencies between the first and second parts of *Henry VI*' which led Kristian Smidt and J. Dover Wilson to conclude that 2 and 3 *Henry VI* preceded *1 Henry VI* in order of composition. (Ronald Knowles, Introduction to *2 Henry VI*, Arden Shakespeare (London: Thomson Learning, 2001), 113).

²⁹¹ Coen Heijes, "'Strike up the Drum": The Use of Music in the Boyd History Cycle', *Shakespeare Bulletin* 27:2 (2009), 225.

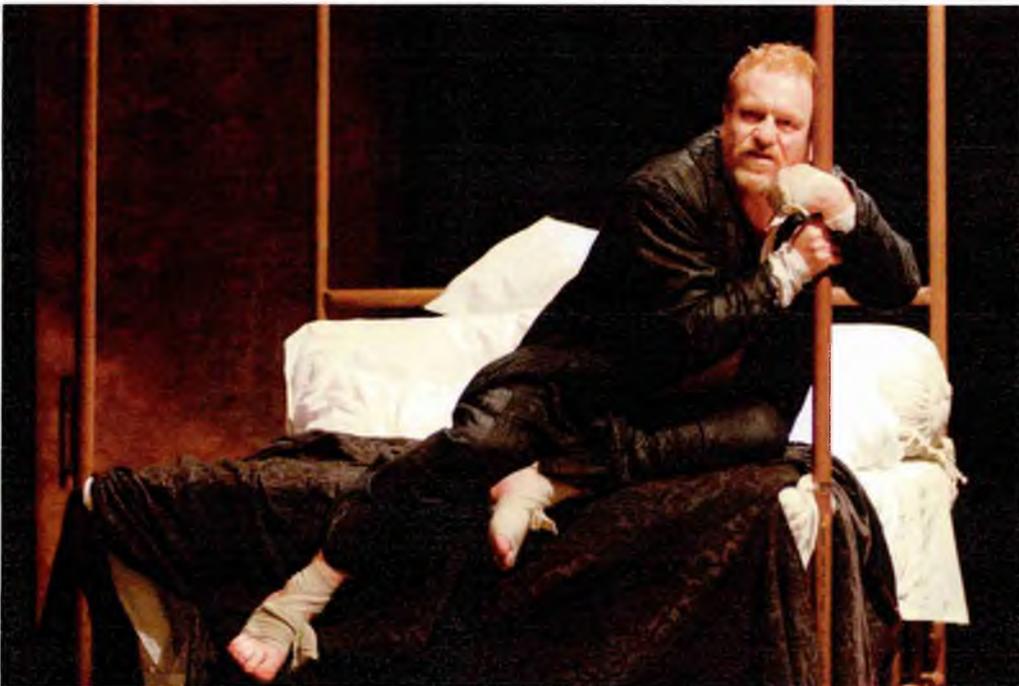
and that working through the plays from *Richard II* to *Richard III*, particularly with extra-textual additions to the beginning of *Richard II*, plays out a story in which kings and country are punished for the usurping actions of their forbears.²⁹²

Boyd's production of the octology was about staging unity and in this chapter I discuss some of the different aspects of his history cycle related to that theme. In 'What art thou / That counterfeit'st the person of a king?', I address the unifying motif of the crown, Boyd's notion of kingship across the cycle, and his metatheatrical concept of the king which across eight plays showed the king as a role that players act. In the second part, 'My dream was lengthened after life', I look at the extensive extratextual use of the supernatural and how Boyd used ghostly elements from both classical and Christian mythology to impose a sense of the unified providential cycle upon the productions. In the third part of the chapter, 'A Woman's Hide', I look at the women across the cycle, discussing the domestic women of the second tetralogy who are more frequently silent or absent in productions, and the martial women in the first tetralogy, addressing how the cumulative experience of women from *Richard II* to *Richard III*, rather than demonising the characters, in fact creates a sympathetic response to them.

²⁹² In spite of my assertion here it is important to acknowledge that the productions can be legitimately read in the order of composition as Boyd staged them and as Heijes reads them. Such a reading would inevitably create very different interpretations from those which I argue here. However, I believe the productions make greater sense as a cycle when read in the chronological order.



7 L – R: Bagot (Forbes Masson), Duchess of York (Maureen Beattie), York (Richard Cordery), Richard II (Jonathan Slinger), Bushy (Nicholas Asbury), Gaunt (Roger Watkins), Queen Isabel (Hannah Barrie). Front: Ghost of Woodstock (Chuk Iwuji). *Richard II* directed by Michal Boyd, Royal Shakespeare Company.



8 Clive Wood as Henry IV. *2 Henry IV* directed by Richard Twyman, Royal Shakespeare Company



9 Clive Wood (King Henry IV). *2 Henry IV*, directed by Richard Twyman, Royal Shakespeare Company.



10 Background: Henry IV (Clive Wood).
Foreground: Hal (Geoffrey Streatfeild). *2 Henry IV*, directed by Richard Twyman, Royal Shakespeare Company.



11 Chuk Iwuji as Henry VI. Directed by Michael Boyd, Royal Shakespeare Company.



12 L – R: Ghost of John Talbot (Lex Shrapnel), Ghost of Talbot (Keith Bartlett) on the barge of the dead. *2 Henry VI*, directed by Michael Boyd, Royal Shakespeare Company.

'What art thou / That counterfeit'st the person of a king?':²⁹³ Kingship in Boyd's octology

The idea of the king and claims to kingship are central threads which run through Shakespeare's English history plays: as Lily B. Campbell stated in 1947, the plays are about 'Richard II, who was deposed for his sins; or Henry IV and his rebel-ridden kingdom; or Richard III, infamous for tyranny; or Henry VI, who "lost France, and made his England bleed"²⁹⁴. This last quotation comes from the final Chorus of *Henry V*, referring, although ambiguously, not to Henry VI's England but his father's, Henry V, the one king that Campbell leaves out of her list because he apparently is a king unchallenged by would-be deposeders.²⁹⁵ But *Henry V* is a play that also studies kingship, ambiguously presenting Henry V who makes war in France to 'busy giddy minds'.²⁹⁶ Boyd's octology was deeply concerned with the idea of the king, asking throughout the cycle, which is so caught up with successive claims to the throne, the ostensibly simple question to which an answer is so hard to pin down: 'who is the king?'. In posing this question, Boyd addressed the issue of whether, as Hamlet says, 'the King is a thing',²⁹⁷ in this context a person or a role. Boyd suggested the metatheatricality of the king which was explored in a number of ways, most obviously through costume. This section of the chapter will look at the presentation of kingship in Boyd's productions teasing out the different ideas about kingship that could be found in the productions. I discuss how elements of design were used to present the different methods of rule; how Boyd conducted a discussion about the idea of the king as a role that is played; and Boyd's presentation of a process of what I call stripping the king. Ultimately this

²⁹³ 1 *Henry IV*, V.iv.26 – 27.

²⁹⁴ Lily B. Campbell, *Shakespeare's Histories: Mirrors of Elizabethan Policy* (London: Methuen, 1964), 11.

²⁹⁵ Of course, *Henry V* does have a scene featuring would-be traitors. However, as Nicholas Grene states, 'Cambridge, seeing his own case doomed, chose not to proclaim his true object, to place the Yorkist claimant Edmund Mortimer on the throne ... By failing to elucidate this, Shakespeare suppresses from [*Henry V*] the whole dynastic dispute that is the preoccupying concern of all his other histories' (Grene, *Shakespeare's Serial History Plays*, 242).

²⁹⁶ 2 *Henry IV*, IV.iii.342.

²⁹⁷ *Hamlet*, IV.ii.27.

section of the chapter illustrates how, through these presentations, Boyd showed kingship as a theatrical role and the crown as a poisoned chalice. The crown was a central stage property which Boyd used throughout the eight productions and it was the same physical object in each play, giving a sense of continuity over the eight plays, creating and reinforcing the idea of the cycle. Alongside the golden crown, Boyd used a simple paper crown as a principal motif throughout his productions, as characters constantly put forward and tried to support their paper thin claims to the throne. Both the golden and paper crowns, passed from king to king, seemed to reinforce the idea in Boyd's interpretation that the role of the king is one that any man may put on or take off.

The history plays can be read as a series of inspections of kingship beginning in *Richard II*. *Richard II* is built on the oppositions between Richard and Bolingbroke's²⁹⁸ approaches to governance. In Boyd's production, Richard's idea of kingship was characterised by excess, visually presented by staging the production as Elizabethan. Boyd's production began with the company formally processing out of the tower to the sound of choral music, each character using restricted movements. As the company moved over the stage, Richard emerged from the auditorium wearing bright gold and cream robes, the crown sitting on his head above orange curls, his face painted white with bright red lips, and the sceptre lying in his arm. At his arrival on stage, the company, all of whom averted their eyes from the king, began bowing and moving backwards. The formal reception characterised Richard as the untouchable sovereign. The advertising posters for this production showed Jonathan Slinger, who played Richard II, in this costume and make-up and the allusion between Richard II and

²⁹⁸ This spelling is how the character was listed in the production programme and is thus the way in which it will be spelt in reference to this production. However, it is noteworthy that the characters pronounced the name Bullingbroke and that this had implications in terms of the presentation of the bullish energy of the character which sets him apart from Richard II's gentility.

Elizabeth I was evident, bringing to mind Elizabeth's famous statement, 'I am Richard II, know you not that?' which was also printed in large letters as the head of an essay by Andrew Hadfield in the production programme.²⁹⁹ However, it is unclear how many theatre-goers would have understood this specific allusion between Elizabeth and Richard without the aid of the programme. This is true also of the parallels which Ben Spiller sees between Elizabeth I and Joan in *1 Henry VI* through echoes of the Tilbury speech in the play: Spiller writes that Boyd's 2000 production 'alluded clearly to Elizabeth via the performance of ... Joan', a result largely of alignments between Joan and Margaret which thus made Joan of royal descent, and the fact that '[f]or the majority of her stage time, Joan was dressed in armour, complete with metal breastplate: a visual reference, it seemed, to Elizabeth's probable appearance at Tilbury'.³⁰⁰ While Spiller's suggestions are interesting, he is not entirely convincing in his discussion of Boyd's staging of Joan: a breastplate is a simple form of armour to signal war dress, used by any martial woman in the production including Margaret later in the tetralogy (in both 2000 and 2006). In contrast, the allusions between Richard II and Elizabeth I were much clearer although they did not explicitly suggest that the productions were commenting in some way on this relationship. What this design choice did was to stage the sumptuousness of the Elizabethan era: the beautiful, though physically restrictive, costumes, the use of make-up, the dainty looking foil as weapon of choice. This set Richard's reign apart from those of the other kings the cycle covers, highlighting the weakness of the king in his vanity and the problems of leadership that such self-indulgence leads to.³⁰¹ Campbell writes of the play that

²⁹⁹ Andrew Hadfield, 'I am Richard II', *Richard II* production programme, 9 – 10.

³⁰⁰ Ben Spiller, 'Warlike Mates? Queen Elizabeth and Joan la Pucelle in *1 Henry VI*', in *Goddesses and Queens: The Iconography of Elizabeth I. VI* ed. Annaliese Connolly and Lisa Hopkins (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 40 – 41

³⁰¹ It could be suggested that the allusion between Richard and Elizabeth I, along with Hadfield's essay, suggest that Boyd was trying to align this production specifically with the original controversy that is associated with the play if Shakespeare's play is considered to be that which the Earl of Essex had staged

The long-continued follies of Richard are discussed in the dialogue – his favoritism, his alienation of subjects by heavy financial burdens imposed upon them, his farming out of crown lands, his connection with his uncle’s murder – but they are not presented on the stage.³⁰²

Richard’s follies, as Campbell describes them, were also absent from the stage in Boyd’s production, except that the involvement of Richard in Woodstock’s murder was strongly suggested.³⁰³ The use of the Elizabethan design concept, through its focus on excess and sumptuousness and its contrast to the simpler puritan style of Bolingbroke, helped to suggest these negative aspects of this king’s style of leadership. The idea of kingship was intertwined with costume throughout the cycle: each king seemed to literally wear and signal his approach to ruling, beginning with this very elaborate presentation for Richard II, moving through a more puritan approach for Henry IV, into something of a monk’s habit for Henry VI. This approach to costume visually represented the stripping of kingship which occurred through the eight plays: in his influential work on *The King’s Two Bodies*, Ernst Kantorowicz describes Richard II as moving through a process that he calls ‘cascading’, that is moving ‘from divine kingship to kingship’s “Name”, and from the name to the naked misery of man’.³⁰⁴ Boyd presented this process across the cycle, the productions stripping kingship of its accoutrements, for example in increasingly simplifying the costumes of kings. This stripping of the different layers staged the question of what actually constitutes a king: vanity, playing, or goodness?

on the eve of his rebellion in 1601. However, this idea is largely unsupportable, other than that the series of plays features a number of rebelling nobles, because those ideas were not explicitly explored in the productions. Rather, it was the sumptuousness of the Elizabethan age which was important in characterising Richard’s selfish reign.

³⁰² Campbell, *Shakespeare’s Histories*, 169.

³⁰³ See Ghosts section of this chapter. There was also an essay in the production programme detailing who Thomas of Woodstock was, further encouraging the idea that the audience was supposed to make the connection between the body lying on the stage during the opening moments of the play and the king’s murdered uncle.

³⁰⁴ Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957), 27.

Clive Wood's Bolingbroke was the antithesis of Slinger's Richard II. In contrast to the more authentic Elizabethan costumes, Bolingbroke was dressed in stark black clothing – trousers, boots and a long leather coat – which visually set his character apart from the company of Richard's subjects and highlighted the differences between Bolingbroke's and Richard's approach to kingship. Tillyard wrote that 'Henry [Bolingbroke] belongs to a new order, where action is quick and leads somewhere'; he goes on to contrast this with the ceremonialism of Richard's reign which is concerned with appearance while nothing actually happens.³⁰⁵ Although Tillyard remains somewhat out of fashion, his idea in this quotation underpinned the presentation of Bolingbroke through the contrast with the elaborate Richard, embodied in the sparse, practical form of dress. Consequently, when Lex Shrapnel's Hotspur was shown wearing very similar clothes to Bolingbroke's in *1 Henry IV* the reference immediately suggested shared character traits between Bolingbroke and Hotspur. Clothing was used in line with Marvin Carlson's ideas of 'ghosting' characters and was evident across the cycle: the clothes Wood wore for the part of Richard Plantagenet, later Duke of York, in the *Henry VI* plays were again similar to those worn by Bolingbroke.³⁰⁶ The effect of Boyd's doubling is most evident here: Wood played the role of the usurper in both *Richard II* and *Henry VI*; the use of the same style of costume immediately recalled the earlier character.

Richard's style of rule was clearly suggested through the opening pageantry: Margaret Shewring, when writing about the first scene of *Richard II*, states that '[o]n the bare stage of the Elizabethan popular theatre the opening scene allowed the visual

³⁰⁵ Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays*, 258. Tillyard notes that 'the very actions [of the play] tend to be symbolic rather than real. There is all the pomp of a tournament without the physical meeting of the two armed knights. There is a great army of Welshmen assembled ... but they never fight' (246). Although Tillyard's ideas regarding the unification of the history plays are now largely discredited, his views on these characters remain valid.

³⁰⁶ Marvin Carlson writes in *The Haunted Stage* that 'the recycled body of an actor ... [will] in a new role evoke the ghost or ghosts of previous roles' (8). The doubling of costumes had this effect in Boyd's productions, thus permeating new characters with the audience's memory of the actors' previous roles. I will discuss Carlson's ideas more thoroughly in the next section.

establishment of all the spectacle and pageantry of a strongly hierarchical court'.³⁰⁷ Boyd's production did this, establishing the awe in which the king was held, the aversion of eyes suggesting the hierarchy. However, both Bolingbroke and Mowbray presented material challenges to Richard and his style of rule: Mowbray refused to give up the gage, even when Richard used a hard, threatening tone saying slowly with emphasis on each word 'Give ... me ... the ... gage [*sic*].'³⁰⁸ Mowbray's action revealed his greater concern for honour than for his king's commands, reducing the importance of those commands and challenging the king's power. Bolingbroke also defied the king although, at this point, more subtly than Mowbray, using his tone of voice and demeanour. However, tone of voice, as Barbara Hodgdon points out, is very significant in '[marking] subject positions'.³⁰⁹ The tone Bolingbroke used created his position in relation to Richard and Richard's in relation to him. As with Mowbray's challenge, this elevated Bolingbroke at the expense of Richard's divine authority. These challenges suggest that Richard's command was not as assured as his and the company's behaviour otherwise suggested: although as a group the subjects seemed to honour the king, closer inspection of individuals seemed to reveal a more level playing field. This was evident in the trial-by-combat: whenever Bolingbroke spoke, his supporters, standing in the gallery of the auditorium, responded with banging on the railings while shouting 'God save Henry!'. This extratextual addition effectively presented Bolingbroke as king, making him equal to Richard and devaluing the importance of the crown.³¹⁰ The placing of Bolingbroke's supporters in the auditorium

³⁰⁷ Shewring, *Richard II*, 12.

³⁰⁸ *Richard II*, I.i.174

³⁰⁹ Barbara Hodgdon, 'Early Modern Subjects, Shakespearean Performances, and (Post) Modern Spectators', *Critical Survey* 9:3 (1997), 3.

³¹⁰ This extratextual addition is supported by Bolingbroke himself as King Henry IV when he tells Hal that 'I did pluck allegiance from men's hearts, / Loud shouts and salutations from their mouths, / Even in the presence of the crowned King'. (*2 Henry IV*, III.ii.52 – 54).

also increased the growing sense of Richard's alienation as the 1,000-strong audience itself appeared to champion Bolingbroke.

Richard's conception of his absolute authority is shown to be superficial, and certainly not beyond question. Boyd constantly undermined Richard's presentation: although the company did receive him, they were visually opposed – Richard approached them from down stage as they came forward from up stage, much as warring factions would meet each other later in the plays. Richard was elevated above his subjects by standing on his throne-stairs to observe the trial, and he exercised his power by tardily throwing his warder. However, the petulance with which he threw the warder showed his power to be dangerously arbitrary and he readily and gleefully descended to stage level, the level of the combatants, to be kissed by his cousin. Richard's descent again underlined the relative equality of the characters and visually undermined his role. In contrast, Bolingbroke's tone highlighted his authority: he addressed the first lines of his speech, 'O, let no noble eye profane a tear',³¹¹ to Richard, but as the king walked away, Bolingbroke stopped him by calling out the lines spoken to the Lord Marshall in the text, 'My lord! [*sic*]' before adding 'I take my leave of you',³¹² thus reversing the role of authority and giving Bolingbroke power over Richard. The scene reinforced Bolingbroke's intention to challenge Richard's authority as he pointedly stated that 'the sun that shines on you shall shine on me [*sic*]',³¹³ again suggesting the equality between the two characters.

On the surface, Boyd's *Richard II* appeared relatively conventional in that it staged a powerful king who is usurped and discovers a degree of self-awareness. However, on

³¹¹ *Richard II*, I.iii.59.

³¹² *Richard II*, I.iii.63.

³¹³ *Richard II*, I.iii.139.

closer analysis, it is appropriate to refer to this impression as the veneer of the production, which hid a more politically and democratically minded production which challenged Richard's authority from the outset, as much as Richard wore a veneer of makeup and the mask of kingship covering a much less worthy and more 'normal' character. Slinger established a presentation of Richard that was seemingly friendly and amenable, absolutely assured of his authority and everyone else's submission. However, as this façade was stripped away, he revealed an icy indifference to people showing that he had no familial sympathies, certainly not towards Bolingbroke, to whom he spoke the words 'my father's brother's son'³¹⁴ with contempt, relishing the way the construction of the line distanced him from the close link they share as first cousins. Boyd's production is a relative rarity in suggesting this distance between Richard and Bolingbroke – many previous productions have, in contrast, suggested the closeness of the relationship. For example, in John Barton's 1974 production for the RSC, Ian Richardson and Richard Pasco alternated the roles of Richard and Bolingbroke at each performance, both playing both the king and usurper, in order to underline the similarities and closeness of the two, and in Deborah Warner's 1995 production for the National Theatre the relationship between the two was also emphasised, perhaps subconsciously encouraged through the fact that Richard was played by a woman (Fiona Shaw) and Bolingbroke by a man (Richard Bremner).

The encounter with Gaunt in II.i in Boyd's production also revealed some of the character beneath the mask. Richard, kneeling devotedly at Gaunt's feet, was initially greatly concerned and childishly pleased at Gaunt's jokes. However, this alternated with growing anger and as Gaunt continued to accuse Richard, Richard stood and moved away from his uncle with a grotesque and threatening smile frozen on his face,

³¹⁴ *Richard II*, I.i.117.

his expression becoming a mask. The tension eventually exploded as Richard began shouting at Gaunt who had to be physically restrained in his wheelchair by York. 'So much for that'³¹⁵ was spoken as a part of Richard's process of calming down after the argument, and he granted York governorship with an insulting tone. The presentation of this dual-level of personality – one of niceness masking malice – was significant for the stripping process, which for Richard began here, showing the stripping of his complex personality, and initiated the physical costume stripping to which I referred earlier.

Boyd used the 'death of kings'³¹⁶ speech to look at the idea of kingship as a role and, thus, it was during this scene that the audience began to hear and see the real man beneath the façade: Richard responded to the laughter from his men with a resonating deep masculine voice as he said '[m]ock not my senseless conjuration'.³¹⁷ This was one of the first times that Richard's natural voice had been heard in the play and this sense of seeing the real Richard was continued through the speech: Richard knelt on the ground centre stage, sitting on his heels, a very informal and natural image. Significantly, when he spoke about the crown he removed it from his head for the first time in the production. This action with the new naturalness of tone presented the idea of the 'role' of king as embedded in the object rather than the person. When Richard stood he handed the crown to the Bishop who then re-crowned him and Richard again took on the character of the King, this act of coronation suggesting the significance of the placing and removal of the crown, an action whose significance was apparent throughout the cycle. Kantorowicz discusses this scene at length, and his interpretation of Richard II in relation to the king's two bodies is useful in understanding Boyd's

³¹⁵ *Richard II*, II.i.156.

³¹⁶ *Richard II*, III.ii.140 – 173.

³¹⁷ *Richard II*, III.ii.23.

approach to the king: Kantorowicz discusses how during the 'death of kings' speech 'not only does the king's manhood prevail over the godhead of the Crown, ... worse than that, kingship itself seems to have changed its essence'.³¹⁸ In Boyd's staging of the scene, the crown was presented as the embodiment of kingship, and it was the removal of this property that signalled a change in the king, rather than a change in kingship itself. The use of Richard's natural voice clearly presented a separation of manhood and sovereignty, and strongly suggested the idea of the king having 'two bodies' – a physical man and a political role. However, Kantorowicz goes on to state that '[t]he king that "never dies" has been replaced by the king that always dies ... gone is the oneness of the body natural with the immortal body politic',³¹⁹ but as kingship was presented as a role in Boyd's interpretation, it was not the king that was presented as dying, but the man. Kingship in the symbol of the crown retained its immortality, remaining constant from reign to reign, but the stripping of the role in and from Richard began to change perception of the role.

Richard's surrendering of the role of king began with the simple removal in III.ii, however he was never resigned to his deposition: rather than slide into self-awareness calmly, he became increasingly anguished. Indeed, as suggested above, the focus here was not on Richard's self-discovery but on the surrendering and usurping of kingship. Kingship was presented as something addictive; later, in *2 Henry IV*, the crown was presented as a corrupting force, exerting an effect like a drug, the surrendering of which was a cause of considerable mental ill-health. Richard's giving up of the crown then bore some resemblance to the withdrawal of a drug: his mental anguish was apparent at Flint Castle where he moved through anger, authority, vulnerability, and self-doubt. He

³¹⁸ Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, 30.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*

appeared gleefully pleased when Northumberland stated that Bolingbroke wanted to kiss his hand, however he also confided his anxiety when seeking reassurance from Aumerle, and he cried out 'O God! O God!' looking up to the flies as though expecting a literal divine intervention.

The scene of Richard's deposition is famously controversial, the original importance of it suggested by its censorship in the quarto edition of 1597.³²⁰ That the scene is the deposition of the anointed king and the putting in his place of an usurper, suggests the significance of the discussion and presentation of kingship embodied within it. Tillyard quotes A. B. Steel stating that '[t]he kings of the next hundred and ten years ... were essentially kings *de facto* not *de jure*, successful usurpers recognised after the event'³²¹ and all of Boyd's kings carried this idea in their presentation: kingship was about usurpation and the horrors and instability of state that comes with it. Indeed, as I will argue, the one good king of the cycle rejects his own kingship: on a molehill in II.v of 3 *Henry VI*, that king states that 'O God! Methinks it were a happy life / To be no better than a homely swain'.³²² The use of formality and tradition in *Richard II* emphasised the importance of the deposition in a political rather than personal sense in Boyd's production: Richard deposed himself while taking bows and stepping backwards as the characters had done for him at the opening of the production: each bow giving away another portion of his kingship:

With mine own tears I wash away my balm,
With mine own hands I give away my crown,
With mine own tongue deny my sacred state,
With mine own breath release all duteous oaths.³²³

³²⁰ For discussions of the controversy around this scene see Janet Clare, 'The Censorship of the Deposition Scene in *Richard II*'. *The Review of English Studies* 41:161 (February, 1990), 89 – 94.

³²¹ Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays*, 253.

³²² 3 *Henry VI*, II.v.21 – 22.

³²³ *Richard II*, IV.i.197 – 200.

Richard spoke to Northumberland as an equal: Slinger did not present his Richard as beaten or even grief-stricken. Indeed, he continued to swing from emotion to emotion, the confusion demonstrated as he bellowed 'Ay, no. No, ay' before concluding more softly 'for I must nothing be'³²⁴ and, in an entirely unexpected move, while waiting for the mirror he suddenly tore his ginger wig from his head and threw it to the ground revealing a pale shaven scalp. This may or may not be a reference to Mo Mowlam, a British MP and Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1997 – 1999), who would remove her wig to relieve tension during the talks that led up to the Good Friday Agreement. This action by Mowlam perhaps gave the talks a sense of perspective by referring to her illness and may also have created an image of her vulnerability.³²⁵ However, rather than relieve tension, in this context Richard's action in fact increased it: more than the formal deposition, the removal of the wig more intimately revealed the giving up of role and kingly identity. Metatheatrically, this move presented kingship as a role which an actor might play, suggesting that any character can be a king and thereby raising questions about the nature of divinely anointed monarchy. This idea is something which Grene explores using this theatre-language to describe the plot of *Richard II*, writing that 'the doctrinal paradox of the King's two bodies is dramatised ... as the descent of the royal method actor, who fully believes in his role, down to the bewildered less-than-man trying to find a part'.³²⁶ Grene's description and frequent use of the term 'royal role' fully presents the king as a character in a drama, drawing attention, as Boyd did, to the disposability, through the metatheatricity, of the king in these plays. The audience were also reminded that Slinger would later 'play' Richard III, further suggesting the idea of monarchy as 'playing' the king: the king being a role that anyone can put on and take off. This idea, of course, was embodied in the image of

³²⁴ *Richard II*, IV.i.201.

³²⁵ See http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/4739277.stm. Last accessed 15th June 2009.

³²⁶ Grene, *Shakespeare's Serial History Plays*, 218.

the golden crown prop which was passed from king to king, actor to actor, and back again in the eight plays. Moreover, this use of the metatheatrical emphasised the narrative underpinning the cycle: the continued challenging and usurping of kings, in this instance, of Henry usurping Richard and therefore playing the king, thus undermining the foundation of Henry IV's rule before it had even begun.

Boyd began a presentation here that would position Bolingbroke and other characters around him through the life of the character. Bolingbroke was shown as a political pragmatist: his statement that 'I come for Lancaster'³²⁷ was never spoken as a truthful intention, as it was for example in Nunn's 2005 production. However, nor was it spoken merely to hide his true intentions either but rather to placate and reassure York. This pragmatism was shown in a harder light in the treatment of Bushy and Green, who were bound and had bloodied faces which highlighted the expediency of Bolingbroke. That Bolingbroke had no qualms in using violence to achieve his ends was further underlined as he ripped a pearl earring out of an ear of one of the men. However, violently discarding the effeminate earring also showed the new order which Bolingbroke represented. The attempt at annihilation of the old order was underscored at the end of *Richard II* as numerous heads were brought onstage in sacks and dropped at the new King Henry's feet. There were so many brought on, their names listed by the messengers, that it aroused laughter in the audience but produced a look of distaste in the new king, suggesting that he understood his role clearly: it seemed appropriate to

³²⁷ *Richard II*, II.iii.114. Larry Champion supports my point here, as he writes that Henry IV's apparent intention to lead a crusade to the Holy Land is 'a venture that he full well knows will never come to reality' (Larry Champion, *The Noise of Threatening Drum': Dramatic Strategy and Political Ideology in Shakespeare and the English Chronicle Plays*. London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1990, 114), suggesting that Henry IV plans the expedition solely to encourage favour among his people. In Boyd's production this was not the case in this instance: Henry appeared to fully intend this trip but was constantly interrupted in executing his will. Instead, this moment in *Richard II* underlined this more dishonest aspect of his character which even so was much less apparent in the guilt-laden king of *Henry IV*.

use violence in order to gain the crown, but not while wearing it. This showed the significance of the crown and the change caused by wearing it.

Historically *Henry IV* has been considered either as a Hotspur play, or a Falstaff play, or a Prince Hal play, with each of these characters providing a star role for a leading man.³²⁸ However, rather than a star vehicle about a single character, Boyd's productions of the *Henry IV* plays focussed on three strands in relation to kingship: the notion of stripping which was staged through the corrupting influence of the crown as staged in the decline of Bolingbroke; the idea of playing the king which was explored in the Eastcheap scenes, chiefly in the character of Hal; and the continuing theme of disputable claims to the crown which dominated the octology.

Although he does not have a particularly large part in the play, Henry IV's scenes were highly significant to Boyd's interpretation of kingship. Older critics of the plays have stressed the negative role of Henry IV in his court, emphasizing the difference between the divinely anointed Richard II (who, because he was divinely anointed, could apparently do no wrong) and the usurper Henry; in writing about the *Henry IV* plays, James Winny constantly refers to Henry IV as Bolingbroke, his pre-usurpation name, and 'the usurper', indeed, at one point he refers to Henry's 'true shape as robber and cut-throat'.³²⁹ More recently, Larry Champion has also stressed the purely Machiavellian approach of the Lancastrian kings, seeing Henry IV as 'constantly playing a scripted role ... to construct the image of a judicious and courageous ruler' striving to legitimise his usurpation.³³⁰ It is interesting that Champion states, as Grene does in relation to Richard II, that Henry is 'constantly playing' further suggesting the

³²⁸ McMillin, *Henry IV Part One*, 1 (although the whole of chapter one addresses this progression).

³²⁹ James Winny, *The Player King: A Theme of Shakespeare's Histories* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1968), 99.

³³⁰ Champion, *The Noise of Threatening Drum*, 112 – 115.

theatricality of the role of king. However, in Boyd's productions of the *Henry IV* plays, Clive Wood's Henry was neither as simply bad as Winny suggests, nor the focus of the playing theme as Champion suggests. Rather, Henry, having achieved the crown, showed both a continued contrast to Richard's rule, and the decay brought about by possessing the crown. That both Richard II and Henry IV were seen to suffer when they were king suggested that, despite different approaches to governing, kingship itself remained a dangerous force.

The contrasts existing between the characters of Richard II and Bolingbroke were transferred to and immediately established between Richard's reign and that of Henry IV. This was embodied in the visual design of their courts: from the showy Elizabethan time setting of *Richard II*, the characters of the *Henry IV* plays inhabited a world suggestive of the Interregnum. As in *Richard II*, this was signalled through costume: Henry spent much of his time wearing simple, plain black clothes buttoned up to the neck with small white collars, progressing to a black robe in *2 Henry IV* during his illness. At times his costume emphasised the usurper in Henry as he resembled Oliver Cromwell, the famous executioner of an English king. Visually suggesting the Interregnum undermined Henry's rule by subtly suggesting that he was not really king, which was visually supported by his failing to ever sit higher than half-way up the stair-throne. Henry's rule, which was stripped of Richard's style of ceremony, thus moved away from Richard's more medieval approach to kingship to a far more practical and democratic system: as Andrew Hadfield states, '[m]onarchs who have no natural right to rule – that is, all English monarchs after Richard – have to prove themselves worthy

of the people's support',³³¹ the need for the people's support suggesting a kind of democracy, the new simplicity of design suggesting a removal of veneer.

Henry IV's illness is a theme that increasingly dominates *2 Henry IV*. However, Boyd extended this so as to develop the illness through *1 Henry IV* also: Henry was a melancholy king from the opening of *Part One*, and the illness which consumes him in *Part Two* was shown to have already taken hold at Shrewsbury when, in his final speech, he verbally stumbled and, as though the sound signified a physical problem, had to be physically supported by Prince John of Lancaster, before he removed the crown in a tableau that concluded the play. Holding the crown in this way as the lights went down drew attention to the property and suggested that the King's apparent weakness was directly related to the crown. Much has been written about Henry IV's usurpation of Richard II being the root of his illness and spreading into society from him. Theodore Weiss states that '[the rebellion's] principal source can be traced to the society's center, that which should be the source of strength and stability, the King and his deeds in becoming king'.³³² While the rebellion was not explicitly presented as a sickness, as Weiss terms it, relating to the king, Henry's illness was shown to be related very strongly to his crown. This was explored more thoroughly in *Part Two*: Henry's condition had visibly deteriorated each time he entered the stage. In a prolonged example of the stripping of kingship, Henry was dressed in baggy, creased robes and was seen to become increasingly isolated: for example, during III.i, sitting alone on his throne, he was bent over with his knees drawn up, his feet and hands bound with bandages, and with a walking stick resting on his lap. Over the play, the walking stick progressed to a wheelchair – significantly the same that Gaunt, his father, had used –

³³¹ Andrew Hadfield, *Shakespeare and Renaissance Politics* (London: Thomson Learning, 2004), 60.

³³² Weiss, *The Breath of Clowns and Kings: Shakespeare's Early Comedies and Histories* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1971), 263. In opposition to this, Graham Holderness points out that it is Hotspur who 'is the principal source of disorder in the realm' (Holderness, *Shakespeare: The Histories*, 159).

and later a bed. That this illness was directly linked to kingship, although not, as Weiss states, because of how Henry attained the crown, was presented in a supernatural, tetralogically significant moment: Henry physically embodied the manifestation of Richard II's prophecy which Henry repeats during III.i, that '[t]he time will come that foul sin, gathering head, / Shall break into corruption'.³³³ The use of the phrase 'gathering head' suggests both the physical progression of infection and indicates the place where the crown sits, drawing an explicit link between illness and kingship. At Henry's reiteration that '[w]e would, dear lords, unto the Holy Land',³³⁴ the Ghost of Richard II approached Henry as sand began to fall over the king, visually referring back to Richard's experience in relinquishing kingship and suggesting a sympathy between the two characters which put the blame for their condition onto kingship itself.³³⁵ In his criticism of Henry IV, Winny states that

the grace of Heaven is conferred on kings as well as upon archbishops, and the royal office is invested with still greater sanctity, which Bolingbroke has misused by giving countenance ... to the lawless acts now repeated by the rebels.³³⁶

However, in spite of Henry having 'misused' the sanctity of the royal office, the falling sand tends to give greater support to the first statement, that the grace of heaven literally fell on these kings, and it did so, in Boyd's interpretation, regardless of how that kingship had been achieved. The falling sand and the presence of Richard II suggested a level of divine forgiveness. In many ways, partly because of the relative absence of the king from the stage and the Interregnum setting, the two parts of *Henry IV* felt like a transition between 'real' rulers; that these two kings met centre stage supported this impression by suggesting that Richard had come to take Henry on his way to make way for Hal to rule as Henry V.

³³³ 2 *Henry IV*, III.i.71 – 72.

³³⁴ 2 *Henry IV*, III.i.104.

³³⁵ This scene in Richard II is discussed in more depth in the Gender section of this chapter.

³³⁶ Winny, *The Player King*, 98.

While Kantorowicz's argument that in III.ii of *Richard II* 'kingship itself comes to mean Death, and nothing but Death'³³⁷ was not substantiated by Boyd's production of *Richard II*, Henry IV's experience with the crown very strongly supported it. The idea that the crown exerted a drug-like effect over its user was evident in IV.iii as Henry seemed to have an almost psychic link with it: he was woken after Hal left with the crown by its physical absence from his side, and he became Gollum-like himself both in his physical actions which saw him bent over and attempting to restrain his grasping motions, while speaking in a chillingly kindly manner to his son. Henry physically expressed his emotional desperation for the crown which was only appeased when it was returned to him. Hal's repulsion and recoiling away from his father confirmed the impression.

Although Champion views Hal as 'a psychological double of his father',³³⁸ Boyd's productions, on the surface, emphasised the conflict and differences between them, largely through their clothing, contrasting the black Henry wore with the whites and creams that Hal wore, a colour scheme which aligned Hal with Richard II rather than his father. Hal wearing white while his father lay, clad in black, on his death bed, where the corrupting influence of the crown showed its strongest effect on him, supported the idea that Hal represented, in a crude sense, 'good', although Hal's manner in much of the production may have undermined this impression. Hal's disrespect was displayed here as he sat slouched in his father's and grandfather's wheelchair. On a deeper level though, this presented similarities in character through patrilineal inheritance; this image suggested both the continuation of the corruption of the country through Henry's

³³⁷ Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, 30.

³³⁸ Champion, 'The Noise of Threatening Drum', 115.

line, possibly related to Bolingbroke's usurpation of Richard II and also remembered the role of the chair in *Richard II* to contain Gaunt as he criticised his monarch, thus also suggesting that Gaunt's level of monarchical challenge was a form of usurpation in itself. This was continued into Hal's appropriation of kingship: taking the crown when he thought his father was dead and slowly placing it on his own head. The slow deliberate movements suggested a coronation and, because Henry was still alive, presented Hal, later Henry V, as an usurper equal to his father.³³⁹

Boyd used the character of Hal to continue the exploration of the idea of playing the king. The Eastcheap scenes were imbued with theatricality, a velvety red curtain across the rear of the stage presenting the Boar's Head as a proscenium arch theatre. That the actors played in front of the arch, on the thrust of the stage, suggested the 'play' world of Eastcheap mingling with the 'real' world of the play, thus giving Hal's frivolity importance in his development to kingship. Hal's entrance in a paper crown significantly drew attention to him as a player-king. Champion states that 'Hal's crass disregard for the traditional ritualistic values of the crown emphasises his concern only for personal pleasure'³⁴⁰ and Hal's use of the paper crown, particularly when he mockingly played with Francis who also wore a paper crown, would seem to support this. However, the 'traditional ritualistic values' had already been stripped away from the crown, and while the somewhat childish playing suggested Hal was undermining his father and belittling the role of king, his wearing of a crown at this point kept in mind who Hal would become and highlighted his earlier claim to be watching and waiting. The multiple use of paper crowns also visually created the idea of many kings on the single stage: at this point it was possible to suggest that all were player-kings and none

³³⁹ Videos of Boyd's staging of this scene are available to view on the Royal Shakespeare Company website at <http://www.rsc.org.uk/explore/plays/henryv.htm>. Last accessed 1st July 2009.

³⁴⁰ Champion, 'The Noise of Threatening Drum', 116.

rightful-rulers. That Hal took off his crown and screwed it up further suggested the disposability of the royal role, that the king is something that could be put on and taken off at will.

Boyd's production of *Henry V* was less concerned with the king than the preceding productions were. This was visually evident in the diminution of the crown to a simpler ring of gold with only hints of the leaves which the original bore; the focus was shifted away from it thus suggesting Henry V's less significant interest in it. This was underlined in two scenes where Henry removed the crown completely: while moving among his subjects on the eve of Agincourt and, significantly, while wooing Katherine at the conclusion of the play. Henry handed the crown to Alice who held it throughout the scene, and the crown only returned to Henry when the other lords entered after their peace talks. It is significant that Henry removed the crown here thus highlighting his role as a man wooing a woman rather than as a king taking possession of a foreign Princess. Despite this tentative discussion of the man and the role, *Henry V*, was, in Boyd's octology, devoid of speculation about kingship. However, the awareness of the man aside from the crown created a transition into the *Henry VI* plays which continued the debate.

Shakespeare's character of Henry VI has fared badly in criticism of the plays named for him; however, it is my contention that in Boyd's octology Chuk Iwuji's Henry VI was a good king: in this section I will discuss the strength of Henry VI, addressing how Boyd returned to the issue of rightful kingship. In so doing, the question which proliferated in the second tetralogy – who is the king? – was changed to a similar but different question – who is a traitor? The former enabled Boyd to interrogate kingship as a role which anyone could play, the latter turned the focus around, supporting the man who was king

against the other characters. The process of stripping had now reached a point of 'the naked misery of man' and was unable to go further. Consequently, Boyd's production of the *Henry VI* plays showed a king that contrasted with much of the negative criticism written of him.

In a recent essay concerning masculinity in the first tetralogy, Jean Howard stated that Henry VI 'is a king so weak that he loses control of his wife ...; of the French lands won by his father; of the army he supposedly commands; and of the succession of the English throne'.³⁴¹ This list of failures is underlined as Howard goes on to state that Henry is 'peripheral to much of the action: absent, passive, increasingly isolated'.³⁴² While I do not dispute Henry's passivity during the play, the weakness of the king seems, to me, to have been somewhat taken for granted: Henry was described by director John Barton as 'not complex, merely wet'.³⁴³ This may also be true of some performances of Henry: Hampton-Reeves and Chillington Rutter discuss productions of the *Henry VI* plays at length, describing Jack May who played Henry in the 1953 Birmingham Rep productions as a '[Henry VI] straight off the page ... a weak and pious king'.³⁴⁴ However, although Henrys have historically responded to weakness, over the twentieth century and into the twenty-first actors have found something stronger in the character: Hampton-Reeves and Chillington Rutter describe David Warner who played Henry in the RSC's 1963 – 1964 productions as 'inventing a role even his directors [Hall and Barton] didn't quite know was there',³⁴⁵ when he created a 'study of

³⁴¹ Jean E. Howard, 'Stage Masculinities, National History, and the Making of London Theatrical Culture', in *Center or Margin: Revisions of the English Renaissance in Honor of Leeds Barroll*, ed Lena Cowen Orlin (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Press, 2006), 199.

³⁴² *Ibid.*

³⁴³ Hall and Barton, *The Wars of the Roses*, xviii.

³⁴⁴ Hampton-Reeves and Chillington Rutter, *The Henry VI Plays*, 45.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 74.

weakness³⁴⁶ that showed Henry VI as ‘aware’.³⁴⁷ Alan Howard’s presentation of the king in 1977 – 1978 also suggested not simply weakness but development and growth over the plays, finding ‘what he took to be Shakespeare’s true interest in the play: not plot ... but role, the growth of the self, the discovery of interiority’.³⁴⁸ The accounts of these performances give the lie to Jean Howard’s rather harsh condemnation of what she perceives as the negative weakness of the king. Although it may be going too far to suggest that Chuk Iwuji may have been directly influenced by these historical performances of King Henry, his performance in Boyd’s production did have points of comparison with them and built on the historical development of the performance of the character. In contrast to Howard’s criticism of the king, Iwuji’s Henry VI was in fact the one good king of Shakespeare’s history cycle. Despite being ineffective, in Boyd’s production he was a strong character: Barbara Hodgdon has written of David Oyelowo’s performance in Boyd’s 2000 – 2001 productions that Oyelowo’s Henry was ‘[l]ess the saintly martyr of David Warner’s ... and Alan Howard’s ... performances’.³⁴⁹ Richard Cordery, who played Humphrey of Gloucester in both 2000 and 2006 productions, has written that Boyd explicitly did not want Henry performed as a weak king, a direction that Cordery states puzzled Oyelowo:

[who] played Henry as a committed individual who knows he is right, and I think he found Michael Boyd’s warnings that he didn’t want Henry to be a “weak” king rather puzzling. He saw no reason for regarding Henry’s deep Christian conviction as a weakness or failing.³⁵⁰

Although written of the earlier productions, both Hodgdon’s and Cordery’s accounts give us some indication of how Boyd envisaged Henry, and also some insight into the

³⁴⁶ Hampton-Reeves and Chillington Rutter, *The Henry VI Plays*, 71.

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

³⁴⁸ Ibid., 92.

³⁴⁹ Barbara Hodgdon, ‘The RSC’s “long sonata of the dead”: Shakespeare-History and Imagined Community’, in *Re-Visions of Shakespeare: Essays in Honor of Robert Ornstein*, ed Evelyn Gajowski (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 2004), 143.

³⁵⁰ Cordery in Smallwood, *Players of Shakespeare 6: Essays in the Performance of Shakespeare’s History Plays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 191.

first actor's ideas about him. Oyelowo's own Christian faith may have influenced his response to the devout king, reading faith as strength rather than weakness. As I have already stated, there were great similarities between the two stagings of the Henry VI plays, and it is fair to use this understanding in analysis of the 2006 – 2008 productions. Chuk Iwuji's Henry also displayed this absence of weakness: he was a strong character who developed awareness over the three plays; he was the character in whom the debate regarding kingship continued to rage; and he concluded the tetralogy as a powerful force in the future of England.

It seems appropriate at this juncture to address what I mean in this instance by the phrase 'good king'. Henry VI is of course a devoutly religious king, and literary critics have addressed his piety for a long time.³⁵¹ However, it is not religious goodness which I refer to here, but the ability to rule. Although, as I have already conceded, Henry VI does not rule effectively, in Boyd's production this was a matter of his immaturity which allowed divisions and factions to establish themselves around him before he had an opportunity to rule. Indeed, in an article that questions critics who 'bypass crucial early modern questions about kingship',³⁵² in simply condemning Henry as weak, Thomas Moretti suggests that Henry VI in fact embodies an 'early modern attempt to triangulate Christianity, sovereignty, and manhood [which] in so doing ... troubles the conjunction of kingship and Christianity'.³⁵³ Moretti does not see Henry as weak simply because he is 'no stage warrior',³⁵⁴ but suggests that *3 Henry VI* in particular is an effort by Shakespeare and his collaborators to see if it is possible to stage a Christian

³⁵¹ See, for example, Mattie Swayne's 1941 article 'Shakespeare's King Henry VI as a Pacifist', *College English* 3:2 (November, 1941), 143 – 149.

³⁵² Thomas J. Moretti, 'Misthinking the King: The Theatrics of Christian Rule in *Henry VI, Part 3*', *Renascence* 60:4 (2008), 276.

³⁵³ *Ibid.*, 276.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 282.

king effectively.³⁵⁵ This idea is significant in relation to Boyd's and Iwuji's imagining of Henry VI as a strong yet pious person, a king who seems to have found himself in the worst scenario.

Shakespeare frequently makes reference to the fact that Henry was only nine months old when he succeeded his father,³⁵⁶ and Chuk Iwuji's performance initially emphasised the childish nature of the king.³⁵⁷ Henry's youth and dependence on his elders was highlighted through *1 Henry VI*: Iwuji's Henry spoke with a high voice and, while wanting to please his uncles, was quite ignorant of the divisions between them. Henry, rather, looked to his uncles, particularly Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, for guidance, and appeared pleased to bestow honours and to physically join hands in friendship while remaining blind to the discord that festered. The score helped to suggest the consequences of such innocence, for example during III.i of *1 Henry VI*, Henry's first appearance in the play, the sound of a cymbal created a sense of foreboding by drawing attention to and reflecting the growth of Henry's agitation while those around him argued, took sides and plotted, the sound stopping abruptly as Henry finally spoke: the silence underlined the importance of Henry speaking as much as the music highlighted his emotion. Musical strains through Henry's line to Richard Plantagenet as he restored him to the House of York, 'If thou will be true, not that alone / But all the whole inheritance I give',³⁵⁸ suggested the octological importance of what Henry was doing: he innocently made Plantagenet Duke of York, while the music foreshadowed Henry's actions at the beginning of *2 Henry VI* where he would give the 'whole inheritance' of the crown and also referred back to Bolingbroke's deposition of Richard II.³⁵⁹ This

³⁵⁵ Moretti, 'Misthinking the King', 277.

³⁵⁶ *2 Henry VI*, IV.viii.4; *3 Henry VI*, I.i.112, III.i.76; *Richard III*, II.iii.17.

³⁵⁷ Hodgdon, 'The RSC's "long sonata of the dead"', 143.

³⁵⁸ *1 Henry VI*, III.i.167-168.

³⁵⁹ Bolingbroke was of course played by Clive Wood who here played the Duke of York.

allowed moments of consequence to be extradiegetically highlighted while Henry remained childishly in the moment.

Henry's immaturity, however, was balanced by the presence of Humphrey as Protector of the Realm. Despite the growing divisions between Humphrey and Beaufort and later Humphrey and Margaret's faction, Humphrey is an honourable character. Like the Duke of York, with whom Cordery doubled the role, Humphrey is a Protector who 'rules' in the place of an absent monarch: Richard II is in Ireland, while Henry VI, though physically present, is too young to rule. However, despite Henry's youth, these two characters created a partnership, each balancing the negative traits of the other. This use of doubling unified the cycle, showing the links between the characters and plays by presenting links between the characters each actor played.

Beaufort frequently draws attention to Humphrey's power over the child-king,³⁶⁰ which, in Boyd's production, was embodied in the staff of office Humphrey wields, the crown effectively being demoted as the receptacle of power in *1* and *2 Henry VI*. Humphrey's constant association with the staff effectively presented him as somewhat of a counterfeit king. However, because of the association of the property with kingship and usurpation back to *Richard II*, that Humphrey did not wear the diadem meant that he was never presented as a royal poser as Beaufort suggested; instead a partnership was formed between the crown and the staff. The moment of Humphrey's exile from court was highly significant to the presentation of Henry VI, not least because the staff was physically handed by Humphrey to Henry, thereby returning the receptacle of power to the crown. Boyd has discussed his perception of the significance of Humphrey, describing Humphrey's death in *2 Henry VI* as a watershed which makes all the

³⁶⁰ See for example, *1 Henry VI*, I.i.37 – 38, I.v.65 – 67, III.i.44 – 45; *2 Henry VI*, 145 – 162.

following horrors of the Wars of the Roses and the rise of Richard of Gloucester possible.³⁶¹ This might suggest the weakness of Henry VI who, without his protector, is unable to prevent the descent into chaos;³⁶² however, the moment of Humphrey's exile in fact created a space into which Henry could grow.

This was particularly evident during II.iii of *2 Henry VI* in which the growing power of Margaret, Suffolk and Bedford was visually staged. While Humphrey attempted to defend himself against their accusations, the three conspirators physically separated Henry from Humphrey, by standing across the stage building something of a wall around the king and creating a visual barrier literally preventing the Lord Protector from protecting the king. Although this physical power around Henry may suggest that he remained weak, it was here that Henry came to maturity: in his grief at Humphrey's exile he commanded the attention of both on and off stage audience as he slowly looked around at every person on stage asking '[w]ho's a traitor?'.³⁶³ This question, left to hang in the air for a moment, became a central question of the trilogy, shifting the initiative from the warring factions to the king, away from the usurpers asking who is rightfully king, to the king recognising the threat. In this manner Iwujii's emphasis condemned everyone on stage while also accusing the audience of a degree of complicity. Although Hampton-Reeves and Chillington Rutter have stated that Alan Howard's Henry allowed the betrayal of Humphrey, Iwujii's Henry was shown to be commanding in a situation that was simply not under his control. Unlike Howard's Henry VI who in earlier scenes was 'so surprised by his own voice that he stepped back from its sound in alarm',³⁶⁴ Iwujii's Henry had now grown into his voice much like the later Henry Howard produced who, after Humphrey's death, 'achieved ... the authentic

³⁶¹ Question and Answer session with Michael Boyd, 16th March 2008.

³⁶² Boyd in fact gave his production of *3 Henry VI* the subtitle *The Chaos*.

³⁶³ *2 Henry VI*, III.i.222.

³⁶⁴ Hampton-Reeves and Chillington Rutter, *The Henry VI Plays*, 98.

voice of his *own* monarchy'.³⁶⁵ For Iwuji's Henry, this was particularly evident after the death of Beaufort as he shouted to the assembled lords, 'when I swear, it is irrevocable'.³⁶⁶ Iwuji's king had lost his innocence and naivety and had become a powerful man. In her discussion of the 2000 – 2001 productions, Hodgdon writes that

young, almost childlike at first, [Oyelowo's] Henry deeply loved and admired Gloucester, whose banishment and death forced him into moments of anger that then lapsed into puzzled passivity.³⁶⁷

Hodgdon's account conjures an image of a child having something of a tantrum because his favourite uncle is sent away; at the least highlighting the ineffectiveness of Henry's response by stating that he 'lapsed into ... passivity'. However, in contrast to this account, Iwuji's Henry in III.i awakened to the full reality of his situation and the absolute betrayal, of himself as much as Humphrey, by those around him.³⁶⁸ This awakening simply came too late, preventing what might in other situations have been a good king from being an effective ruler, but his words did have an effect on those around him, and a moving effect for the audience. Iwuji's Henry was neither simply passive nor sidelined;³⁶⁹ he was instead the equal of the other characters but chose to withdraw from their bickering over the crown.

Staging all eight plays of Shakespeare's octology is a large project, through which complex and intricate threads of narrative and themes can be woven. Kingship was a key theme of the cycle and Boyd did a number of inter-related things with it. The most significant of these was the process of stripping which saw the vain veneer of Richard II's reign stripped back to a kind of puritanism for Henry IV. By the time the *Henry VI* plays had been reached, kingship had attained the highest level of its corruption: Henry

³⁶⁵ Hampton-Reeves and Chillington Rutter, *The Henry VI Plays*, 99.

³⁶⁶ *2 Henry VI*, III.ii.298.

³⁶⁷ Hodgdon, 'The RSC's "long sonata of the dead"', 143.

³⁶⁸ Boyd Question and Answer, 16th March 2008.

³⁶⁹ Hodgdon, 'The RSC's "long sonata of the dead"', 145.

V had died and left a nation of squabbling nobles. It was perhaps that Henry VI was separate from the role in his early scenes that enabled him to grow onstage to become a strong man. The *Henry VI* plays give way to the horrors of *Richard III* and it is perhaps this play which sees the full impact of the stripping process (at least the anarchy of Jack Cade is contained in *2 Henry VI*). However, rather than continuing the discussion of kingship, Boyd's *Richard III* instead focussed on concluding the supernatural thread of the productions, seeing Henry VI return to prophesy the future of England. The ghostly Lancastrian providentialism forms the next part of this chapter.



13 L – R: Alexia Healy, Hannah Barrie, Ann Ogbomo as Joan's fiends, Katy Stephens as Joan against Keith Bartlett's Talbot. 1 *Henry VI*, directed by Michael Boyd, Royal Shakespeare Company.



14 York (Clive Wood) laying out stones to illustrate his claim to the throne. 2 *Henry VI*, directed by Michael Boyd, Royal Shakespeare Company.



15 York (Clive Wood) proves Joan's (Katy Stephens) virginity on the stake. *1 Henry VI*, directed by Michael Boyd, Royal Shakespeare Company.



16 Joan (Katy Stephens) grieves over her dead son Edward (Wela Frasier). *3 Henry VI*, directed by Michael Boyd, Royal Shakespeare Company.

'My dream was lengthened after life':³⁷⁰ Ghosts in Boyd's octology

At the conclusion of *Richard III*, on the eve of the battle of Bosworth, eleven ghosts appear to Richard in his dream telling him to 'Despair and die'.³⁷¹ The ghosts, who are the characters Richard has murdered through the play in his pursuit of the crown, then move over to Richmond in his dream and wish him all good things for the battle to come and his life thereafter: 'Live and flourish'.³⁷² Despite Shakespeare's use of spectres in tragedies such as *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*, these are the only ghosts to appear textually in Shakespeare's eight history plays, plays which are nevertheless steeped in blood and boast high body counts. Jean-Christophe Mayer discusses the ways in which Shakespeare's history plays, especially the first tetralogy, memorialise the past; describing the plays as remembrances of the dead 'who, Lazarus-like, are brought back before us'.³⁷³ In Boyd's staging of the histories the dead did in fact rise 'Lazarus-like' and haunt the stage. Throughout the eight-play cycle at least 24 ghosts of specific dead characters returned, many extratextually, to haunt the action and the living characters on the stage. These ghosts have not, as yet, been explored by academics. Reviewers of the productions have also largely ignored them: Michael Billington made reference to them and began to suggest some kind of meaning behind their presence, stating that the ghosts show that Boyd 'believes in the idea expressed by TS Eliot ... of "time future contained in time past"', but this is as far as Billington went, neglecting to expand in his limited word count.³⁷⁴

³⁷⁰ *Richard III*, I.iv.43.

³⁷¹ *Richard III*, V.iii.120, 126, 135, 140, 143, 148, 154, 163, 172,

³⁷² *Richard III*, V.iii.138.

³⁷³ Jean Christophe Mayer, *Shakespeare's Hybrid Faith: History, Religion and the Stage* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 44.

³⁷⁴ Michael Billington, *Guardian*, 18th August 2007. Many reviewers, such as Susannah Clapp in the *Observer* and Benedict Nightingale in *The Times*, simply stated that there were ghosts, while Nicholas de Jongh in his review of the *Henry VIs*, the most ghostly of Boyd's productions, did not mention them, nor did Christopher Hart in the *Sunday Times* or Paul Taylor in the *Independent*.

This section offers a reading of Boyd's use of ghosts in his cycle. Stephen Greenblatt has argued that Shakespeare's ghosts can embody a philosophy of history, appearing in *Richard III* in the dreams of Richard's 'collaborators'³⁷⁵ to show 'history's nightmare',³⁷⁶ but also '[functioning] as the memory of the murdered'³⁷⁷ and legitimising Richmond as the new king.³⁷⁸ Boyd's staging of ghosts, both Shakespeare's and those he added, in light of Greenblatt's words, may encourage a reading that shows a nightmare vision which presents England as a medieval hell. Indeed, the use of Hieronymus Bosch's paintings in Boyd's production programmes and the influence Bosch's work had on the designer, Tom Piper, help to suggest this.³⁷⁹ However, on the contrary, Boyd's use of the ghosts actually created a sense of providential history. Although Tillyard's idea of the providential Tudor myth remains out of fashion, Nicholas Grene has pointed out that '[I]ater scholars have suggested that the history plays in fact stage conflicts between different orders of historical interpretation, an older providential scheme of things in tension with a more modern Machiavellian concept of causality'.³⁸⁰ I contend that Boyd's concept of history was primarily providential, but his productions also staged this conflict between the political pragmatism of the second tetralogy and the more medieval spirituality of the first. However, the providence within Boyd's productions was problematised: its origins were never made clear and the providence that won out was not necessarily that of a benign god working towards the good of all. For example, the use of classical figures and the

³⁷⁵ Stephen Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2001), 169.

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 157.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 180.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 179.

³⁷⁹ Tom Piper, Take 4 Plays event, Courtyard Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, 15th February 2007.

³⁸⁰ Grene, *Shakespeare's Serial History Plays*, 131. Nicholas de Jongh found in Boyd's 2000 productions that it was the Machiavellian that won out over the medieval, stating that 'Boyd clearly rejects the conservative notion that the history plays show England rescued by providence ... Boyd's *Henry VI* exposes a brutalised Machiavellian England'. This was apparent in those productions, however, as Grene suggests, the conflict is not as clear-cut as de Jongh implies and in fact Boyd staged both the Machiavellian and the Providential.

element of vengeance-seeking within the representation of the ghosts, in one case preventing a dying man from repenting of his crimes on his death bed, suggest a hard, punishing power. Nevertheless, whatever its origins, providence was implemented through the agency of ghosts.

Ghosts were a common feature in Elizabethan drama, often working in revenge tragedies as Senecan vengeance-seekers.³⁸¹ As Greenblatt has discussed in his work on Shakespearean ghosts, *Hamlet in Purgatory*, Shakespeare did use ghosts in this Senecan model, but he also went beyond this, figuring ghosts as remembrances of history and restorative agents.³⁸² In Boyd's productions the ghosts worked on different levels: they emphasised the lineal narrative of history, reminding the audience of previous events and, further, suggesting an element of cause and effect. On a cyclical level this showed a kind of karma: what went around would come around for the characters. However, the ghosts worked in a more complex manner than this simplistic interpretation might suggest: as Greenblatt says of the textual ghosts in *Richard III*, the ghosts figure 'as something else, something more ominous'.³⁸³

Boyd's ghosts were physical beings: his use of a single company of 34 performers playing 264 roles meant there was a significant degree of doubling and the ghosts were played, with the exception of Thomas of Woodstock who is an offstage character in *Richard II*, as the character already known to the audience. The very physicality of the actor's body meant that the ghosts were not presented as fantasy but rather as physical horrors, functioning both in a Senecan sense but also as remembrances of the 'social

³⁸¹ Lily B. Campbell, 'Theories of Revenge in Renaissance England', *Modern Philology*, 28:3 (February, 1931), 282-285.

³⁸² Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory*, 157, 180.

³⁸³ *Ibid.*, 164.

sins³⁸⁴ of the previous plays. It has been suggested that the ghosts, as I call them, of the dead characters, particularly those of Talbot and his son in 2 and 3 *Henry VI*, were not in fact ghosts.³⁸⁵ However, as Marvin Carlson has written, 'the recycled body of an actor ... will almost inevitably in a new role evoke the ghost or ghosts of previous roles if they have made any impression whatever on the audience'.³⁸⁶ Carlson is referring to actors playing different 'living' roles in different plays, but the effect is the same if the actor returns in a play in the same costume, with the same props that he previously used. Certainly this is the effect even slightly later in any single, independent play, but the effect is more intense over a cycle of plays which deliberately refer to and remember each other. Carlson refers to this as 'ghosting', presenting the 'identical thing [the audience] have encountered before, although now in a somewhat different context. Thus a recognition not of similarity ... but of identity becomes a part of the reception process'.³⁸⁷ The context in which the audience were seeing Boyd's ghosts was different enough for the ghost to be recognised as the same but changed character. Mostly this was obvious because the audience had seen the character die, however it was never possible to suggest that these characters had magically returned to life or were functioning as an entirely different character: on the contrary, as though to underline their new dimension within the productions, dead characters, at the end of the scene, immediately stood up as ghosts, the same yet altered. Boyd's retaining of characters' costume and other accoutrements signified that these roles were intended to be identified specifically as ghosts of specific characters.

³⁸⁴ Thomas H. Fick, 'Authentic Ghosts and Real Bodies: Negotiating Power in Nineteenth-Century Women's Ghost Stories', *South Atlantic Review*, 64:2 (Spring 1999), 81.

³⁸⁵ In his review of the 2006 productions, Stuart Hampton-Reeves refers to the figures as 'Spirits' and 'zombies' (Stuart Hampton-Reeves, 'Henry VI and the Histories: Review of the Henry VI Plays (directed by Michael Boyd) at the Courtyard Theatre, August 2006', *Shakespeare* 3:2 (2007), 213 – 216).

³⁸⁶ Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 8.

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

Although Boyd began *The Histories* in the summer of 2006 by staging revivals of his 2000 productions of *Henry VI*, the narrative progression of the productions through doubling, foreshadowing and remembering, along with marketing strategies,³⁸⁸ suggest that the cycle was intended to be viewed as a whole, taking the production of *Richard II* as the beginning and *Richard III* as the conclusion. Boyd's idea of the dual presence of linear and cyclical history in the plays was evident within the production design: the cycle began with the characters of *Richard II* inhabiting an Elizabethan world, progressing through Puritanism for the first Henriad, and concluding in modern dress for *Richard III* (although as the *Henry VI* productions were revivals they took a step back to the medieval). Each of these plays inhabited a rusty metallic thrust stage which easily straddled all of the different periods. Boyd's *Richard II* established the acts and circumstances which would haunt the characters and cause the wars and civil strife of the later plays. Indeed, the opening scene of this production extratextually and extradiegetically featured the body of Thomas of Woodstock, Duke of Gloucester, murdered uncle of Richard II, lying on the stage, invisible to the rest of the characters. Creating a triangle encompassing the body, Bolingbroke and Mowbray argued down stage left and right while Richard sat on his throne up stage surrounded by the rest of the company, the body lying face down centre stage in between the two groups. At Bolingbroke's line of Mowbray, that 'he did plot the Duke of Gloucester's death',³⁸⁹ Woodstock's body stood up, revealing a heavily blood stained shirt, and walked off the stage. Although not suggesting anything specific at this point other than creating a slightly eerie atmosphere, this moment established the ghostly motif that would be present throughout the eight productions. That the body was the central point of focus at the opening of the eight plays underlined its significance. Woodstock's ghost

³⁸⁸ These marketing strategies included discounts on ticket prices when a number of plays were booked together, and an advertising image which showed images from each of the eight plays in a circle together.

³⁸⁹ *Richard II*, I.i.100.

recurred throughout the play either observing, or taking the speaking part of other characters. For example the ghost spoke Scroop's relatively lengthy speeches in III.ii which inform Richard of the deaths of Bushy, Green and the Earl of Wiltshire:

uncurse their souls. Their peace is made
With heads, and not with hands. Those whom you curse
Have felt the worst of death's destroying wound,
And lie full low, graved in the hollow ground.³⁹⁰

It seems somewhat fitting that a figure of the after-life should speak these lines. This though, of course, is a strange situation shot through with the theatrical tension between the physicality of the living actor's body and the fact that his character is dead although speaking the lines Shakespeare gives to a 'living' character and heard by onstage characters as a living person, Scroop not Woodstock. The different levels and layers of life create depth and meaning. The ghostly aspect gives these words a more intense sense of finality, as though this character has seen these dead men, and hinting that the living characters are not in control of their own destinies; as Grene puts it in relation to prophecies in the plays, a sense is created that there is a 'pre-written narrative that is England's history'.³⁹¹

The omnipresence of the ghost reminded the audience of Woodstock's offstage (and off-text) murder, a deed which is easily ignored because it happens before the action of the play, however it also imbued it with significance: Woodstock's presence through Richard's downfall clearly suggested that Richard played a role in Woodstock's murder. The constant presence of the ghost from the outset demonstrates the use of the ghost as a vengeance-seeker, suggestive perhaps of the Ghost of Andrea in Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*; however, more than that it illustrates Boyd's conception of the cause and effect of history, that actions always have consequences. Interestingly, Boyd

³⁹⁰ *Richard II*, III.ii.133 – 136.

³⁹¹ Grene, *Shakespeare's Serial History Plays*, 140.

directed *The Spanish Tragedy* for the RSC in 1997. In this production he extended the role of the Ghost of Andrea to have him moving around the stage and through the action. Boyd has also used ghosts in productions of *Romeo and Juliet* and John Ford's *The Broken Heart*, both for the Royal Shakespeare Company, the use of ghosts seeming to be a motif of his directorial style.

The identity of the ghost of Woodstock remained extradiegetic to most of the characters during the opening scenes of the play: despite engaging with the characters he was recognised only by the audience. Indeed, even when taking speaking roles it was only the audience who recognised the character as the ghost, thus adding an extra layer of unity for the audience. However, when the ghost entered the stage during II.i from a downstage entrance as Gaunt was wheeled on from the rear in a Victorian-style wheelchair the two characters seemed to look directly at each other before the ghost exited the stage. This was one of the first times that an onstage character had 'seen' the ghost, suggesting that the lines between the play-world and the world in which both the play and audience existed were being blurred.³⁹² The recognition here suggested a sympathetic understanding between a victim and a critic of Richard's reign, strengthening the suggestion that Richard had been involved in the murder of Woodstock.³⁹³ To further emphasise Richard's culpability and strengthen the role of the ghosts as vengeance-seekers in Boyd's productions, during IV.i the mirror was brought to Jonathan Slinger's Richard II by the ghost of Woodstock whom Richard now saw and recognised. On one level this recognition of the ghost intensified the mood of death

³⁹² The Duchess of Gloucester had seemed to feel the presence of her husband's ghost in I.ii but she did not appear to have 'seen' him.

³⁹³ The sympathy expressed here between Gaunt and the ghost as the medium of Providence also suggests that Boyd's production, although providential, did not subscribe to Tillyard's 'Tudor myth', this moment seeming to show a 'Lancastrian myth' as set out by H. A. Kelly.

which infused Richard's earlier thoughts in the 'death of kings' speech, where Richard suggests that he and his men sit on the ground and 'tell sad stories' of how kings

have been deposed, some slain in war,
Some haunted by the ghosts they have deposed³⁹⁴

Indeed, this final line may be a reference to the whole of Boyd's histories and as if to confirm this the ghost of Woodstock was played by Chuk Iwuji who played Henry VI in those plays and, more significantly here, the ghost of Henry VI in *Richard III* who haunted the reign of Richard III also played by Jonathan Slinger who, of course, deposes Henry VI. This moment of recognition referenced that later (although because of the order that Boyd staged his cycle in, *earlier*) relationship, making the current relationship between Richard II and the ghost more poignant and profound than simply the haunting of Richard II by murdered Woodstock.³⁹⁵ This profundity and complexity of the ghosts is not simply an extratextual device of Boyd's, but integral to Shakespeare's use of ghosts, as is implicit in Greenblatt's assertion that the ghosts are something else, although precisely what else is difficult to define. Greenblatt also highlights how Shakespeare's ghosts rise above the simply bloodthirsty Senecan ghost,³⁹⁶ something that Boyd's ghosts did also, functioning as full characters even though without speeches of their own. Instead they haunted the words of other absent characters through taking their words for them. The use of the ghosts to implicate Richard in the offstage murder presented a far more dangerous and calculating character than is usually painted of the poetic king who is usurped by the barbarous Bolingbroke. Slinger presented Richard II as being as attractively repulsive as his Richard III had already been and Boyd's staging highlighted these links between the characters of Richard II and Richard III. The relationship between Slinger's Richards and Iwuji's

³⁹⁴ *Richard II*, III.ii.152 – 154.

³⁹⁵ As Grene notes, 'It is not hard to foretell the future when it is already in the past' (*Shakespeare's Serial History Plays*, 133).

³⁹⁶ Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory*, 180. Much of Greenblatt's discussion suggests this.

ghosts suggests a continuing influence of the supernatural through history. This was not only shown through the ghost of Woodstock's presence through the various events in Richard II's downfall, but through the deeper relationship between the characters and players at the beginning and end of the octology. These cyclical links highlight Boyd's use of doubling in order to create links over, and thus unify, the cycle, dramatising the philosophical approach to the different forms and understandings of time and history upon which his cycle was based.

1 Henry IV was relatively devoid of these physical ghostly goings-on. Bolingbroke's usurpation of Richard II of course haunts his character and is revealed in his speeches. His haunted memory, which had a physical effect on his body, aging and eventually killing him in *Part Two*, negated the need for the physical presence of a ghostly character. *2 Henry IV* though was dominated by physical remembrances of the past: the ropes hanging from the flies which had symbolised the battle of Shrewsbury in *1 Henry IV* continued to hang over the stage, remembering that conflict while foreshadowing the battles and executions which would follow in the short and long term. Into this atmosphere of impending doom the character of Rumour entered the stage dragging a simple wooden coffin last seen containing the body of Richard II at the end of that play. Rumour was played by Forbes Masson, doubling the role with that of Bagot in *Richard II*. Masson as Rumour dressed in the same costume he had worn to perform Bagot, suggesting, although it was not explicitly stated, that this Rumour was a ghost of Bagot as detailed in Carlson's idea of ghosting.³⁹⁷ This example underlines Boyd's employment of the feature. The ghosting of Rumour meant that his cruel mission, detailed in his opening speech, took on a sinister quality, suggesting a vengeful

³⁹⁷ Masson was listed in the cast list as Rumour, as opposed to Iwuji who in *Richard II* was listed as Gloucester. The links were therefore not made explicit to the audience in this didactic manner but left for them to make through the visual references.

intention intensified through Boyd's adaptation of the murder of Richard II so that it was carried out not by Exton, but by Bagot assisted by the ghost of Woodstock. This adaptation gained in significance here, especially in relation to Bolingbroke's displeasure with the murderer at the end of *Richard II*. As Rumour spoke he opened the coffin and kissed the hand of the body lying inside. Almost in response the ghost of Richard II rose from the box wearing the long white robe which he wore in the prison scene but which was now marked with a large bloodstain across the whole of the torso, recalling the rising of Woodstock at the beginning of *Richard II*, this ghosting creating a level of sympathy between the characters when living (as each night the actors would return again alive to play the parts) and when dead. The memorialising aspect of the history plays was also notable in this scene: Jean-Christophe Mayer discusses the significance of onstage coffins, stating that '[t]he presence of a coffin onstage is ... a reminder of past quarrels, which impinges on the universe of the play'.³⁹⁸ This was exactly the significance in the Boyd production of *2 Henry IV* but Richard II's coffin had a dual purpose: Richard II's ghost suggested both the reminder of past quarrels and the anticipation of vengeance to come. The presence of these ghosts at the opening of the plays created an uneasy atmosphere by making the universe of the plays very uncertain: by bringing the supernatural to bear on the events of the play Boyd suggested that the natural order had been perverted by the supernatural order and that consequently a normal progression through the plays could not be guaranteed.

The coffin was also a prominent motif of *Henry V*: the tennis balls arrived suspended from the flies in a wooden box, the like of which would later feature as a coffin, and after the battle of Agincourt, as the *Te Deum* was sung, the company built a platform made of wooden coffins on the stage on which the negotiations with the French were

³⁹⁸ Mayer, *Shakespeare's Hybrid Faith*, 41.

conducted, ironically keeping the Dauphin's idea that the 'way shall be paved with English faces'³⁹⁹ in mind. This platform, in the most obvious sense, compounded the effect of the preceding battle and it reminded the audience that peace talks are always built on dead bodies. In this production then, the Dead stayed dead, but the presence of the coffin acted as a powerful visual symbol: although dead, the Dead continued to influence the mood. This also suggested certain culpability in relation to Henry V: although it would be Henry VI who would lose France, this moment placed some degree of blame on Henry V because France was already seen to be bleeding.

Significantly, the use of the coffin to recall past moments was employed again at the opening of *Henry VI*. The play begins with the interrupted funeral of Henry V, and in both 2000 and 2006 the coffin was onstage as the audience entered the auditorium. This visual immediately reminded the audience of the Chorus' words at the end of *Henry V*, that Henry VI would make 'England bleed',⁴⁰⁰ and created an uneasy anticipation of what would come, suggesting a transition between rulers and introducing the theme of the death of chivalry which dominates *1 Henry VI*. Indeed, at Rouen Henry V's ghost strode from the foot of the stage up to the doors in the tower at the rear and threw them open allowing the English to pour into Rouen and overthrow the French. The presence of his ghost recalled Henry V's victories in France, and associated the character of Talbot, 'the scourge of France',⁴⁰¹ with this earlier monarch, thus suggesting that, as Henry was now dead and his age with him, time was limited for Talbot and the chivalric spirit he represented.

³⁹⁹ *Henry V*, III.vii.79.

⁴⁰⁰ *Henry V*, Epilogue, 12.

⁴⁰¹ *1 Henry VI*, II.iii.14.

An extra-textual character, the Keeper, was introduced for the *Henry VI*s and *Richard III*. He fetched all the dead bodies and ghosts from the stage throughout the three plays. Each dead character would stand and walk off the stage with the figure in red, the character creating quite a personality through the plays in his engagement with the dead, for example, in a sweetly comical moment emphasising Prince Edward's youth, in *3 Henry VI* the Keeper made Edward's ghost wipe up his blood from the stage before allowing him to leave. Representing the mythical figure of Charon, ferryman of Hades, the Keeper was dressed in a long red robe with a belt around his waist from which hung the keys to, one assumes, the underworld. The Keeper is listed in the *dramatis personae* of *Richard III* as the character in I.iv to whom Clarence tells his prophetic dream. Boyd expanded this role significantly over the first tetralogy, so the character acted as gaoler throughout that part of the cycle (in *1 Henry VI* for example he played Mortimer's keeper) and generally as a keeper of hell suggesting that the characters' world was a kind of hell, as indeed Hampton-Reeves and Chillington Rutter have argued in their discussion of the 2000 production.⁴⁰² It was significant that Antony Bunsee doubled the role of the Keeper with that of Dick the Butcher in the Jack Cade rebellion, striding around with a cleaver which the Keeper character retained after the rebellion. This made both characters, by mutual representation, threatening, making the relationship with the audience an uneasy one: the Keeper was not the comforting figure he might have become. The characterisation of Dick the Butcher also demonstrates Benedict Nightingale's ideas that, in Boyd's productions, England became 'an abattoir run by butchers whose crimes include voracity, deceit and betrayal'.⁴⁰³ The presence of the Keeper character throughout these four plays, mostly silently surveying the action, gave a sense that in some way he represented a supernatural power that was observing,

⁴⁰² Hampton-Reeves and Chillington Rutter, *The Henry VI Plays*, 187.

⁴⁰³ Benedict Nightingale, *The Times*, 11th August 2006.

if not actually directing, the characters, again drawing links with the framing action of the Ghost of Andrea and Revenge in *The Spanish Tragedy*. Characteristic of Boyd's staging, in a nice touch to Clarence's dream scene, when Clarence spoke of the 'ferryman'⁴⁰⁴ in his dream, he turned to the Keeper, who was of course, unknown to Clarence, that same ferryman. In writing about the dreams of *Richard III*, Stephen Greenblatt has stated that the 'dream-state' of Clarence's dream has an 'unreality' which is 'further distanced by its use of classical figures like the sour ferryman Charon'; however, he goes on to say that 'it is easy enough to assimilate [the dreams] to the experience of fear in people who were struggling to comprehend terrible events ... In hindsight, they seem to possess a prophetic power'.⁴⁰⁵ As is evident here, in the staging of the recounting of the dream Boyd did not create distance but in fact brought the nightmare vision even closer and enhanced the terror of the prophecy by having that classical figure standing next to Clarence.

The three parts of *Henry VI* were filled with supernatural occurrences, more so than the other parts of the octology, perhaps to an extent responding to Boyd's idea that Shakespeare was 'the Last Great Medieval, and his first tetralogy the Last Great Medieval Masterpiece',⁴⁰⁶ and, through that, responding to the medieval design used for the productions. Joan la Pucelle was followed around throughout *1 Henry VI* by three familiars dressed in red who gave her aid, and, in *2 Henry VI*, Duke Humphrey returned after death to prevent Beaufort from repenting on his death bed. This was a significant moment as it demonstrates the active role that the ghosts played in the drama: as the Cardinal lay struggling, Humphrey entered the stage from the rear and stood at the head of the bed, invisible to the onstage characters. When Henry asked the Cardinal to make

⁴⁰⁴ *Richard III*, I.iv.46.

⁴⁰⁵ Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory*, 70, 172-173.

⁴⁰⁶ Boyd, *The Histories*, 4.

a sign to show his repentance, the ghost leaned over Beaufort, physically holding his arms down, thus preventing him from making any sign to the king and, one presumes, thereby damning him in the afterlife. The dead then did not just walk in Boyd's productions, watching like 'zombies', as Hampton-Reeves describes them; rather they took an active role in the condemnation of characters and the eventual renewal of England, making this a providential cycle. Foremost, it was the characters of Talbot and his son who united the three parts in highlighting the death of chivalry and seeking revenge for their betrayal in a very ghostly, yet very active manner.

The effect of the betrayal of Talbot by the lords at home is suggested sufficiently in the text through the abandonment of the Talbots at Bordeaux, the death of young John Talbot, his father's grief and eventual death, all suggesting their heroism giving way to the political machinations of York and Somerset. However, Boyd went further than this, having the Talbots' ghosts recur again and again, not only observing but actively influencing events, their presence constantly reminding the audience of their story and suggesting the pursuit of revenge. For example, in I.iv of *2 Henry VI*, the conjuration scene, the ghosts of Talbot and his son rose from a large smoky trapdoor, hanging in the air with Margery Jordan, making the prophecies that would come to pass during *Parts Two and Three*. Despite noting that the ghost of Young Talbot 'wore the same clothes, he was hoisted above the stage in the same way [as when he died], his wounds still bled, and a ghostly Old Talbot swung his sword below'⁴⁰⁷ Hampton-Reeves and Chillington Rutter, in their discussion of the 2000 productions, suggest that these were general spirits rather than these figures being intended to be seen as specific ghosts of Talbot and his son. Hampton-Reeves and Chillington Rutter also suggest that these 'spirits'

⁴⁰⁷ Hampton-Reeves and Chillington Rutter, *The Henry VI Plays*, 194.

went on to play the Captain and Whitmore⁴⁰⁸ and they argue more generally that 'several parts were played (in effect) by the ghosts of previous characters ... Sometimes these ghosts took on minor parts, effectively parodying the whole process of doubling required by the large-scale cast of Shakespeare's history plays'. Although Hampton-Reeves and Chillington Rutter acknowledge the ghosts, theirs is a qualified response. However, I contend that these figures should be interpreted as ghosts of those specific characters with an important narrative function in the productions;⁴⁰⁹ the fact that these prophecies were made by characters the audience knew to be chivalrous and noble lent those prophecies weight and importance.

Textually, the prophecies made during the conjuration are undermined by Hume who, in a soliloquy, details Winchester and Suffolk's plot against the Duchess of Gloucester, telling that these prophecies are intended to trap her rather than a real supernatural event:

Yet have I gold flies from another coast –
I dare not say, from the rich Cardinal
And from the great and new-made Duke of Suffolk,
Yet I do find it so; for, to be plain,
They, knowing Dame Eleanor's aspiring humour,
Have hired me to undermine the Duchess,
And buzz these conjurations in her brain.⁴¹⁰

Textually this does seem odd in a series that is unified by curses and prophecies over the eight plays. Indeed, Grene has written that

a scene such as this, with its use of the supernatural, poses certain problems for modern producers as to how seriously it should be portrayed ... Eleanor has been tempted to dabble in the occult as part of a political conspiracy against her husband. There is every reason for regarding with cynicism the 'prophecies' produced as a result.⁴¹¹

⁴⁰⁸ Hampton-Reeves and Chillington Rutter, *The Henry VI Plays*, 194.

⁴⁰⁹ My argument is superficially supported by the fact that in the production programmes in both the 2000 and 2006 productions the characters were listed as Ghost of Talbot and Ghost of John Talbot.

⁴¹⁰ *2 Henry VI*, I.ii.93 – 99.

⁴¹¹ Grene, *Shakespeare's Serial History Plays*, 143.

However, in spite of the textual evidence and Grene's assertion of problems faced by producers, Boyd's use of the very real presence of the Talbots' ghosts determined that the supernatural was to be understood as real and the prophecies as true in this production. The very presence of the heroic Talbot and his son belied the priest's testimony; although Hume was not presented as a liar, his speech showed him as a plaything of whatever power the ghosts represented.

The ghosts of Talbot and his son not only made these prophecies but actively participated in their manifestation. The scene of Beaufort's death, which was notable because of the malign participation of the ghost of betrayed Humphrey, gave way to the scene of Suffolk's murder. Beaufort's death bed became a barge of the dead tying into the image of the classical underworld already represented by the Keeper. The ghosts of Talbot and his son took the roles usually performed as the Captain and Whitmore and were joined by the ghosts of Gloucester and Beaufort (with Gloucester still retaining the purpled face caused by his murder and with the ghost of Beaufort now on a lead and under his control) and had Suffolk and Somerset as their prisoners. Both prisoners were blindfolded and consequently unable to see the ghostly horror which the audience was watching. Suffolk was able to remove his blindfold as he was spoken to and he looked around at the ghosts, stunned. Talbot's question 'Doth Death affright thee?'⁴¹² did not mean a fear of dying but, as Suffolk was looking at ghosts, fear of death personified in the ghosts themselves. That it was by ghosts that the prophecy of Suffolk's death was fulfilled, and by those same ghosts who had made the prophecy, suggested a particular consistent supernatural agency manipulating the events of the plays. That these ghosts were exacting their revenge, deposing of plotting courtiers, suggests that rather than

⁴¹² *2 Henry VI*, IV.i.33. In the Oxford edition this line reads 'What doth thee affright?' to which Suffolk responds 'Thy name affrights me, in whose sound is death' (*2 Henry VI*, IV.i.33 – 34).

England becoming a living hell, these characters were working for her good, working towards a providential conclusion.

It would, of course, be easy to suggest that this was not the case as the civil wars of *Henry VI* give way to the butchery of *Richard III* and many critics have argued against the providential nature of the plays, including reviewers of Boyd's 2000 production. Indeed, in a move seeming to suggest a non-providential approach, certainly confusing the providential approach, Boyd had the ghosts of previous kings appear at Richard III's coronation, paying homage: the ghost of Henry VI lay prostrate at Richard's feet before Richard ascended his throne to be crowned by his dead father, the Duke of York. However, in the tower scene of *3 Henry VI* although Richard wanted to be in control, it was Henry who had the upper hand: he seemed resigned to his fate and strengthened as a result. Henry died taunting Richard and the actual stabbing seemed to be more a response to Henry's goading than Richard's premeditation. This was further emphasised as, after the stabbing, Richard proceeded to rip out the pages of Henry's bible, highlighting the absence of God and Richard's power over the supernatural. He stood to roar 'I am myself alone!',⁴¹³ not just isolating himself from his family but also, and more pertinently, from God. As he did this, Richard stretched out his arms, with the bible in one hand and the torn pages in the other: a perverted Christ figure. As he dragged Henry's body off, Richard pulled him in a circle, smearing blood around the stage.

It was on to this stage covered in blood that Edward IV entered with his new queen. Dressed in long white robes, the two made a parade of the stage, their trains becoming stained with Henry's blood and further smearing it over the stage, over England. This

⁴¹³ *3 Henry VI*, V.vi.84.

visually suggested that Edward's reign would be contaminated by Henry, by Henry's murder and by everything that had gone before it in the three plays, as Henry IV's reign was contaminated by the murder of Richard II, and Richard II's reign, in this cycle, was contaminated by the murder of Woodstock. Indeed, Henry, through supporting Richmond, haunted Richard III, returning extra-textually on the eve of Bosworth as the climax to the dream sequence, reminding the audience of his 'England's hope'⁴¹⁴ prophecy; the use of warm lighting for Richmond, as opposed to the darkness in which Richard stood, suggesting a clear delineation of good and bad. This suggests a providential conclusion to the cycle, not least as Henry's ghost returned to observe as Richmond crowned himself on the battlefield after Richard was brought down by a field populated by the ghosts of the previous plays, Richard's horse performed by the ghost of Buckingham.

As stated above, many reviewers, newspaper and academic alike, have been somewhat dismissive of Boyd's use of ghosts in his octology, either briefly discussing how the dead 'won't leave the living alone'⁴¹⁵ or, as Kenneth Tucker in his academic review of the *Henry VIs*, who found Boyd's ghosts 'problematic', 'confusing' and even 'disturbing' because they 'conflict with Shakespeare's text', completely dismissing the ghosts as ridiculous.⁴¹⁶ However, these ghosts are crucial to Boyd's interpretation of the plays. As Graham Holderness writes of the Ghost in *Hamlet*, he 'is the return of the past, the dead resurrected in contemporary presence; a narrator from the past, who recounts the history of the past', he 'bears witness' and 'reinstates the forgotten to memory'.⁴¹⁷ Boyd's ghosts staged a philosophy of history: through their presence the plays were not simply of the history genre but literally filled with the past. The

⁴¹⁴ 3 *Henry VI*, IV.vii

⁴¹⁵ Dominic Cavendish, *Daily Telegraph*, 11th August 2006.

⁴¹⁶ Kenneth Tucker, 'Henry the Sixth at Stratford 2006', *Shakespeare Newsletter* 56:2 (Fall 2006), 62.

⁴¹⁷ Graham Holderness, *Shakespeare: The Histories* (London: Macmillan, 2000), 58.

presence of the ghosts encouraged the audience to see the plays as history plays with the past infiltrating into the present of the play world and the present of the real world. The ghosts represented Boyd's understanding of the philosophy of history and implemented providentialism, not a cosy benign providence, but a hard and, at times, brutal providence, that critics since the 1970s have played down. Unlike the Senecan ghost of Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*, Boyd's ghosts here played an active role: the 'scourge of France' became to some degree the scourge of England, ghosts providing a constant reminder of past sins and working towards a new beginning, installing a righteous ruler on the throne.

'A woman's hide': Gender in Boyd's octology

Shakespeare's history plays are famous for the relative absence of women and Boyd's cycle amply illustrated this: out of 264 performed roles only 31 were female, requiring only five actresses in a company of 34 players.⁴¹⁸ A negative approach to women in the history plays is evident both in the texts and criticism of the plays to date. Phyllis Rackin has written that 'it has often seemed to modern scholars that, of all the dramatic genres that were popular on the Elizabethan stage, the English history play was the least hospitable to women'.⁴¹⁹ Moreover, within Shakespeare's octology, there are significant contrasts in the treatment of women between the plays of the first and second tetralogies, both in terms of the stage time given to women and the manner in which the women are presented. The women of the first are powerful, violent figures whose behaviour at times borders on the monstrous, embodied, for example, in Talbot's identification of Joan la Pucelle as 'Devil or devil's dam'⁴²⁰ and York's line of Queen Margaret 'O tiger's heart wrapped in a woman's hide'.⁴²¹ These are some of Shakespeare's strongest and most powerful female characters, but the plays themselves 'seem to express considerable anxiety about women's exercise of military and political power'.⁴²² In contrast, the women of the second tetralogy are not military, political, or monstrous but are marginalised and dismissed as either silent crying Queens (in, for example, *Richard II*), or whores (such as Mistress Quickly and Doll Tearsheet in the *Henry IV* plays); their roles are 'severely limited'.⁴²³ However, this approach to women in the history plays is insufficient when thinking about Boyd's productions, a consequence of Boyd staging a cycle in order of chronology rather than in order of the

⁴¹⁸ <http://www.rsc.org.uk/content/5484.aspx>. Last accessed 6th January 2010.

⁴¹⁹ Phyllis Rackin, 'Women's Roles in Shakespeare's Elizabethan History Plays', in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare's History Plays*, ed. Michael Hattaway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 73

⁴²⁰ *1 Henry VI*, I.vi.5.

⁴²¹ *3 Henry VI*, I.iv.138.

⁴²² Rackin, 'Women's Roles', 73.

⁴²³ *Ibid.*

plays' composition.⁴²⁴ As a result of this, Boyd's cycle reveals gender as a thematic thread that unites the seemingly disparate plays or tetralogies of plays into a coherent whole: although superficially strikingly different, the presentation of women through the octology can be seen as a single unfolding development. As this section demonstrates, when read in chronological order of event, the presentation of women is a development of strength, from voiceless oppression in *Richard II* to anguished agency in *Richard III*, rather than a descent to disenfranchisement.

The female characters of Shakespeare's second tetralogy largely fade into the background: they are, according to Jean Howard and Phyllis Rackin's argument, 'increasingly contained within the domestic sphere and ... erased from the political action altogether'.⁴²⁵ In *1 Henry IV* Westmorland makes a brief but memorable account of the Welshwomen. He states that

A thousand of [Mortimer's] people butcherèd,
Upon whose dead corpse' there was such misuse,
Such beastly shameless transformation,
By those Welshwomen done.⁴²⁶

In spite of this, the women of the plays are neither martial nor public but are contained in the domestic sphere. Indeed, in their influential account of gender in the history plays Howard and Rackin seem to focus more strongly on the gendered presentation of men in the plays of the second tetralogy and how the women by comparison present these men. However, Westmorland's description of behaviour which led to Abraham Fleming's terming of the mutilating Welshwomen as 'a sex pretending the title of

⁴²⁴ In stating this I am disagreeing with Coen Heijes who, in his article 'Thus play I in one person many people' (*Shakespeare* 6:1 (2010), 52 – 73), argues for reading Boyd's octology in the order of production beginning with *1 Henry VI* and concluding with *Henry V*. However, it is equally valid to read the productions, as I do, in the order of chronology. Heijes quotes both director Michael Boyd and assistant director Donnacadh O'Briain to support his reading, although both seem to base their claim for this order on the fact that '[i]t is how [Shakespeare] wrote them' (Heijes, "Strike up the Drum" 56).

⁴²⁵ Carol Banks, 'Warlike Women: "reprooffe to these degenerate dayes"?' in *Shakespeare's Histories and Counter-histories*, ed. Dermot Cavanagh, Stuart Hampton-Reeves and Stephen Longstaffe (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 169.

⁴²⁶ *1 Henry IV*, I.i.42 – 45.

weake vessels'⁴²⁷ in Holinshed's chronicle, is significant, because the women of the second tetralogy in Boyd's production performed a greater strength than these texts and critics suggest.

Richard II has a framework that is constructed on the opposition of gender lines: although about two men fighting over the crown, Richard's court is characterised femininely against the masculinity of Bolingbroke. The queen is largely absent: Shakespeare does not even give her a name, although Boyd named her in the cast list as Queen Isabel, ostensibly after Richard's historical queen, Isabel de Valois. Hannah Barrie's Queen was present from the opening scene of the play as the whole company congregated to honour Richard and watch the subsequent throwing of gages, and she remained present by Richard's side through the trial-by-combat scene: as a member of the company but elevated to the king's side she was at once both subject and equal. The perceived equality of the two in Boyd's production was encouraged through physical presentation: both wore similar cream and gold gowns, and had pale made up skin and a shock of curly auburn hair. The physical likeness had implications for the gender oppositions in the play and the balance in the relationship which mutually presented both the man and woman.

The extratextual presence of the Queen had a dual effect: it gave her more stage time than Shakespeare does, but this extra time also served to consolidate her silence. However, although Barrie's Queen said very little, as the character textually does, her visual performance often offered an alternative narrative through facial expressions and crying. This was particularly notable during Gaunt's confrontation of Richard (II.i)

⁴²⁷ Abraham Fleming in Raphael Holinshed, *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Irelande* (London: Henry Denham, 1587), vol 3, 528.

where Isabel knelt with her husband before in his anger Richard stood and moved away, struggling with his rage. However, it was Isabel who suggested, through her expressions, the inevitable end of Richard's emotion, first registering fearful concern before she began to cry with an imploring look, as though she was silently begging Gaunt to stop, in fear of the consequences. This at once presented a frightened woman and her tormentor, suggesting a level of calculating rage in Richard's personality. The very fact of Isabel's containment in the private sphere suggested the effect in their offstage intimate relationship as opposed to those seen on the public, political (masculine) stage. This created an all-round tyrannical impression of Richard. In discussing the deposition scene in *Richard II*, Scott McMillin asserts that, although 'the Queen does not appear ... her influence is felt'⁴²⁸ through Richard's appropriation of her language and tears. Indeed, McMillin states that 'the language of the Queen circulates through Richard's role',⁴²⁹ but it might be more appropriate to suggest that the whole of her character infused Richard's in Boyd's productions. Throughout the production the physical similarities between the two suggested a merging of character: the couple could at once be each other or no-one, both female or male, so closely did the two resemble each other. Richard's personality was so overpowering that the Queen's tears seemed to stem from her being literally left with nothing: Richard's wig, make-up and clothing suggested that he had usurped his wife, marginalising her through stealing her identity. The deposition scene marked the beginning of the process in which Richard surrendered this aspect of his character and became himself; the subsequent separation between husband and wife was literally a separation of their characters.

⁴²⁸ Scott McMillin, 'Shakespeare's *Richard II*: Eyes of Sorrow, Eyes of Desire' *Shakespeare Quarterly* 35 (1984), 44.

⁴²⁹ *Ibid.*

In the text, the Queen does not appear in the deposition scene, but in Boyd's production Queen Isabel was extratextually present at the end of the scene which segued into that of their parting. The deposition scene – 'this manly scene' as McMillin terms it⁴³⁰ – concluded by the men exiting, leaving Richard standing centre stage while fine sand began to fall on him from the flies, with the Queen, unnoticed, up stage right. Although isolated within his circle of sand and light (Richard stood silently while Carlisle made his prophecy and while Isabel observed him), Richard could respond to the characters and eventually drew his wife into the circle with him. Facing each other as they spoke, the pair created a striking image: Jonathan Slinger's Richard was shorter than Barrie's Queen Isabel and this visually depleted the now-unkinged king further. From fearing her husband, Isabel now caressed him placing her hands on his chest and around his neck. Through being stripped of his kingly identity, Richard returned to the masculine role which was highlighted by changes in his vocal pitch (which began in the 'death of kings' speech)⁴³¹ and through the loss of his wig and ruff. Isabel's tender physical and emotional reassurance of her husband, who stood with his head hanging, suggested new equality within the relationship in contrast to the earlier presentation. That Richard held his wife close in a protective embrace at the arrival of Northumberland underlined this shift. This has implications for the ideas surrounding the parallel of Richard and Elizabeth I: Richard in this production was clearly aligned with Elizabeth, but while that real woman seemed to have to usurp the masculine role in referring to herself as a prince and husband,⁴³² much as Isabel here initially became husband to the broken Richard, this man who had usurped the feminine could not remain king.

⁴³⁰ McMillin, 'Shakespeare's *Richard II*: Eyes of Sorrow, Eyes of Desire', 44

⁴³¹ *Richard II*, III.ii.140 - 173.

⁴³² Lisa Hopkins, *Writing Renaissance Queens: texts by and about Elizabeth I and Mary, Queen of Scots* (London: Associated University Presses, 2002), 24.

Beginning in his gendered opposition to Richard II, Clive Wood's Bolingbroke was presented as masculinity personified: he was a solid figure who dressed in no-nonsense black clothing and boots. Bolingbroke's reference to his son as a 'young wanton and effeminate boy'⁴³³ immediately drew a parallel with the feminine Richard II, aligning Hal with Richard and suggesting Bolingbroke's approach as misogynistically gendered.⁴³⁴ This was also immediately supported by the Duchess of York's pleading for Aumerle's pardon which, while retaining the comedy directed at the female figure, also served to present Bolingbroke as a man unable to cope with women: Bolingbroke was simply baffled by the Duchess' refusal to stand up. Although the scene was humorous in the image of the ridiculous female, the moment of Aumerle's pardon was played with seriousness, Bolingbroke's own sense of guilt and fear of damnation leading him to change his mind. Nevertheless, despite the motivating factor of his existential terror and although he became weary of the Duchess, Bolingbroke's seriousness gave the Duchess a level of justification, her character serving in this scene, as Queen Isabel did, to ratify Richard II's reputation, reminding the audience of Bolingbroke's wrongs. Indeed, Howard and Rackin point out that '[b]oth York and Henry are diminished by their inability to silence the woman and their ultimate capitulation to her demands'.⁴³⁵ This was the effect in Boyd's production, but what Howard and Rackin seem to miss by using the Duchess of York to highlight the male debasement that occurs in this scene is the power that, although admittedly a by-product of that male debasement, is invested in the woman by their capitulation.

⁴³³ *Richard II*, V.iii.10.

⁴³⁴ Howard and Rackin note that being characterised as 'effeminate' does not imply 'homosexual', as the relationships between Richard, Bagot, Bushy, and Green are sometimes suggested as being. Indeed, in Boyd's productions the relationship between Hal and Poins was also characterised to some extent with the suggestion of homosexuality, in so doing further aligning Hal with Richard. Significantly here, the use of the term 'effeminate' suggests the presentation of both Richard and Hal in feminine terms. (Howard and Rackin, 143).

⁴³⁵ Howard and Rackin, 156.

Masculinity mixed with the inability to handle women united the characters that Wood played over the cycle: the wifeless father Henry IV and the wifeless father Richard Plantagenet, revealing a common thread through Wood's portrayal of the men and perhaps uncovering some of the motivation for his characters' treatment of women throughout the plays. For example, in Boyd's *1 Henry VI* Wood's Richard Plantagenet spent his time hunting down Joan to sexually brutalise her before burning her at the stake. In *2 and 3 Henry VI*, as Duke of York, the same character engaged in a battle with Margaret that culminated in his violent murder on a molehill. The arc of the actor's roles here clearly suggests a gendered approach to the engagements with other characters; this is true also of an alignment between Wood's characters and those of Maureen Beattie.

Despite the marginalisation of women in the second tetralogy, Beattie played a series of female characters which were particularly significant in their relation to Bolingbroke: she began with the Duchess of York in *Richard II*, doubling that role with Mistress Quickly in the two parts of *Henry IV*. These two characters have both been presented by critics as female comic fodder: the tone of the scene of the Duchess' pleading is introduced by Bolingbroke's 'Our scene is altered from a serious thing, / And now changed to "The Beggar and the King"',⁴³⁶ and Mistress Quickly, who is known for her bawdry and her use of malapropisms that '[disrupt] the King's English',⁴³⁷ occupies the comic space of the Boar's Head. However, Beattie's doubling of these characters was significant in Boyd's productions in that the oppositional relationship between her characters and those played by Clive Wood served to elevate the role of Quickly.

⁴³⁶ *Richard II*, V.iii.77 - 78.

⁴³⁷ Phyllis Rackin, 'Foreign Country: The Place of Women and Sexuality in Shakespeare's Historical World', in *Enclosure Acts: Sexuality, Property, and Culture in Early Modern England* ed. Richard Burt and John Michael Archer (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994), 81.

The Boar's Head was created with a red velvety curtain raised across the rear of the stage with large cushions on which the characters lolled placed in front. An old battered leather chair for Falstaff completed the set. Against the hard metallic stage and tower, this drapery suggested a boudoir and a more feminine space in contrast to Bolingbroke's court and the bare Welsh landscape. Although the Boar's head contains Falstaff and Hal, the aesthetic feminisation of the space made it fully belong to Mistress Quickly whose own costume, and that of Doll Tearsheet, complemented the design: Quickly wore velvety red skirts with a tight bodice that emphasised her bust. Sexuality was a key aspect of the Boar's Head: for example, when men came looking for Hal a scene was created by the characters in which the prince lay on the floor with Doll sitting astride him with his head hidden underneath her skirts, deliberately suggesting that the prince was copulating with this woman. On discovery, this apparent, although staged, licentiousness caused great embarrassment for the messengers. Thus the Boar's Head and its female occupants were characterised as bawdy, sexual, colourful and feminine. Indeed, Mistress Quickly, and to a lesser extent, Doll, were, although mostly silent and inconsequential to the narrative action, vital in establishing a feminine atmosphere in which the 'effeminate' prince spent his time.

J. L. Simmons has noted the absence, not just of Henry IV's wife, but of Hal's mother or stepmother figure, asserting that Shakespeare '[w]as unable to find a coherent place for Hal's stepmother, a maternal figure that might interrupt with a childhood nightmare Henry V's triumph'.⁴³⁸ Prior to this statement Simmons also draws attention to, what in the *Henry IV* plays is, Hal's absent sexual maturity which 'is not proposed until the comic catastrophe of *Henry V*'.⁴³⁹ It would appear that Boyd's production did not agree

⁴³⁸ J. L. Simmons, 'Masculine Negotiations in Shakespeare's History Plays: Hal, Hotspur, and "the foolish Mortimer"', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 44:4 (Winter, 1993), 448.

⁴³⁹ *Ibid.*, 447.

with this reading of the texts: Hal's sexuality was, as already discussed, displayed early in *1 Henry IV* and there was also a mother figure shown for the young man. As well as her bawdiness, Mistress Quickly displayed a maternal fondness for Hal, seen in her expressions, which suggested a mothering of the textually motherless boy. It is partly in this manner that the significance of the opposition of Henry IV and Mistress Quickly begins to become apparent. It would be easy to suggest that Falstaff is most clearly a surrogate father for Hal⁴⁴⁰ and in such a role he should be considered as a direct contrast to the king: indeed within the Boar's Head Falstaff plays the king's role to the prince (II.v). However, in Boyd's production, the Boar's Head was a microcosm of Henry's court, acting as an inverted world of licentiousness against the Puritanism of Henry. In this case then, it is most true to suggest that within this microcosm it is Mistress Quickly who takes the king's position. In Boyd's production Henry and Mistress Quickly were clearly set in opposition: the sexless man against the sexualised woman; a black dressed puritan against a colourful bawd; the father of Hal against his mother figure; a king of one world against a queen of another. In this light, despite the marginalisation of Mistress Quickly through her lack of scenes and speeches and her position on the edges of society, her character is empowered and elevated. In Boyd's production this was confirmed through the opposition of Beattie's and Wood's characters throughout the octology.

Scholars have argued that there are stark contrasts between the women of the first tetralogy and those of the second, perhaps a consequence of what we may call Shakespeare's dual roles which were, as Michael Boyd somewhat crudely puts it, 'the

⁴⁴⁰ Ian Fredrich Moulton, 'Fat Knight, or What You Will: Unimitable Falstaff' in *A Companion to Shakespeare's Work, vol 3: The Comedies*, ed. Richard Dutton and Jean E. Howard (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 225.

last Great Medieval' and 'the First Great Modern'.⁴⁴¹ The difference is quite obvious in the plays in the contrast between the public, martial, and vocal women who occupy the *Henry VI* plays and *Richard III*, and the silent, weeping, private women who are part of *Richard II*, the *Henry IV* plays and *Henry V*. However, Boyd's productions were conceived as an octology, responding to the plays as a medieval cycle and consequently there were links back and forth across the eight plays of the two tetralogies which influenced how the women of the two series were received: for example, Doll Tearsheet feigned pregnancy with a cushion stuffed under her skirts in an attempt to evade arrest at the end of *2 Henry IV*, an action which mirrors Joan's vocal attempts to free herself from death at the stake in *1 Henry VI*. These two claims serve to both marginalise and elevate the women: being found out, in Doll's case in a cruelly comic manner, marginalised both women through humiliation. However, the association of Doll with Joan's powerful martiality and articulateness had a positive reflection on Doll through the reference. As Heijes points out, these kind of links dominated Boyd's octology, and it is significant that Alexia Healy, who played Doll, would go on to play Katherine in *Henry V*: not only was this the same actress whose character had played with Hal in a sexual manner in the Boar's Head, the presentation, through Carlson's idea of ghosting,⁴⁴² turned Katherine into a kind of high class French whore while at the same time elevating Doll to the level of a princess.

The public martiality of the later female characters was also foreshadowed in *1 Henry IV* in the presentation of Lady Mortimer, a character whose scenes were fully retained in Boyd's production. Simmons uses Shakespeare's and Fleming's account in Holinshed of the atrocities committed upon male English corpses to highlight the threat that

⁴⁴¹ Boyd, *The Histories*, 4.

⁴⁴² Marvin Carlson notes that 'the recycled body of an actor ... will almost inevitably in a new role evoke the ghost or ghosts of previous roles if they have made any impression whatever on the audience' (8).

femininity poses to masculinity within the world of Shakespeare's histories, in this context by changing the men into 'sexually self-sufficient androgynes'.⁴⁴³ This presentation is akin to that of the martial women of the *Henry IV* plays.⁴⁴⁴ However, the significance of Westmorland's presentation of Welshwomen is perhaps greater on the page, as, because it is spoken and not seen, it can be lost in the performance as it was amongst the greater number of enacted atrocities in the *Boyd*. This is something that Howard and Rackin underline by highlighting how Shakespeare's staging of Wales as seductive negates the male English spoken account. However, in line with the relative silence of women in the second tetralogy, the scenes involving the solitary Welshwoman in *1 Henry IV* are often cut in performance as a consequence of Lady Mortimer's exclusive use of the Welsh language.⁴⁴⁵ Played in Boyd's production by Sianed Jones, Lady Mortimer was very much her warrior father's daughter, wearing an armour breastplate and chainmail skirt over her tunic which foreshadowed the armour which would later be worn by Joan and Margaret in the *Henry VI* plays. In order to distance her further from the other characters, not just the women, and suggesting a different ethnic origin, Jones had an almost completely shaven head with a Celtic design shaved into the back. This perhaps trod a fine line in creating an attractive character but simultaneously one who may just have been capable of mutilating bodies. Lady Mortimer spoke and sang only in Welsh while her husband rested his head in her lap. As scholars have previously discussed, although given a voice by Shakespeare, the power of Lady Mortimer's speech is limited because she is only able to communicate with the on and off stage English through the translation of her father: in III.i, Lady

⁴⁴³ Simmons, 'Masculine Negotiations in Shakespeare's History Plays', 446.

⁴⁴⁴ Perhaps in response to this comment from Westmorland and thus linking the women of the octology, Joan in III.ii extratextually held aloft the severed arm of the Duke of Bedford showering blood over the stage, such violence creating a negative image of the French woman. Interestingly it is foreign and female characters that seem to display this violence, although the young Richard who would become Richard III also demonstrated such tendencies by castrating the dead or at least dying Clifford onstage in *3 Henry VI* II.vi. Again, this relates back to Westmorland's account as detailed here.

⁴⁴⁵ Megan S. Lloyd, *'Speak it in Welsh': Wales and Welsh Language in Shakespeare* (London, New York and Toronto: Lexington Books, 2007), 159.

Mortimer 'weeps, and speaks ... in Welsh'⁴⁴⁶ which Glyndŵr translates as 'My daughter weeps she'll not part with you. / She'll be a soldier, too; she'll to the wars'.⁴⁴⁷ Mortimer responds not directly to his wife, but to her father, saying 'Good father, tell her'.⁴⁴⁸ This is followed by Glyndŵr speaking to Lady Mortimer and her reply, but after a few lines there is simply the stage direction '[t]he lady speaks in Welsh'⁴⁴⁹ which Mortimer responds to, and she in turn weeps and speaks some more. There are twelve lines between this 'speaks in Welsh' stage direction and Glyndŵr's next translation. The fact that Glyndŵr translates what Lady Mortimer says suggests that she is not 'robbed of her voice'⁴⁵⁰ as Boyd has asserted. However, according to Matthew Greenfield, Lady Mortimer's exclusive use of the Welsh language and the emphasis placed on her husband's inability to understand her in this scene creates 'a boundary, excluding the audience'.⁴⁵¹ Despite being allowed speeches in this production, the inability of the on, and presumably the majority of the off, stage audience to directly understand Lady Mortimer meant that she remained marginalised as a martial woman.⁴⁵² However, Greenfield interprets this not as 'a coercive imposition of otherness on the un-named daughter' but in a positive sense as 'granting her some degree of autonomy or privacy'.⁴⁵³ The idea that speaking in a foreign tongue may suggest Lady Mortimer's autonomy further supports my notion that these women, though marginalised, are strong, and, because Lady Mortimer was marginalised, the character created something of a bridge between the women of the first and second tetralogies.

⁴⁴⁶ *1 Henry IV*, III.i.187 SD

⁴⁴⁷ *1 Henry IV*, III.i.190 – 191.

⁴⁴⁸ *1 Henry IV*, III.i.192.

⁴⁴⁹ *1 Henry IV*, III.i.195 SD.

⁴⁵⁰ Event at the Courtyard Theatre, 15th March 2008.

⁴⁵¹ Matthew Greenfield, '1 Henry IV: Metatheatrical Britain' in *British Identities and English Renaissance Literature*, ed. David J. Baker and Willy Maley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 75.

⁴⁵² That the words Lady Mortimer speaks can only be understood through the translation of her father is also problematic for the presentation of an independent woman.

⁴⁵³ Greenfield, '1 Henry IV: Metatheatrical Britain', 75.

The figure of '[a] woman clad in armour'⁴⁵⁴ is a negative, dangerous image. Encapsulated in Shakespeare's *1 Henry VI* in Bedford's questions 'A maid? And be so martial?',⁴⁵⁵ the contradictions of femininity and martiality represent a fundamental transgression of gender boundaries: women playing the men. In Boyd's productions of the first tetralogy, contrary to much critical thought, the women in armour were not such a bad thing: indeed the negative treatment of women by men up to this point in the second tetralogy and throughout the eight plays led to the rehabilitation of the female characters.

A central theme of Boyd's history cycle was the creation and loss of power through the series of wars. The second tetralogy concludes with Henry V's glorious moment in France, giving way to the loss of his achievements in the *Henry VI* plays. Significantly, *1 Henry VI* begins with the funeral of Henry V marking the death of heroic masculinity which is compounded by the death of Talbot in IV.vii. The scenes in France in Boyd's production of *Part One* were crucial to underscoring and therefore understanding how the death of Henry V would affect the realm through the death of chivalry. Within this context the role of Joan was critical. Carol Chillington Rutter has described Fiona Bell's performance of Joan in Boyd's 2000 production as a Joan 'in skirts: no child but a formidable woman'.⁴⁵⁶ This was also true of Katy Stephens' performance of the same character in 2006. However, Bell's Joan displayed a certain degree of gender ambiguity, with a severely cropped hair-do making her face appear, according to

⁴⁵⁴ *1 Henry VI*, I.vii.3.

⁴⁵⁵ *1 Henry VI*, II.i.21.

⁴⁵⁶ Carol Chillington Rutter, 'Of Tiger's Hearts and Players' Hides' in *Shakespeare's Histories and Counter-Histories*, ed. Dermot Cavanagh, Stuart Hampton-Reeves and Stephen Longstaffe (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 192.

Chillington Rutter, 'powerfully masculine'⁴⁵⁷ and she spoke with a Scottish accent which immediately made her appear Other and 'menacing'⁴⁵⁸ to the English nobility. These steps apparently masculinised Joan. However, in the 2006 production, Katy Stephens's Joan was more visually feminised than Bell's, wearing her hair long and dark and speaking with a countrified English accent, not so much menacing as placing her in a lower class to the English and French nobles alike.⁴⁵⁹ Essentially though, the Joans were the same character: she was a powerful figure in both of Boyd's productions. However, this was ambiguous: Joan was physically aided from the beginning by onstage fiends. During I.ii, her combat with the Dauphin, Bell's Joan 'was on the point of losing ... when [the fiends] three silent figures, beautiful women clothed neck to ankle in sensuous blood-red filed on stage'.⁴⁶⁰ This led Chillington Rutter to read Bell's Joan as weak, in relation to other historical presentations. Stephens's Joan was also accompanied by these familiars, but only appearing on the balcony at the beginning of the trial with the Dauphin, humming a single unified note, as a few white feathers fell from the flies. Where Bell's fiends shadowed and pre-empted, therefore prompting, her movements, making her strong and showing an explicitly unambiguous supernatural influence from the outset, at this point Stephens's appeared to simply observe, suggesting Joan's own strength which the fiends would later aid rather than create. This may have been a directorial decision in response to Stephens's own discomfort with the idea of Joan's power solely coming from the fiends, a discomfort she drew from textual evidence that Joan provides of her physical

⁴⁵⁷ Chillington Rutter, 'Of Tiger's Hearts and Players' Hides', 193.

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 192.

⁴⁵⁹ This use of accents to mark the character apart is a device that has precedent in previous productions of the play, notably Terry Hands's 1977 production in which Peggy Ashcroft spoke Margaret's role with a Gallic accent, identifying the queen as foreign in the English court (Hampton-Reeves and Chillington Rutter, 76)

⁴⁶⁰ Hampton-Reeves and Chillington Rutter, *The Henry VI Plays*, 193.

power as she states to Talbot 'tis only I that must disgrace thee'⁴⁶¹ suggesting to Stephens that Joan's strength was all her own.⁴⁶² Either way, in both productions Joan's strength came from an external source (Stephens's fiends eventually following Bell's by creating her movements in combat with Talbot). Further, her ability to physically overpower the Dauphin feminised the male members of the French forces. Thus, despite Stephens's objections, Joan's martiality was characterised negatively.

Textually Margaret enters before Joan's execution (Margaret enters in V.ii, Joan is executed in V.iii), but Boyd adapted the two scenes so that Joan's capture by York and her execution took place as a continuous uninterrupted passage. This editing of the capture and burning of Joan so that she left directly before Margaret's first entrance created a continuously negative presentation, compounded by the fact that Katy Stephens doubled the two characters. Shakespeare uses act V to resolve any remaining doubt about the source and negativity of Joan's power. In Boyd's production, Joan knelt centre stage, praying, whilst emptying a small bag containing animal bones and feathers onto the stage; these items presented her as a witch. As Joan's desperation mounted, Stephens drew up the sleeve of her right arm to reveal scarring, presumably from the previous occasions on which 'I was wont to feed you with my blood'.⁴⁶³ The visual images reinforced Shakespeare's demonisation. James Paxon writes that Joan is 'indisputably a sorceress in this play'⁴⁶⁴ and Chillington Rutter supports the statement through analysis of Boyd's 2000 production in which she states that Boyd demonised Joan explicitly throughout in contrast to Shakespeare who 'withholds' and earlier

⁴⁶¹ *1 Henry VI*, I.vii.7.

⁴⁶² Letter to author from Stephens.

⁴⁶³ *1 Henry VI*, V.iii.14.

⁴⁶⁴ James Paxon, 'Shakespeare's Medieval Devils and Joan la Pucelle in *Henry VI*' in *Henry VI Critical Essays*, ed. Thomas A. Pendleton (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 129 - 130.

productions which have 'juggled' the suggestion.⁴⁶⁵ In his discussion of this scene, Warren Chernaik points out the apparent contrast between the effects of reading and performance: he writes that

stripped of her demonic allies, [Joan] is revealed a mere woman ... and is punished. Yet, in every performance I have seen, Joan is presented as a sympathetic, attractive figure, and, as staged, her death comes across not as triumph of English virtue ... but as cruel, unmerited suffering.⁴⁶⁶

In Boyd's production, Joan, while an attractive character, was not sympathetically presented. However, as Chernaik observes, the manner of her death here served to reverse that presentation: York's men bound Joan to a ladder which provided both a prominent place for her to be tried and acted as the stake on which she was burnt. York's interrogation brought the fear, cunning and hypocrisy of Joan to the fore as she attempted to save herself; however it also revealed the brutality of York. Placing his dagger up Joan's dress, York stabbed upwards and brought it away covered in blood, suggesting that he was cutting her hymen and thus proving that she was still a virgin. This rape was one of the most horrific moments of the eight productions. In the text York states simply 'And yet, forsooth, she is a virgin pure',⁴⁶⁷ a mocking response to Joan's hypocrisy. There is no textual indication that he does in fact prove her virginity in this manner, and in so doing Boyd complicated the audience's response to Joan. The rape in Boyd negated the audience's tendency to laugh at Joan's hypocrisy and suggested that, since she *was* virginal, her supernatural help may not have been evil at all. This was further indicated by a shower of white feathers which fell over Joan's grave, an image suggesting in Chillington Rutter's words that 'angels were being

⁴⁶⁵ Chillington Rutter, 'Of Tiger's Hearts and Players' Hides', 194.

⁴⁶⁶ Warren Chernaik, *The Cambridge Introduction to Shakespeare's History Plays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 30.

⁴⁶⁷ *1 Henry VI*, V.vi.83.

murdered'.⁴⁶⁸ This turned such negative presentation on its head and created a more ambiguous entrance for Margaret.

Chernaik writes that '[t]he degradation of Joan in the final scenes can be seen as a way of neutralizing the threat that she represents'.⁴⁶⁹ However this was not the case in Boyd's production as the outrage of Joan's humiliation and death was immediately followed by Margaret's entrance on the battlefield,⁴⁷⁰ the doubling of the characters in such rapid succession created a transferral of character traits. This was further highlighted by Margaret's dress which, while different to Joan's smock, was identical to those worn by the fiends. The final scene of the production continued the marginalisation of the women. Suffolk returned to Henry from his wooing mission and as he spoke, Margaret, in a stunning *coup de théâtre*, descended from the flies in a picture frame to be viewed by the king. That Margaret was first seen in England on these terms – the actress physically contained in a frame – consolidated the approach to women in Boyd's productions: Margaret was something to be looked at, a voiceless image to be objectified as King Henry indeed does as he approves her based on his lusty response to this portrait. In contrast to Chernaik's statement, Joan, in this production was not neutralised, rather her character and experiences continued to influence the productions, coming to maturity in the character of Margaret, in a similar way that the experiences of Doll also seemed to be a part of Joan. Indeed, this doubling created a cycle of revenge, Margaret seeking vengeance for the treatment of Joan; as Chillington Rutter wrote of Bell's Margaret, '[she] would complete on a battlefield outside

⁴⁶⁸ Chillington Rutter, 'Of Tiger's Hearts and Players' Hides', 193.

⁴⁶⁹ Chernaik, *The Cambridge Introduction to Shakespeare's History Plays*, 30.

⁴⁷⁰ As Suffolk's prisoner, she is not martial at this point but her discovery in this situation does point towards that eventuality.

Wakefield [much later in the Wars of the Roses] the action York thought he'd ended here [in France with the murder of Joan]'.⁴⁷¹

The doubling device in *1 Henry VI* was used to present women negatively. Where the English women of the second tetralogy had been quiet and contained, feminine power, strength, and martial ability was shown in the plays of the first tetralogy as a negative, foreign concept which was put down and apparently silenced by English men, a theme thus established which was developed in *2* and *3 Henry VI* not least through the character of Margaret. Furthermore however, Margaret's embodiment of the negative treatment of women which proliferated throughout the octology was, conversely, the cause of her redemption.

As the gendered opposition of Bolingbroke and Quickly was apparent in the *Henry IV* plays and the similar opposition of Joan and Talbot characterised *1 Henry VI*, so *3 Henry VI* is characterised by the opposing of Queen Margaret and the Duke of York. Margaret is famous for her unnaturalness, immortalised in York's famous line 'O tiger's heart wrapped in a woman's hide!'.⁴⁷² Such perception of unnaturalness stems from Margaret's decision to divorce herself from Henry, to don armour and become the leader of the Lancastrian army and to fight in the Wars of the Roses for her son's right to the crown from which Henry has disinherited him. Consequently, Margaret is already transgressive but compounds this in I.iv, the molehill scene, in the unrelenting cruelty with which she treats the captured York.

⁴⁷¹ Chillington Rutter, 'Of Tiger's Hearts and Players' Hides', 196.

⁴⁷² *3 Henry VI*, I.iv.138.

In Boyd's production York was presented as a tender family man through his relationship with Rutland. York was seen playing with his son who romped around wearing a paper crown. The perversion of this domestic scene with the murder of the boy began the horror which reached a crescendo in the molehill scene, characterising Margaret as unsympathetic, indeed, monstrous. Textually, during I.iv, Margaret shows York the napkin stained with Rutland's blood⁴⁷³ and crowns him with a paper crown in a mock coronation.⁴⁷⁴ However, in Boyd's production this was exaggerated: York, elbowed to his knees by Clifford, was humiliated by Margaret who forced the bloody handkerchief into his mouth and the now bloodstained paper crown upon his head. The use of Rutland's crown visually recalled the domestic happiness, emphasising the contrast between these players. That Margaret was fighting for her own son's future with such inhumane violence created a greater distance between the character and the audience's sympathy. Responding to York's use of animal terms to describe her – 'She-wolf of France',⁴⁷⁵ 'tiger's heart' – Margaret watched and listened, sometimes crouching, sometimes standing, always unmoved, while York spoke. Howard and Rackin discuss the 'extraordinary venom' that is directed towards Margaret throughout the play, not least here in this scene which is 'largely Shakespeare's invention'.⁴⁷⁶ As Joan is demonised in the final act of *1 Henry VI*, this whole play demonises the character of Margaret, blaming her for usurping the masculine role while fighting for her family. Indeed, Howard and Rackin draw attention to Northumberland's role in this scene, stating that his presence 'as a weeping spectator to Margaret's atrocities invites the audience to recognize the extent of her violation of proper femininity'.⁴⁷⁷ Finally confirming her transgression, Margaret stabbed York in his back before crowing that his

⁴⁷³ *3 Henry VI*, I.iv.80.

⁴⁷⁴ *3 Henry VI*, I.iv.96 SD.

⁴⁷⁵ *3 Henry VI*, I.iv.112.

⁴⁷⁶ Howard and Rackin, *Engendering a Nation*, 94.

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 95.

head should be placed on York gates. This scene would seem to completely demonise Margaret, the perversion of her femininity trumping the factor of her maternal motivation and the fact that she is forced to such lengths by her own husband's effeminacy.⁴⁷⁸

However, in a stark reversal of fortune, Margaret ends *3 Henry VI* 'defeated'.⁴⁷⁹ In Boyd's production Margaret and Prince Edward were dragged onto the stage as prisoners, bound and with sacks over their heads. As the murder of York mirrored and responded to the murder of Joan, so the murder of Prince Edward mirrored and responded to the murder of Rutland. Margaret was left kneeling as she was forced to watch the murder of her son. She cried out and shouted at the young man '[s]peak to thy mother boy!'.⁴⁸⁰ This moment revealed humanity in Margaret which had not previously been apparent, her grief and disbelief finally giving way to anger as she roared 'Butchers! Villains! Bloody animals!'.⁴⁸¹ Her voice was choked as she spoke and she rocked as though physically and emotionally broken. This was an horrific scene, and, as a result of the strength of Stephens' acting, painful to watch. Along with I.iii of *Richard III*, where Margaret spoke her curses while arranging and caressing the skeleton of Prince Edward on the stage, this moment redeemed this incarnation of the martial woman. Howard and Rackin write that Margaret's defeat in *3 Henry VI* 'seems to place her in the feminine subject position which she has so long rejected'⁴⁸² and indeed Margaret's return to the feminine sphere in this scene where she was solely presented as a grief-stricken mother enabled the audience finally to sympathise with her

⁴⁷⁸ It is worth noting that in Henry effeminacy is a bad thing, but the effeminacy of York seen in his relationship with Rutland is not so.

⁴⁷⁹ Howard and Rackin, *Engendering a Nation*, 97.

⁴⁸⁰ *3 Henry VI*, V.v.50.

⁴⁸¹ *3 Henry VI*, V.v.60. This line reads 'Bloody cannibals' in the Oxford text. This emendation would appear to mirror York on the molehill and his description of Margaret.

⁴⁸² Howard and Rackin, *Engendering a Nation*, 97.

and, at this point, not insignificantly, Margaret began to become the figure, trusted by the audience, who represented the history of the cycle, an evolution which came to fruition in *Richard III*.

The women of the history plays have been seen for many years as silent, marginal, even dismissible: even in the moments at which they become powerful and prominent, their assertiveness has been construed and contained as transgression. However, in Boyd's productions the narrative of the women formed an arc across the eight plays through which the female character developed from oppression at the hands of men, to fight back as warrior women, eventually finding a sense of redemption in the cries of Queen Margaret. The women of the second tetralogy are, in terms of narrative progression, insignificant; however, Boyd invested them with a level of agency and independence, often through extratextual stage presence and physical movement or expression. The extensive use of doubling allowed Boyd to create links between these women and those of the first tetralogy. The audience were encouraged to remember the earlier treatment of female characters through the use of ghosting techniques; for example in the arrest of Doll and her comic plea of pregnancy which both foreshadowed and remembered Joan's desperation at the stake. This created a sense of unity through the different women and the sense that their negative treatment built up within each character so that, eventually, the audience were in some way able to feel sympathy for the previously monstrous Margaret as she grieved not only for her son and herself but for every woman who had walked the stage before her. This production, seen in the order of chronological event, offered a presentation of gender, particularly of the women, that challenged the negative presentation that can be found in the text, demonstrating that these threatening women who played the men hid a stronger identity.

The Glorious Moment?

Boyd's cycle of history plays was one of the main theatrical events of this opening decade of the twenty-first century, perhaps even eclipsing the *Complete Works Festival* which showcased it. It was a radical venture by a new artistic director to establish his reign and a new regime – or a return to the old regime – an RSC ensemble tradition. In so doing, *The Histories* provided a project of linked plays that created a coherent whole, a body of work that, as a season, made sense and encouraged patrons to return to the RSC while it underwent a major refurbishment which saw two of its three theatres closed.

Although this chapter has addressed four key points of the cycle – tetralogy thinking, kingship, the supernatural, and gender – the main end of Boyd's production is, I think, coherence. This is the term that has silently underpinned each of these sections as it underpinned the whole of the theatrical cycle. Boyd conceived of this project as a whole octology, and his directorial vision emphasised this, creating links backwards and forwards which supported the notion that these plays worked chronologically together. The use of doubling, ghosting, and foreshadowing underlined and highlighted significant moments: such as the links between the women of the first four plays and those of the second through the characters of Doll Tearsheet and Joan la Pucelle, the return of ghosts to haunt their tormentors and prophesy England's future, and the passing to and fro of the golden crown between kings and usurpers. There were a number of themes expressed through these productions, however, it is the issues that I think were fundamental to Boyd's interpretations that I have studied here but which all ultimately relate to the same issue of providentialism. Unlike the other productions which form the basis of this thesis, Boyd was not concerned with discussing the here and now through Shakespeare's history. Nor was he to any great extent in the

productions concerned with discussing Shakespeare's period or even really the medieval era. Instead, the cycle addressed the issue of time and history, covering a number of time periods in the design of the productions, showing how each period relates to, responds to, and builds upon what has gone before – this extended to the inclusion of extra-textual images to create the sense of a past before *Richard II* began. The kings in these plays then were to some extent at the mercy of another power, in the previous sections I have referred to this as the supernatural, perhaps it is more fitting to conclude that this power is a form of history, an autonomous history with agency to influence and manipulate what happens in its present and future.

Boyd called the final weekend performances of the cycle *The Glorious Moment*; attendees for the full performance were referred to as *Momenteers*: a sense of event and meaning was created around this moment in the Company's history. As I asserted at the opening of this chapter, the cycle of history plays has featured at various moments through the RSC's history. This moment is strikingly different from that which opened the decade showing disunity and disintegration – in contrast it is again the notion of coherence which frames and informs Boyd's production. Where this cycle will fit in the ongoing history of the RSC remains to be seen.

Chapter Five: Staging History at the New Globe

It's the raw, it's the roughness, it's what the Globe, I suppose, is about. It's why you come here ... you could go anywhere else to see Shakespeare and it doesn't have that, it doesn't have the edge.⁴⁸³

The 'edge' that this playgoer talks about after a performance of *1 Henry IV* at the Globe theatre in June 2010 is what scholars have referred to as authenticity. What Shakespeare at other venues apparently lacks is the sense that one is witnessing Shakespeare as it should and was intended to be, apparently unmediated by other hands, coming direct from the Bard himself. As Rob Conkie states when discussing productions at the Globe, the branding of the productions as authentic suggests that what the audience is witnessing is 'the real Shakespeare'.⁴⁸⁴ Shakespeare's history plays have a significant place in the history of the Globe theatre; the original Globe burned down in 1613 during a performance of *Henry VIII* only fourteen years after the theatre had opened.⁴⁸⁵ More recently, the new Globe theatre opened on Bankside with a production of *Henry V* in 1997, and productions of *1 Henry IV* and *2 Henry IV* concluded the opening decade of the twenty-first century. Despite these performances of history plays at the Globe, history is potentially a problematical term when discussing this theatre: whose history, after all, are we talking about? The plays cover medieval kings, the Globe is an Elizabethan theatre, but the productions of the plays are taking place in the twenty-first century. The Globe represents a paradox: new productions of old plays, attempting to uncover how they might originally have been performed. New and old, past and present co-exist in this space. Focussing particularly

⁴⁸³This quotation is taken from a video of audience responses to *1 Henry IV* at the Globe Theatre in June 2010.

Video at <http://www.shakespeares-globe.org/theatre/annualtheatreseason/henryivpart1>. Accessed 16th July 2010.

⁴⁸⁴ Rob Conkie, *The Globe Theatre Project: Shakespeare and Authenticity* (New York, Ontario and Ceredigion Wales: Edwin Mellen Press, 2006), 2.

⁴⁸⁵ The original Globe burned down after wadding from a cannon caught fire during a performance on June 29th 1613. The new Globe company paid tribute to this history by ceremonially dousing the thatch with water before a production of *Henry VIII* in 2010 (<http://www.shakespeares-globe.org/abouttheglobe/latestnews/20100629/6001/>. Last accessed 13th August 2010).

on the 2010 production of Parts One and Two of *Henry IV*, this chapter addresses the Renaissance style production that the Globe offers. However, it is worth noting Christie Carson and Farah Karim-Cooper's reservations regarding this kind of work; they state that

[t]oo many assessments of the work [at the Globe] have been singular in their aims, drawing conclusions about the project as a whole from a viewing of individual performances of a particular production or several productions within one season.⁴⁸⁶

Thus, I will also discuss the past productions of *Henry V* (1997) and *Richard III* (2003) while acknowledging the limitations of this chapter in providing a full exploration of the workings of the Globe theatre.

The new Globe theatre has now been open on Bankside, London for thirteen years, although the project to rebuild Shakespeare's theatre has been ongoing for considerably longer. Sam Wanamaker formally began the present project in the 1970s, but the notion of reconstruction has been traced as far back as William Poel in the nineteenth century.⁴⁸⁷ The new Globe has fostered both excitement and disappointment for scholars, but is only recently beginning to see the publication of book length studies and discussions of what is frequently referred to as an 'experiment' which is taking place in a 'laboratory'.⁴⁸⁸ What writing about the project does reveal though is the initial links between the scholarly and practitioner communities which have now been lost: Carson and Karim-Cooper state in their introduction to a collection of essays about the project that '[t]he Globe theatre has been a disappointment to many scholars. It has not told

⁴⁸⁶ Christie Carson and Farah Karim-Cooper, 'Introduction' in *Shakespeare's Globe: A Theatrical Experiment*, ed. Carson and Karim-Cooper (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 7.

⁴⁸⁷ Franklin J. Hildy notes that in 1897 William Poel 'made the first known drawings of what the Globe theatre may have looked like and proposed to the London County Council that they build it near the original site of Shakespeare's playhouse' (Hildy, 'The "Essence of Globeness"', 15).

⁴⁸⁸ Alan C. Dessen, 'Globe Matters', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 49:2 (Summer, 1998): 195.

It is also worth noting Pauline Kiernan's book, *Staging Shakespeare at the New Globe*, published in 1999, as an early account of productions at the Globe theatre

them what they wanted it to and it has not involved them as they had hoped'.⁴⁸⁹ And as early as 1998, Stephen Orgel described his discomfort in and with the idea of the theatre: in an article titled 'What's the Globe Good For?' Orgel stated that '[n]obody wanted another Globe' as the reason why the theatre had not been rebuilt from the Restoration period until the 1990s.⁴⁹⁰

The Globe project was initially very concerned with authenticity. Franklin J. Hildy, who was involved with the project from 1984, states that the interest in 'authentic reconstruction' came about 'because it forced a level of discipline on the project that had never been attempted before'. Hildy notes that

[p]revious attempts to reconstruct the theatre started with the assumption that concessions had to be made to modern tastes, modern notions of audience comfort and modern building codes. Such concessions became excuses for not attempting to identify, let alone answer, the important questions.⁴⁹¹

The building is as 'authentic' as was possible at the time, and this approach extended into the productions at the theatre: although Sam Wanamaker did not live to see the theatre open, it was his wish that 'at least one production of every season would be as "authentic" as possible'⁴⁹² because 'he argued that live theatre needs the unfamiliar, the frightening'.⁴⁹³ Pauline Kiernan asserts that '[Wanamaker] believed you could only give the classics back their frightening novelty by renewing the original stage and staging'.⁴⁹⁴ This is a controversial point: Wanamaker's notion of 'authenticity' here is about creating something new, using 'authenticity' to rediscover the 'frightening novelty' or newness of old plays. However, authenticity is also about historicism; about touching the past and Shakespeare. Rob Conkie writes about this in terms of 'an

⁴⁸⁹ Carson and Karim-Cooper, 'Introduction', 9.

⁴⁹⁰ Stephen Orgel, 'What's the Globe Good For?', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 49:2 (Summer, 1998), 192.

⁴⁹¹ Hildy, 'The "Essence of Globeness"', 14.

⁴⁹² Pauline Kiernan, *Staging Shakespeare at the New Globe*, (Basingstoke and New York: Macmillan Press, 1999), 95.

⁴⁹³ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

imagined past stability which [acts] as a comforting balance to an ever-changing and anxious present'.⁴⁹⁵ Conkie suggests that authentic productions give a sense of something solid, a past which was more reassuring than the present and which we can access in reality through the Globe. Interestingly, Mark Rylance, the Globe's first artistic director, argued that 'I never call this work authentic' because '[i]t isn't', but that his company sought to use 'known practices that may be helpful to the modern relationship between actor and audience'.⁴⁹⁶ This indicates a contrast between the approach of academics and practitioners to the Globe theatre: academics seem to historicise, whereas Rylance's approach as a practitioner is more concerned with the present nature of theatre.

Thus the issue of staging Shakespeare at the Globe is complex because of intersecting ideas of authenticity, original practices, and the present moment. Conkie considers the mixture of past and present in productions at the theatre, reading the 1997 production of *Henry V* in terms of a football match. Conkie discusses how the Globe project itself is a reflection of current circumstances and concerns, a result of the national need to find some sense of security in a rapidly changing present and looking to the past in order to do that. Crystal Bartolovich lists the developments in society that contributed to a sense of 'perceived threats to authenticity':⁴⁹⁷ she highlights the 1970s as 'after all, a very troubled time for "Englishness"':

[d]ecolonization was virtually complete, the postwar economic boom was winding down, "American" popular culture had made ... vast inroads on what was left of so-called "British" culture, and, most important, post-colonial diaspora had brought a continuous flow of immigrants with different languages,

⁴⁹⁵ Conkie, *The Globe Theatre Project*, 9.

⁴⁹⁶ Mark Rylance, 'Unsex Me Here' *Guardian*, May 7th 2003. Online at www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2003/may/07/theatre.artsfeatures. Last accessed 19th July 2010.

⁴⁹⁷ Conkie, *The Globe Theatre Project*, 10.

customs and appearance to mingle with a population that at least claimed to be homogenous.⁴⁹⁸

This kind of impetus for the Globe theatre suggests a desire for a positive assertion of 'British' culture; the choice of *Henry V* for an opening production shows a nationalistic, perhaps even a xenophobic stance. This was supported by some of the audience responses to the production: Conkie refers to the 'football-fuelled nationalism'⁴⁹⁹ of 1996 which transferred to the yard of the Globe during the production run.⁵⁰⁰ He describes how '[e]ach time Henry arrived on stage he was cheered ... and conversely, each time the French nobles appeared on stage they were booed'.⁵⁰¹ This approach to the French nobles at times threatened real violence from the crowd – at one performance a can was thrown at one of the actors playing a Frenchman. Conkie interprets this action as evidence of the two time periods working together, he writes that 'it is as if the objects are thrown from the past into the present, from an early modern period of aggressive nationalism into a late 1990s Europhobia'.⁵⁰² Conkie thus read the production as creating a space in which past concerns 'rehearsed and endorsed' current feelings.⁵⁰³

This 1997 production, directed by Richard Olivier, was an 'authentic' production.⁵⁰⁴ As one of the earliest performances in the new Globe it was the first experimentation into original practices, how these practices affected playing, and what was considered acceptable in the playing space of the Globe in the late 1990s. The authenticity of this production featured entirely hand-stitched costumes (including the underwear which

⁴⁹⁸ Crystal Bartolovich, 'Shakespeare's Globe?', *Marxist Shakespeares* ed. Jean E. Howard and Scott Cutler Shershow (London: Routledge, 2001), 190.

⁴⁹⁹ Conkie, *The Globe Theatre Project*, 71.

⁵⁰⁰ The European football tournament, Euro '96, was held in England in the summer of 1996.

⁵⁰¹ Conkie, *The Globe Theatre Project*, 73.

⁵⁰² *Ibid.*, 51.

⁵⁰³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁴ Richard Olivier is the son of Sir Laurence Olivier whose film version of *Henry V* began in a mocked up version of the Globe theatre.

performers wore), there was an all-male cast, and reeds were spread over the stage as would have been in the Elizabethan era. To all intents and purposes, this production was as authentic as it could have been with knowledge of Shakespearean practices at the time. Despite this, in her published account of this production, Pauline Kiernan suggests that some issues of original staging were not adhered to as thoroughly as they might have been.⁵⁰⁵ For example, Kiernan writes of the use of scaling ladders at Harfleur in III.i that '[i]n this production the ladder was not used, as it would have been in original performances, for the English soldiers to scale the wall to climb up on to the balcony'.⁵⁰⁶ Although Kiernan does not say why the ladder was not used, that it was not suggests a degree of compromise in the original practices project from one of the first such productions. This evidence of compromise is potentially a problem with the original practices model: as noted earlier, Hildy stated that previous attempts to reconstruct Shakespeare's theatre resulted in concessions being made to 'modern tastes, modern notions of audience comfort and modern building codes'.⁵⁰⁷ Although Hildy suggests that this was not the case for the Globe in fact it was to an extent (concessions had to be made to building codes for health and safety reasons)⁵⁰⁸ and has become so as the project has gone on: although playgoers in the galleries sit on wooden benches, they can now also purchase the loan of a cushion and back rest – this is a concession to comfort and therefore does not create the authentic experience of an Elizabethan playgoer.

⁵⁰⁵ Pauline Kiernan was research associate at the Globe during this production and her account is to a large extent a non-critical account of what happened during the journey of this production from first preparations of the text to the live performances.

⁵⁰⁶ Kiernan, *Staging Shakespeare at the New Globe*, 106.

⁵⁰⁷ Hildy, 'The "Essence of Globeness"', 14.

⁵⁰⁸ In the 'Rebuilding the Globe' section of the theatre's website it states '[a]n additional exit, illuminated signage, fire retardant materials and some modern backstage machinery are all concessions to our times' (<http://www.shakespeares-globe.org/abouttheglobe/background/rebuildingtheglobe/>. Last accessed 13th August 2010).

Further, and possibly more seriously, compromises in the original practices model involve the casting of productions. The 1997 *Henry V* consisted of an all-male cast, as would have been the norm in the late sixteenth-century. However, in 2003, an original practices production of *Richard III* was staged as part of the 'Season of Regime Change'.⁵⁰⁹ Directed by Barry Kyle and featuring Kathryn Hunter in the title role, this production was performed by an all-female cast. The season also included productions of *Richard II* and Christopher Marlowe's *Edward II* which were, in contrast to *Richard III*, performed by all-male casts. Lois Potter points out that there may be 'political significance in the single-gender productions' noting that *Richard II* and *Edward II* are 'plays that question the masculinity of the hero' while *Richard III* is 'perhaps the most macho of the history plays'.⁵¹⁰ However Potter states that 'this message, whatever it may have been, was lost in the general bewilderment at the effect of this casting on the female roles'.⁵¹¹ Potter discusses how the female actors were perceived by reviewers to be better at playing the male rather than the female roles in the production. Using an all-female cast in an original practices production at the Globe theatre seems to negate those practices: it is famously known that women did not act on Shakespeare's stage. There has not been, to date, much academic debate of this issue which suggests that this is a negligible point. However, although there have only been three productions at the Globe which have featured all-female casts (the last being in 2005), I would suggest that the use of female-casts in original practices productions is an anachronism that requires justification. The two parts of *Henry IV* in 2010 consisted of a mixed-gender cast, a feature which indicates the mixture of authenticity and anachronism which seems to increasingly form the 'Renaissance period' production at the Globe.

⁵⁰⁹ This production also included an original practices musical score. In contrast, the score for the 1997 *Henry V* consisted of a mixture of modern and Renaissance music.

⁵¹⁰ Potter, 'English and American Richards, Edwards and Henries', 450.

⁵¹¹ *Ibid.*, 451.

The first impression of the *Henry IV* plays at the new Globe was that the productions were concerned with history: the coats of arms of English aristocratic families adorned all levels of the galleries on banners draped over the rails, and a large banner hung on the stage from a scaffold balcony which bore the royal coat of arms of King Henry IV. For the audience in 2010, as for the original actors of *Henry IV*, this coat of arms was historical, but for the characters portrayed, they were contemporary, introduced at the beginning of the real Henry IV's reign. This is the paradox that greets one when watching history at the Globe. There are a number of layers of time put before the audience which are compounded by how the actors are perceived: they can be twenty-first century actors playing according to original practices, or they can be seen as attempting to inhabit a bygone time, Elizabethan players performing medieval characters: the actors can be perceived to be immersed in history itself. When a history play is being performed this adds a further layer, that of the medieval period. The question therefore also arises of what kind of authenticity is to be sought, whether it is authentic Elizabethan or authentic medieval. Dominic Dromgoole's productions seemed to marry together something of the Elizabethan with something of the twenty-first century and something of the medieval. Both parts of *Henry IV* began not with Shakespeare's text but with the performance of a mummer play on a pageant wagon in the yard before the performance of Shakespeare's play commenced. For *Part One*, this performance involved a randy man with a costume that included a large head mask and a phallus, with a masked ugly woman who wore a pair of sagging breasts over her clothing. The woman claimed that the man had fathered her child, and much Punch-and-Judy style comic action ensued. At the end, a number of the performers approached the stage and removed their mumming costumes before dressing or altering their clothing for their *Henry IV* characters. In *Part One*, demonstrating how the present worked hand in hand with the past, this performance included the request for mobile

phones to be switched off. At the beginning of *Part Two* the mummers' performance told the story of the *Henry IV* plays so far: the demise of Hotspur and Falstaff's role in killing him. The extra-textual business – the pageant wagon, the costuming and the characters – seemed to suggest the type of theatre which Shakespeare's drama grew out of, illustrating a medieval conception of drama. This also placed the *Henry IV* plays in the era in which the story took place. However, mention of mobile phones tied this performance directly to the twenty-first century audience thus highlighting the different levels and conceptions of history which are at play within the new Globe theatre. That Falstaff is perceived as a medieval vice figure and was written of as such in the programme gave this mumming a kind of legitimate presence, while immediately destabilising the concept and expectations of an authentic Globe production of Shakespeare.

However, although history was suggested through the visual emphasis on chivalric heritage and theatrical history, Dromgoole's productions did not respond to the genre of history. This may be a result of the fact that, despite the popularity of such plays on the stage in the 1590s, history as a genre was given to the plays by John Heminges and Henry Condell when they published the first folio in 1623. Although Michael Hattaway suggests that '[Heminges and Condell] confirmed a dramatic genre that Shakespeare himself seems to have endorsed',⁵¹² these plays were not necessarily originally performed under the label of history which may suggest that they are not inherently historical in terms of genre. The idea that the genre, particularly in the second tetralogy, varies between the plays is a well known argument and one that is used to support the notion that Shakespeare did not intend the plays as a coherent cycle. However, we

⁵¹² Michael Hattaway, 'The Shakespearean History Play', in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare's History Plays*, ed. Michael Hattaway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 3.

conceive of and group the plays as such. Nevertheless, in the case of these *Henry IVs* history as a genre seemed to disappear: even Hotspur's discussion of Richard II felt more like a story-so-far report to inform the audience of why he was doing what he was doing now, rather than an engagement with previous events. There was the sense that we may have been observing the past in terms of the design of the performance in the particular building, but the idea of history as an epic national story was not present. Instead, while history seemed to disappear, it was comedy that came to the fore, not least in the presentation of the characters but in extratextual use of songs: the play opened after the mumming with a song '[h]ere's good luck to King Henry', a version of which ('[h]ere's good luck to the Boar's Head') also opened the second half of *Part One*. Falstaff also sang folk songs, as did the ostler. This singing created a benign, gentle atmosphere separate to the political wrangling which dominates the narrative. The use of folk related to the performances on the pageant wagon. Although in terms of overarching theme political history faded, through this use of folk culture there was a sense of roots which grounded the notion of performance within a narrative of time and development.

As argued in the previous chapter, the *Henry IV* plays have traditionally been seen as a star vehicle that showcased a single character. In contrast, Dromgoole's productions were character driven by, to the most extent, three performances: those of Hal, Falstaff, and Hotspur. Rather than focussing on one of these characters, Dromgoole's interpretation showed each to an equal comic extent, underlining the plays as ensemble pieces and highlighting the complexities of the different narratives.

Hotspur, performed by Sam Crane, was slim and weak looking, in contrast to the usual beefy warrior. He presented a petulant teenager, and the suggestion that he had taken

prisoners, never mind that he refused to give them up, was quite hard to believe. Hotspur's responses to Northumberland and Worcester, both of whom were older men, in I.iii showed him to be throwing a childish tantrum. Crane's Hotspur went some way against the trend of the (more recent) performance history of the plays in that he neither spoke with a lisp or speech impediment, nor did he wear spurs at all.⁵¹³ Crane's Hotspur was a character who liked to talk and was unable to stem the flow of his words. H. R. Coursen has highlighted, in his description of Royal Miller's performance of the character for The American Repertory Company in the winter of 1993, how the performance of Hotspur's 'thick speech' can affect the interpretation of the character: Miller '[drove] out those *ws* with an angry stamp of his foot'. Coursen states that '[t]his device of characterization suggested that Hotspur should think before he acts as he must pause before he speaks'.⁵¹⁴ The focus on the *ws* is an influence from Olivier's performance of the part but the fact that a speech impediment was missing from the Globe's Hotspur meant that the inability to stem his words connected to his approach to action, his constant speech perhaps negating his need to act: consequently Hotspur was more hot-air than hot-headed. Crane's Hotspur actually reflected a theme of the play which is more frequently associated with Falstaff; that he was presented, in this case through his name and report, as something he was not. The presentation of Hotspur raises questions about the nature of authenticity: although the original practices approach takes the production values and the audience back to the original moment of the staging of the plays, there is a whole body of performance history which has created ideas of what the play is today. To strip this back seems to do something of a disservice to previous productions: there is an authenticity implicit in the journey that the plays

⁵¹³ When discussing the stammer which Olivier gave his 1945 Hotspur, McMillin states that although 'most reviewers thought Olivier invented it ... Hotspurs had stammered throughout the twentieth century' (27). Even actors such as Michael Redgrave who 'refused to have [a stammer]' still emphasised a difference in Hotspur's speech; in the example of Redgrave, he 'went to the pubs and manor houses of Northumberland in search of a burred "R" two months before opening' (45).

⁵¹⁴ H. R. Coursen, *Shakespeare in Production: Whose History?* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1996), 147.

have taken since their inception. This is something that Coursen touches on as he notes that '[i]t may be that the "intertextualities" of a production are other productions of the same play, and, indeed, the history of that play in performance'.⁵¹⁵

Although Hotspur and Hal are often presented as parallels, more clear in this production of the two parts was the alignment of Hotspur with Pistol: Crane doubled the two. Pistol was presented as a livewire: he was brash and bold in both the volume of his performance and his behaviour. There was a madness about Pistol which seemed to have grown out of Hotspur: in his anger and frustration Hotspur waved his arms around like a cartoon villain and this came to a natural end in the performance of Pistol which channelled Hotspur's energy into drunkenness and lechery.

Dromgoole's production did not emphasise the alignments and oppositions between Hal and Hotspur. Indeed, this Hal seemed more aware of what would be required of him than Hotspur was. Hal had a strong development over the two plays which was, arguably, much clearer than that of Geoffrey Streatfeild in the Boyd productions. Hal began the plays emerging from a trapdoor with his trousers around his ankles following a giggling young woman. It was immediately clear that this was a young man who enjoyed himself; as Lyn Gardner wrote in her review of the productions, Hal was not 'so much sewing [*sic*] his wild oats as harvesting them all in one go, as if already well aware that he hasn't got a lot of time left'.⁵¹⁶ Performed by Jamie Parker, Hal was not a Machiavellian character and he treated the Eastcheap characters as his friends: the 'I know you all'⁵¹⁷ soliloquy was performed with tenderness, as was Hal's uncovering of Falstaff's lies after Gads Hill, rather than revealing a hidden agenda. Indeed, as he

⁵¹⁵ Coursen, *Shakespeare in Production: Whose History?*, 3.

⁵¹⁶ Lyn Gardner, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture/2010/jul/15/henry-iv-parts-one-and-two-review>. Last accessed 15th July 2010.

⁵¹⁷ *1 Henry IV*, 1.ii.192 - 214.

spoke Hal tidied the stage around him, altering the drape of the royal arms, which was hanging awry, as he spoke of his 'reformation'. Such behaviour demonstrated his ease with both worlds. However, it was clear that the worlds of the inn and the court did not mix easily for him: although the low characters were at ease with Hal, he was uncomfortable listening to those characters discussing his family and his royal position. This discomfort was evident, for example, when Hal's inn existence was intruded upon by a messenger sent to him at the Boar's Head; in response to the statement that the messenger had come from his father, Hal shouted 'send him back to my mother'⁵¹⁸ with a degree of anger that shocked the onstage audience.

Hal's understanding of his princely position was clearly evident in his relationships with both Falstaff and his father. The interrogation between Hal and Falstaff was a key moment of the production. Hal's sense of belonging in Eastcheap was suggested by the grandeur of the mock court which was greater than that of the real court, indicated by the use of stage furniture: a chair was placed on top of a table which acted as a throne. Although his soliloquies may suggest otherwise, this grandeur in Eastcheap (the court itself did not have any stage props) presented a merging of the two worlds through Hal's presence there: the suggestion was that Hal would indeed be a different kind of king to Henry IV. Both Falstaff and Hal used a cushion for a crown, and everybody – both the audience and characters, including Hal – found humour in Falstaff's camp and over-acted performance of the Prince. Falstaff's line 'Banish not him thy Harry's company'⁵¹⁹ was an assured request for reassurance from his friend. The moment at which Hal states 'I do, I will'⁵²⁰ is important for the presentation of Hal in the play; the facial expression of the actor can be important in understanding the intention of the line.

⁵¹⁸ *1 Henry IV*, II.v.294.

⁵¹⁹ *1 Henry IV*, II.v.484.

⁵²⁰ *1 Henry IV*, II.v. 486.

However, at the Globe this posed a problem because Hal was seated at an angle, his face obscured from two thirds of the audience, not simply by his body position but also by the pillar. The problem of the pillars is a well-known issue of this theatre space that was encountered very early in the new Globe's existence⁵²¹ and that Parker's face was not visible to many of the audience at this point suggested that all those unable to see him, including myself, were having an authentic Globe experience. The significance of the moment was not lost, but the audience had to trust the ability of the actor and focus on his voice which, after a loaded pause, spoke his future rejection of Falstaff with sadness.

The relationship presented between Hal and Falstaff revealed readings of the characters as individuals rather than of the relationship itself. For example, Hal was tender towards Falstaff, but his transformation to princely warrior was rooted in Hal's alertness to the urgency of the national situation which left Falstaff, who did not want to engage with the serious side of political life, behind. That said, Falstaff did not simply represent the opposite of Henry IV's serious and political position. The complexity of Falstaff was evident, for example, in his relationship with Shallow and Silence: although disengaged from the current political events, Falstaff did not want to drown in nostalgia either. It took a number of lines for Shallow to draw Falstaff into the conversation. Falstaff was initially uncomfortable sitting with the justices, turning away and looking as though he would stand and move to extricate himself from the bore. However, nostalgia eventually won out: Falstaff responded three times to Shallow's '[w]e have heard the chimes at midnight', and each time his '[t]hat we have'⁵²² was

⁵²¹ Kiernan noted that '[t]he *Henry V* actors rapidly discovered that you need to *move* on this stage ... to allow all parts of the audience to see them' and the director of *Henry V*, Richard Olivier, frequently gave notes to his company reminding them to keep moving around the stage because of this issue (106).

⁵²² 2 *Henry IV*, III.ii.211 – 214. Significantly, in the Oxford edition these lines are reversed: Sir John states 'We have heard the chimes at midnight' to which Shallow responds 'That we have'. The changes

spoken with a little more sadness and engagement with the other character. Thus Falstaff was not simply a metaphorical vice figure in opposition to Hal's father as the performances on the pageant wagon (which remained in the yard throughout the two productions) might seem to suggest, rather he was more fully fleshed out, a character more in turmoil with his place in time. This was related to the aging process, growing up and moving on, than a more straightforward opposition between vice and the court, as the reading of Falstaff as medieval vice suggests.

Dromgoole's production highlighted Henry IV's obsession with his own story. Despite his '[weariness] of civil war'⁵²³ and his concerns regarding the rebels, this Henry was presented as a king in charge of himself and largely of his realm. Henry was a strong man, a contrast to Hotspur and the opposite part of Falstaff. Henry was aware of himself in the past, and his disappointments with Hal stemmed from here and his high expectations: this Hal could never live up to his father because so much had been demanded of Henry in usurping Richard II. It may have been Dromgoole's production and its design which was imposed on the Globe architecture, or it may have been the very particular space of the Globe theatre itself, but Henry's continual invocation of the past was more than usually apparent in this production. As a consequence, and related to the notion that Hal was not pretending either in Eastcheap or in the court, it was apparent that Hal's biggest flaw was that he simply did not live up to Henry's expectations of him: Henry could not see Hal's development.

made to who spoke which lines in Dromgoole's production created this sense of Falstaff being drawn into Shallow's reminiscing.

⁵²³ Production programme, 4.

Both productions concluded with the performance of a jig, an original practice which ‘the Globe has made its own’,⁵²⁴ and which filled the role of encore and curtain call for a modern audience. However, for the *Henry IV* plays, these jigs involved a mixture of modern and more traditional dance moves and were performed for comic engagement. In light of this chapter’s discussion about authenticity, it is noteworthy that the Epilogue which concludes *2 Henry IV* was absent. This may have been because the theme of the Epilogue is rather specific and therefore not necessarily appropriate. For example, the first part of the Epilogue reads:

I was lately here in the end of a displeasing play, to pray your patience for it, and to promise you a better. I meant indeed to pay you with this; which, if like an ill venture it come unluckily home, I break, and you, my gentle creditors, lose.⁵²⁵

In this quotation the speaker alludes to a previous play, one which either Shakespeare wrote or the actor speaking appeared in. René Weis, in a note to the Oxford edition of the play, states that because it is unknown which play is being referred to it is not useful to speculate about it.⁵²⁶ However, it is clear that this speech refers to a very specific moment in 1598 which the speaker assumes the audience has knowledge of. Such knowledge is not held by the audience in 2010 and the speech would potentially cause confusion because it has an immediacy about it but comes from 1598. The Epilogue also includes references to the Oldcastle scandal:

If you be not too much cloyed with fat meat, our humble author will continue the story with Sir John in it, and make you merry with fair Katherine of France, where, for anything I know, Falstaff shall die of a sweat, unless already a be killed with your hard opinions. For Oldcastle died martyr, and this is not the man.⁵²⁷

This statement is Shakespeare’s defence, claiming that he has not staged a version of the Protestant martyr Sir John Oldcastle. However, in The Oxford Shakespeare edition of *1 Henry IV* the character of Falstaff cannot be found: the editors claim that ‘[o]ur edition

⁵²⁴ Potter, ‘English and American Richards, Edwards and Henries’, 451.

⁵²⁵ *2 Henry IV*, Epilogue, 7 – 12.

⁵²⁶ René Weis, note to *2 Henry IV*, Epilogue, 8.

⁵²⁷ *2 Henry IV*, Epilogue, 25 – 31.

restores Sir John's original surname for the first time in printed texts⁵²⁸ and thus in the *Dramatis Personae* the character appears as Sir John Oldcastle. Wells and Taylor go on to state that 'there is reason to believe that even after the earliest performances the name 'Oldcastle' was sometimes used on the stage',⁵²⁹ this despite the apparent censorship of Shakespeare's original text.⁵³⁰ However, in Dromgoole's productions Roger Allam played a character called Falstaff: there was no attempt, even in the programme notes, to reference anything of the Oldcastle story in spite of the Oldcastle issue seeming to be potentially fertile ground to explore in a first production of the plays at the Globe theatre.

In some ways such a speech as this Epilogue in the Globe could conceivably create the sensation of eavesdropping on a conversation from the past: the omission of the speech negates that. History was a focus of the plays, however what was focussed on was personal history, particularly aging, within the plays and how that came to shape conflicts and identities within the narrative play-world. The development of Falstaff into an old man with shaking hands who needed physical support from Bardolph as he was rejected by the new King Henry V underlined the production's focus on character history. This had also been a theme of Boyd's productions but in a different manner as those productions revelled in their cyclical references. Dromgoole's productions were concerned with person and personality showing the young making a mark, the regretful middle-aged, the old, and the young cut off in their prime. At the end of this busy decade, both theatrically and socio-politically, these productions presented a sense of

⁵²⁸ Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, *The Oxford Shakespeare* second edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 481.

⁵²⁹ Wells and Taylor, *The Oxford Shakespeare* second edition, 481.

⁵³⁰ There is also evidence to suggest that the names of Peto and Bardolph, which are 'restored' to Harvey and Russell in this text, were censored.

personal development in our ever changing world on a stage that seems to stay the same.



17 L – R: John of Lancaster (Joseph Timms), Henry IV (Oliver Cotton), Hal (Jamie Parker), *1 Henry IV* directed by Dominic Dromgoole, Globe Theatre.



18 Falstaff (Roger Allam) and Hal (Jamie Parker). *1 Henry IV*, directed by Dominic Dromgoole, Globe Theatre.



19 Hotspur (Sam Crane) and Mortimer (Doan Broni, background). *1 Henry IV*, directed by Dominic Dromgoole, Globe Theatre.

Conclusion

As the players to Elsinore act as a chronicle of the time, so this thesis has sought to provide something of a chronicle of the productions of Shakespeare's history plays during the first ten years of the twenty-first century. The decade began with a cycle production by the RSC at Stratford-upon-Avon, and Shakespeare's histories populated English stages at various times throughout the decade. These productions had different aims and outcomes: this thesis has sought to uncover the meanings found in them. I have thus addressed the myriad forms that productions of Shakespeare's history plays have taken – film, adaptation, cycle – and I have discussed the issue of how pertinent these histories are to modern audiences and circumstances.

This thesis has found that a number of layers or levels of history exist within a history production and that it is not a simple task to categorise or theorise about these productions. Attempts to capture the ephemeral stage performance on celluloid, as in the case of Olivier's and Ian MacKellen's productions of *Richard III*, show that the impetus which created a present message may not frame the action in the long term.

A number of productions during this period have used Shakespeare's history plays to comment on or contribute to debates about the present moment. The social and political events of these years, with their power wrangles and international conflicts, have created a situation in which a conduit for finding meaning and expression or debate is necessary. As James Loehlin predicted, Shakespeare's history plays have provided that space. In taking the solid, reassuring, known past of the plays, practitioners have provided a mirror in which audiences can view current situations, such as in Nicholas Hytner's *Henry V* and Sulayman al-Bassam's *Richard III: An Arab Tragedy*.

The two big cycle productions of the decade – the RSC and Northern Broadsides' productions – did not speak to extradiegetic history either present or past. Instead, they focussed on narrative cohesion and, in the case of Boyd's productions, on the intricacies of time and history within the plays. Boyd particularly highlighted the potential for doubling of character, properties, images and sounds in a manner that showed the characters as being at the mercy of an external providential driving force. Boyd's production was a creative interpretation that uncovered the layers of time and history that exist in the plays as a cycle. Rutter's, on the other hand, in placing itself in the rich history of adaptation of the first tetralogy highlighted both the potential for and the problems associated with such adaptation.

The Globe theatre's productions of *Henry IV* have drawn this decade of histories to its conclusion. However, these authentically minded productions have shown how history as the genre seems to be lost. The sense of present meaning can also be absent. However, rather than national history, these productions focused on personal history in terms of growing and developing: a theme which might also be related back to Shakespeare's plays as elements of Elizabethan nation building.

Shakespeare's texts present a potential multitude of meanings. Performance can present any number of these. Some of Shakespeare's histories in production in these ten years have demonstrated the presentist element of scholarly approach. They also provide us with a touch point for future historicist study. In using modern aesthetics and speaking to twenty-first century audiences they have created chronicles, as this thesis has chronicled them.

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