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*Henry VI* in Performance: History, Culture and Shakespeare Reproduced

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Submitted for the degree of PhD  
The University of Warwick  
Department of English and Comparative Literary Studies  
September 1997

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## Acknowledgements

During my research, I have benefited greatly from visits to the Shakespeare Centre and the Shakespeare Institute (both in Stratford), and to the Theatre Museum in London. Sue Evens from the ESC and Katie Mitchell from the RSC have both been generous in answering my queries. In addition to the Warwick University Library, I have also been fortunate in having access to the Manchester John Rylands Library and to the Lancaster University Library. I would like to thank my supervisor Dr. Carol Rutter and everyone else who has helped me with the writing of this thesis - a special mention must be given here to Martin Wright, Gerry Carlin and, for her truly heroic patience, Debbie Williams - who makes it all worthwhile.

## Summary of Thesis

The long-neglected *Henry VI* plays have been 'rediscovered' by a number of post-war productions which have found new ways of bringing Shakespeare's civil war plays to modern audiences. *The Wars of the Roses*, directed by Peter Hall and adapted by Hall and John Barton, established the theatrical vitality of the plays and defined them for a generation as 'national' dramas. I argue that many of the most important and mythologised aspects of that production were contingent upon the difficult situation of the RSC in the early 1960s and that, in fact, the 'tradition' of playing the *Henry VI* plays as national dramas is an invented one, based upon the Tillyardian interpretation of them as 'matter of England' plays. Nevertheless, *The Wars of the Roses* has cast a massive shadow over subsequent productions of the *Henry VI* plays. Most notably, two productions in the late 1980s - the RSC's *The Plantagenets* and the ESC's *The Wars of the Roses* - were virtual revivals of the 1963 productions whilst even those that, at the time, seemed to be reacting against Hall and Barton - the RSC's trilogy of 1977 and the BBC's tetralogy of 1981/3 - in fact bore their influence in that they staged the plays as 'matter of England' productions. 'England' took on a different meaning however after the election of the Conservative Government in 1979. Mrs. Thatcher introduced market ideologies into the funding of theatres and this forced rapid, radical and often unwelcome changes to the culture of the large theatres: England became a divided and contested site and rubbed against the resolution that Hall and Barton had sought in 1963. In the third chapter, I will examine in detail three 1980s productions which were shaped by this situation, but also responded to, engaged with, and attempted to subvert the Thatcherite appropriation of national identity. Finally, I argue that all of these performances exhibit a deep anxiety about social changes and about the role of Shakespearean theatre within these changes.

## Introduction

In this study of the *Henry VI* plays in performance, I am going to be concentrating upon the plays' performances in the 1980s, examining the ideological, economic and cultural context of their production, and the nature of their engagements with society. In particular, I am going to focus upon issues of history and culture, as they intersect with discourses of national identity. I am going to argue that the *Henry VI* plays have a special function in the modern construction of Shakespeare as the 'national poet', in that - because of questions over the plays' authorship and their perceived shortcomings in relation to Shakespeare's other plays - their interest in the loss of empire and civil war runs against established ideas of who Shakespeare is, and what kind of nation he speaks to in his work. For these very reasons, the plays have often been adapted and restructured in performance, so that these 'anomalous' works can be resolved into a unified reproduction of Shakespeare for contemporary society. The performance of the *Henry VI* plays, then, has an ambiguous status, in that it both affirms established ideas of Shakespeare, and at the same time brings under inspection the very texts which might undermine or challenge easy assumptions about Shakespeare as the national poet.

In my studies of *Henry VI*'s various performances, I am going to talk about boundaries and wars, to think about the idea that representations of war, as theatre, history and reporting, are representations also of society/culture at the edges of its existence, physically and psychically. Each of the performances studied looks to contemporary conflicts both as a way of constructing a modern vocabulary for the

performance of Shakespeare's war, but also as a way of engaging with the meaning of war in terms of history, culture and national identity. A war is conducted at the boundary, or what has become the boundary, of a national existence that is equivocally physical and ideological. When there is a war, there are contrary forces at work, because a war, or a conflict, can reinforce national identity at the same time that it is deeply questioned. The provocation of these opposites is not so surprising if war is considered as a forceful moment of history, where a society is dragged to the precipice and made to look down, to confront the partiality of its existence, the brutality it is capable of, or the precariousness of its being. The only sane thing to do in the face of such realisation is to completely deny it, and victory gives a convenient opportunity to do this, to reinforce the apparent reality of the victors. Such circulate our defeats and question our victories. The *Henry VI* plays are about both victory and defeat: they are about the victory of English imperialism in mastering France (the outer-reaches of its territory) and they trace the consequences of the loss of that territory. The story begins with France, it ends without it; the major action of the first play is the heroic defence of national boundaries, the second and third plays show us these boundaries closing in, until the brutality, farce and indignity of the battlefield is brought to parliament, to the throne. The edge, the precipice, which lay in France, is brought to the centre of the ideological territory of England. Structures unravel, meaning and history are contested, heroes turn into psychopaths (Young Clifford, Young Richard), bodies are mutilated, fathers kill sons, sons kill fathers, and the monarch is a helpless and passive onlooker, his throne turned to a mound, his heritage and his legacy vanished, order replaced by insanity, everything broken.

In both the plays and their performance, war is ambiguous: in the course of the war, national identity is challenged (both literally and ideologically) but war can also be a focus point for a nation looking for an identity: the aggressor supplies the role of the differentiated 'other' whilst the shared threat of invasion and penetration offers the necessary cohesive bond, the common purpose, vital to sustaining the ideology of a united people. Without such intense moments of social being, shared identity runs the risk of atrophy, dashed on the rocks of a prolonged ennui. It was a commonplace of sixteenth century *Realpolitique* that an aggressive war was a reliable way to rally an uncertain and divisive state around a fresh young prince. The returns of engagement are questionable and transitory, though, for the act of

engagement is also an intense moment of scrutiny. The nation's identity, made conscious, is also brought forth, revealed, put on show and contrasted with the actual, very anti-social horrors of the battlefield. On the battlefield, the body - the sacrosanct metaphor of western society - is mutilated, destroyed, its identity broken and discarded, its normal right to burial and remembrance put in severe jeopardy. So, the moment of extreme representation provokes a counter reaction, an inspection of that identity, made possible by the grim realities of the battlefield, the personal losses, the mechanisation and depersonalisation of the human body, and the disruption of normal social order.

The theatre critic J. C. Trewin once wrote that the *Henry VI* plays have never been popular and that 'the provinces in general never took to *Henry VI*, any part, any battle.'<sup>1</sup> However, in its own day, *Part One* at least was popular, as Thomas Nashe tells us that 'ten thousand spectators at least (at several times)' shed tears over Talbot's death.<sup>2</sup> Nashe may be exaggerating, but his comment is borne out by the entry for a play called '*harej the vi*' in the diary of Philip Henslowe (who owned and ran the Rose Theatre) in 1592, which shows that it was played 15 times that year, to apparently large audiences, and was revived the following year.<sup>3</sup> However, the next three hundred and fifty years saw less than 15 productions of the plays in this country, and many of those were reworkings and adaptations. Productions were so rare that, when Sir Barry Jackson produced the three plays at the Birmingham Rep in the 1950s, he fondly recalled memories of the 1906 productions at Stratford, and took it for granted that audiences were unlikely to see

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<sup>1</sup> This quote is from Trewin's *Going to Shakespeare* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1978), p. 23.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by Michael Hattaway in his introduction to *The First Part of King Henry VI*, *The New Cambridge Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 34.

<sup>3</sup> It should not be taken for granted that *harej the vi* was Shakespeare's play, although this is the view that is generally held now. Hattaway argues that it was unlikely that there were rival *Henry VI* plays and points out that Nashe's *Pierce Penniless* is dedicated to Lord Strange and contains an encomium of Edward Alleyn, the leading player in Lord Strange's *Men at the time* (however, Nashe may not be referring to Shakespeare's play either, if there was a rival play). Cairncross, however, argues that the case for *harej the vi* is 'extremely doubtful', arguing that Shakespeare had no connection with Strange's (pp. xxxii-xxxiii). Recently, David Bradley has lent support to Cairncross' position: in *From Text to Performance in the Elizabethan Theatre: Preparing the Play for the Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), Bradley points out that *Part One* needs at least 25 actors to fill its cast and therefore cannot have been produced by Henslowe. However, our knowledge of the Elizabethan theatre (as the archaeological work on the Rose theatre has shown) is not nearly so certain for such a statement to be definitive. We would be best to follow Hattaway in calling the theory a 'very reasonable conjecture.' (Hattaway, *The First Part*, p. 36).



them again in his lifetime.<sup>4</sup> However, since Jackson's remarks, there have been six productions in Britain, and many more abroad; there have also been (remarkably) no less than four television performances. In the latter half of the twentieth century, the *Henry VI* plays have been reassessed both in performance and in critical studies: to use a word which has been used a lot in association with the plays, they have been 'rediscovered' by the twentieth century.

Sir Barry Jackson's productions (directed by Douglas Seale) were themselves extremely influential; although at the time Peter Hall criticised them, he was later to admit that Jackson and Seale's work inspired him to mount a production of the plays at the relatively young Royal Shakespeare Company.<sup>5</sup> Hall first pressed Peter Brook to direct the plays, but eventually took the project on himself.<sup>6</sup> Hall drafted in John Barton to prepare a two-part version of the trilogy and played them as a complete work with *Richard III*: this was *The Wars of the Roses* which opened in Stratford in 1963.<sup>7</sup> The production was an astonishing success: there was heated debate about the 'literary heresy' of adapting, restructuring and even adding to Shakespeare's work, but the production's modern themes introduced new ways of approaching Shakespeare in performance. The production had a massive influence abroad too: productions followed in America, in France (directed by Jean-Louis Barrault), in Italy (by Giorgio Strehler) and in Germany (by Peter Palitzch), all of which copied Hall and Barton's methods<sup>8</sup> - the two had found a way of playing the plays that cut through the perceived obscurity and amateurishness of the plays and made them speak to

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<sup>4</sup> See Sir Barry Jackson's discussion of the production in 'On Producing *Henry VI*', *Shakespeare Survey* 6 (1953), pp. 49-52, p. 49.

<sup>5</sup>In his 1970 introduction to the published scripts of *The Wars of the Roses: adapted for the Royal Shakespeare Company from William Shakespeare's 'Henry VI Parts I, II, III and Richard III*, by John Barton and Peter Hall (London: BBC, 1970), Hall remembers two previous performances (by which he means the Birmingham Rep productions and their revival at the Old Vic) as 'a mess of angry and undifferentiated barons, thrashing about in a mess of diffuse narrative' (p. vii). However, in his recent autobiography *Making an Exhibition of Myself* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1993), Hall praises those same productions for their 'narrative muscularity' (p. 174).

<sup>6</sup>*The Wars of the Roses*, p. ix: '... I tried unsuccessfully on several occasions to get Peter Brook to work on it. He refused, not because he disliked the material, but because he thought it needed three years of detailed work.'

<sup>7</sup>Hall later added Shakespeare's other history plays to *The Wars of the Roses*: however, in this study I am using the title to refer to the adaptation of the first tetralogy.

<sup>8</sup>An unfortunate omission of this study has been international performances of *Henry VI*. For more details of these productions, see Dennis Kennedy's *Foreign Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), which actually has a photograph from the Palitzch production on its cover; and also *Shakespeare Around the Globe: A Guide to Notable Post-War Revivals* (London: Greenwood Press, 1986).

modern audiences: to the audiences of 1963, it seemed as if a whole new Shakespearean work had been discovered.

In 1977, the RSC revived the plays again, this time under the direction of Terry Hands. Hands approached the works with the view that Hall and Barton had got it wrong: that the *Henry VI* plays are by Shakespeare and no adaptation is necessary. To make the point, Hands' productions made hardly any cuts to the plays, not even to the normal extent in the theatre. In 1981, Jane Howell was commissioned to direct the plays for a *Henry VI-Richard III* season in the BBC Shakespeare Series to be broadcast in 1983. This too made only minor cuts to the plays. Hands and Howell's work won both popular audiences and critical praise. However, in 1987 the English Shakespeare Company, as part of its huge seven play history cycle *The Wars of the Roses*, revived the practices of Hall and Barton, cutting the three plays into two and playing them in cycle with other history plays. The following year, the RSC responded to what it may have seen as an encroachment upon its territory (up to this point, the RSC were the only theatrical company to have staged the plays since the 1950s) with Adrian Noble's *The Plantagenets*, which also followed Hall and Barton in adapting the plays and playing them alongside *Richard III*.<sup>9</sup>

## II

This thesis began primarily as a study of the performance of Shakespeare's *Henry VI* plays in the 1980s; however, it subsequently widened to include the two 'landmark' productions by the RSC that preceded them (that is the Hands' productions of 1977-79 and especially the Hall-Barton productions of 1963-65).

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<sup>9</sup>The main sources for this stage history are Judith Hinchcliffe's *King Henry VI, Parts 1, 2, and 3: An Annotated Bibliography* (New York: Garland Press, 1984); Dennis Burden's 'Shakespeare's History Plays 1952-1983' *Shakespeare Survey* 38 (1985), pp. 1-18; Lawrence V. Ryan's, 'Henry VI on Stage and Screen' in *Henry VI 1, 2 and 3*, The Signet Classic Shakespeare Series, ed. by Lawrence V. Ryan, Arthur Freeman and Milton Crane (New York and Ontario: New American Library, 1989), pp. 230-250; Robert Speaight's *Shakespeare on the Stage: an Illustrated History of Shakespearean Performance* (London: Collins, 1973); and Michael Hattaway's 'Shakespeare's Histories: The Politics of Recent Productions' in *Shakespeare in the New Europe*, edited by Hattaway, Sokolova and Roper (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), pp. 351-369. General studies of Shakespeare in performance have also informed this study: see in particular Ralph Berry's *On Directing Shakespeare* (London: Croom Helm, 1977); John Russell Brown's *Shakespeare's Plays in Performance* (London: Edward Arnold, 1966) and 'The Politics of Shakespearean Production', *Shakespeare Survey* 44 (1992), pp. 91-104; Richard David, *Shakespeare in the Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978); and Dennis Kennedy's *Looking at Shakespeare: A Visual History of the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

The concentration of the thesis remains with those 1980s productions, with the work of Hands and Hall being primarily studied from the point of view of their influence on subsequent performances. This means that, whilst reference to the actual performance of the Hands and Hall productions is not precluded, I have generally focused upon more general 'production' issues, such as the preparation of the script, the marketing of the productions, their role in the shaping of the institution of the RSC and their subsequent place in both theatre history and RSC mythology. I believe that this is legitimate, both because the influence of both productions resides primarily in these areas (during the course of my research, I have found very few of *Henry VI*s later interpreters who actually saw either Hall or Hands' production - yet, if only through reputation, they were influenced by them) and because both productions have already been extremely well documented, in both dissertations of this kind and in published academic volumes.<sup>10</sup> Both of these productions have cast a significant shadow over all subsequent performances of the plays, both in Britain and beyond. *The Wars of the Roses* was the first production of the *Henry VI* plays to attract both popular audiences and critical acclaim; the production has subsequently been mythologised as the RSC's 'founding' work and it has continued to exercise critical minds. In a recent work on RSC history productions, Robert Shaughnessy describes the production as 'haunting' critical writing - the spectre of *The Wars of the Roses* has haunted the theatre too.<sup>11</sup> It established some very significant precedents for the playing of the *Henry VI* plays and, as I argue in Chapter One, the most important of these is the interpretation of the plays as epic, national dramas or as an 'English *Oresteia*.' All of the productions mounted in the 1980s returned to this idea as an implicit assumption about the kind of plays Shakespeare had written: however, as Chapter One aims to show, this idea of the *Henry VI* plays as a single, national work was an interpretation that Hall and Barton invented for their own purposes.

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<sup>10</sup> The same might also be said of Jane Howell's BBC productions. In Chapter 2, I consider Howell alongside Hands, as the two productions are in many ways a part of the same cultural and theatrical 'moment.' However, there is also a lot of value in considering Howell alongside Bogdanov and Noble, thereby situating her work within the discourses and debates of the 1980s. Although there has been much written about Howell's productions, to my knowledge none of them have examined them in relation to later productions of *Henry VI*.

<sup>11</sup> This is from *Representing Shakespeare: England, History and the RSC* (London and New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994), p. 41.

The rediscovery in the theatre of the national poet's great national drama was closely bound up with the rise of the National Theatre in the 1960s, and the RSC's efforts to define itself as a second national theatre. This invention had nevertheless become a tradition by the 1980s - however, by showing that this reading of the plays was contingent upon specific institutional circumstances in the early 1960s, I can then locate these subsequent performances of *Henry VI* as national dramas in the historical and cultural context of the 1980s. When we examine the period of the 1980s in more depth, we will find that 'nation' and 'national identity' were important and controversial areas of contestation and of struggle between opposing ideologies. An important factor in this was the appropriation of national identity (including Shakespeare and English history) by the prime minister Margaret Thatcher. Mrs. Thatcher's political ideology, which was based on an idealisation of market forces, extended to the theatre, which experienced rapid and sometimes traumatic changes to its institutional and economics structures at this time. It would be too easy to simply look at the way that these performances viewed the 1980s, as if they were looking out onto society as neutral observers: however, these productions were very much a part of the culture of the 1980s and have to be seen as products of that era, as well as interventions within its national discourses. For this reason, this study begins by establishing the institutional context of theatrical production, looking at the kind of forces and pressures which shaped performances; the reasons that they were performed; the idea of the play held by the director; the development of the script and the ideological nature of the adaptation process; how they were sold to the general public and how they have been subsequently recorded and interpreted in critical and historical accounts.

An important assumption of this thesis is that there are always two audiences for a theatrical production: there is, of course, the physical, present audience which the performance directly addresses; but beyond that, there is also the general public or - to put it romantically - the nation, which learns about these performances through newspapers, promotional activities and official publications (such as the publication of the script for general consultation). This is especially true when the production is styled as an 'event' which embodies core values of the institution, or works as part of the negotiation between theatre and society. In the case of the *Henry VI* plays, the scale of producing three plays of this size and narrative complexity has meant that their performance have nearly always been events accompanied by discussion,

debate and occasionally outrage. These events have had an important ideological role in the shaping of the RSC and of other alternative national theatres such as the ESC. However, it is not necessarily the case that the 'performance' audience is receiving the same messages as the public, 'production' audience - where productions like *The Wars of the Roses* seem to be, in their production apparatus, essentially conservative, in the actual moment of performance, all manner of contradictions and subversions can be exhibited. The performance of 'national dramas' then has an interesting and problematic place in 1980s culture, as it both intersected with political appropriations and reproductions of national identity and of Shakespeare, whilst at the same time was itself being transformed, inevitably and inexorably, by the business culture which Mrs. Thatcher enforced upon the theatrical establishment.

### III

It is necessary at this point to say a word or two about the methodological procedures of this practice. First of all, I will deal with some specific problems that arise from a study of this kind, then I will discuss in more broad terms the kind of approach I have adopted towards what might be termed a cultural study of theatrical production and performance, and the theories and analysis which have shaped and influenced my thinking.

The study of performance texts has some peculiar problems which are not usually encountered in the study of literary texts. First of all, there is the problem of access - a literary text may be historicised, but a performance text exists only in history, it is not available now for us to consult and examine. Rather, performance has to be reconstructed through the study of first hand accounts, reviews, critical studies, audio and video recordings, prompt books and other supporting documentary evidence. There is inevitably some historical labour involved in stage history - we actually have to agree on what the performance is before we can make judgements about its wider context. Now, the manner of reconstruction gives rise to all sorts of problems which are not simple to address. The growing practice of recording performances on video has certainly helped to reduce some of the problems involved although, as Lennart Nyberg points out,

there are problems involved with video tapes too.<sup>12</sup> First of all, a video is only of one performance and will often be of poor quality and fixed in a single position above the audience - this is certainly the case with RSC archive videos. Nyberg questions the validity of such videos, arguing that they mislead us into thinking we have the performance when in fact all we have is another account of which is in itself subjective. However, whilst I recognise Nyberg's concerns, I am not convinced that they detract from the value of video tapes as documentary evidence. Videos cannot be taken as *definitive* records of performance, but they may well be taken as *typical* performances. Video provides something that no documentary evidence can - detail, and lots of it. Nyberg is right to caution us - it is important to know the context of the video recording to be able to ascertain its reliability and how to use it. However, Nyberg is being naïve if he imagines that the same is not true of all historical evidence. In fact, it is sometimes much harder to ascertain how reliable a promptbook is - the neat and tidy prompt books for the ESC productions held by the Theatre Museum are, for example, clearly not representative of a production which changed much over its two year run. The evidence archived by the Theatre Museum and the Shakespeare Centre is also idealised or fragmentary in what directors choose to make available to them. Consequently, I have relied heavily on videos in this thesis, in conjunction with my own recollections of performances that I have seen. This information is supplemented by references to reviews, to critical studies and to other documentary evidence such as prompt books and published scripts. The problem of variations between specific performances or indeed between specific theatres (for example, the ESC productions played in many different theatres, whilst all of the RSC productions had seasons in both Stratford and London) is not easy to address in a study of this nature; however, I believe that in relation to the cultural contexts in which I am situating the *Henry VI* plays' performance within, my presentation of the performances is generally accurate.

In a recent essay, Jonathan Bate writes that theatre and performance studies have moved on from the older kinds of stage histories which 'tended to consist of dry catalogues of performance details and snippets from reviews.' Nowadays, stage history draws on all kinds of evidence 'in order to demonstrate

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<sup>12</sup> Lennart Nyberg, *The Shakespearean Ideal: Shakespearean Production and the Modern Theatre in Britain* (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wishell, 1988), pp. 8-10.

how the history of Shakespeare on the stage has always been bound up with wider histories and broader changes.<sup>13</sup> Publishing series devoted to stage history - notably Manchester University Press's important *Shakespeare in Performance* series - have raised the profile of stage history in Shakespeare studies and emphasised that Shakespeare wrote primarily for the stage: one consequence of this is that it is almost mandatory now for modern editions of Shakespeare's plays to contain stage histories, and more and more academic works are including performance details in otherwise standard academic studies of the plays. Barbara Hodgdon's *The End Crowns All: Closure and Contradiction in Shakespeare's History Plays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), which explores closure in Shakespeare's history plays, makes it a part of the book's methodology to include performance as a critical tool, whilst Donald G. Watson's *Shakespeare's Early History Plays: Politics at Play on the Elizabethan Stage* (London: Macmillan, 1990) is a less satisfactory attempt to do the same. It cannot be said that either work is entirely successful in this and in my view Shakespeare studies has yet to find a way of bringing performance criticism and academic criticism together convincingly - nevertheless there is a growing acceptance of the need to register the performance dimension of Shakespeare's plays and this has extremely important implications for stage history: as academics and critics are deploying stage history in new ways, stage history itself must find new ways of not only describing performance, but of locating it within wider historical and cultural contexts.

The stage history of the *Henry VI* plays have particularly benefited from this kind of work. These plays are unusual in that their performances have directly driven academic thinking: *The Wars of the Roses* was responsible for changing a lot of minds about the *Henry VI* plays' quality, and the years since 1963 have seen the *Henry VI* plays rise in status in academic works, as they have come to be seen not as apprentice work but as an extremely sophisticated example of late Elizabethan stagecraft, and as significant, even 'great' works in their own right.<sup>14</sup> Of more significance though is the way that critical and

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<sup>13</sup> This is from Bate's introduction to *Shakespeare: An Illustrated Stage History*, edited by Bate and Russell Jackson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. v.

<sup>14</sup> For a selective bibliography of critical works on the *Henry VI* plays, see Michael Hattaway's 'The First Tetralogy and *King John*' in *Shakespeare: A Bibliographic Guide*, edited by Stanley Wells (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 321-336.

cultural studies have fed back into stage history. The *Henry VI* plays have in particular attracted the attention of cultural materialist writing. *Political Shakespeare*, the seminal work of Shakespearean cultural materialism contains two articles, by Alan Sinfield and Graham Holderness, which focus upon performances of *Henry VI*.<sup>15</sup> Sinfield explores the ideological structures of Hall and Barton's adaptation, exposing their reactionary sentiments and locating the production within the 'culturist' investment in what Sinfield calls 'welfare capitalism.' Holderness studies Jane Howell's BBC productions, arguing that their success shows how television can transform and relegitimate Shakespeare's plays. More recently, the cultural materialist approach to Shakespeare in performance has intersected with the increasing theoretical sophistication of 'performance criticism.' A recent volume of essays edited by James C. Bulman, *Shakespeare, Theory and Performance* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996) has significantly raised the stakes for the study of performance by introducing modern critical perspectives such as deconstruction, semiotics and feminism to the discourse of stage history. Another significant work is Susan Bennet's *Performing Nostalgia: Shifting Shakespeare and the Contemporary Past* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996) which explores the performance of Shakespeare as 'a particularly conspicuous site for ... obsessions with a dead past.' (p. 21). These theoretical engagements with performance have included Shakespeare's history plays. In *The End Crowns All*, Hodgdon uses a theoretical approach to performances of the *Henry VI* plays and Hodgdon's subsequent volume for the *Shakespeare in Performance* series (on *Henry IV Part Two*) has been notable in introducing theory into the critical discussion of Shakespearean performance, and in so doing raising the stakes for stage history.<sup>16</sup> Robert Shaughnessy's *Representing Shakespeare* brings stage history, cultural materialism and performance history together in a study of the representation of Shakespeare and history in RSC productions of the history plays: like Hodgdon,

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<sup>15</sup> The articles are Alan Sinfield's 'Royal Shakespeare: Theatre and the Making of Ideology', in *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism*, 2nd edition, edited by Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), pp. 182-205; and Graham Holderness' 'Radical Potentiality and Institutional Closure: Shakespeare in Film and Television', in *Political Shakespeare*, edited by Sinfield and Dollimore, pp. 206-225.

<sup>16</sup> *Shakespeare in Performance: Henry IV, Part Two* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1993).



Shaughnessy employs modern methods, addressing theoretical ideas to the study of performance and locating performance within its historical context.

My approach to these performance has (perhaps inevitably) been shaped by the nature of my reading. It seems to me that, after Sinfield's important essay, it would be wrong to ignore the institutional context of production. However, most cultural materialist studies have been contained within the limited confines of articles: there has yet to be a major book on Shakespearean performance from a cultural materialist position. (Shaughnessy's book is spread too thinly over a large number of productions). Consequently, Sinfield and Holderness tend to make generalisations, and arrive at simplistic conclusions about the politics of performance without drawing out the complexities and contradictions which actually emerge in performance. However, valuable as these studies are in clarifying the historical location of performance, they do not acknowledge the diversity of the performance experience: after all, a performance is not the work of one person or the product of one mind, it is a heterogeneous, multi-vocal transaction with an equally heterogeneous audience. In books such as the *Players of Shakespeare* series and Carol Rutter's *Clamorous Voices: Shakespeare's Women Today* (London: The Women's Press, 1988), actors give their own accounts, thoughts, and ideas about the parts they have played (in both books, the focus is on the RSC).<sup>17</sup> In doing so, it is quite clear that there is not always continuity between actor and director and Rutter's book in particular highlights the conflicts between female actresses and male directors in interpreting Shakespeare's women. In *Players of Shakespeare 3*, Penny Downie describes how, in *The Plantagenets*, her first scene as Margaret, in which she picked her way through the devastation of France, was based upon Dresden after its bombing - this was a provocative and unexpected association (which highlights Britain as violent and destructive in war, rather than heroic) for a production that has generally been regarded as extremely conservative.<sup>18</sup> So, to follow the cultural materialist line only takes us so far in understanding the nature and effect of performance. The closest we have come to a work which bridges the

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<sup>17</sup> The *Players of Shakespeare* series is published by Cambridge University Press. The most recent volume, *Players of Shakespeare 3*, edited by Robert Smallwood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) refers extensively to *The Plantagenets*.

<sup>18</sup> Downie discusses this in her article 'Queen Margaret in *Henry VI* and *Richard III*' in *Players of Shakespeare 3*, edited by Smallwood, pp. 114-139.

gap between the study of institution and the study of performance is Susan Willis' *The BBC Shakespeare Plays: Making the Televised Canon* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991). Willis manages to both depict the institutional and production issues of the series whilst seeing the value and the subversions of the actual performances. Willis' work is a significant challenge to those who would dismiss the series as being naively conservative and restricted by commercial considerations.

Another critical development which has influenced this study, especially in the period of writing, has been the growing interest in issues of nation and national identity with regards to Shakespeare: these have explored how Shakespeare has been appropriated to national discourses in both this country and others; how he has been used in education and in the theatre to either construct and legitimate ideas of nation, or (equally) to challenge such ideas; and how Shakespeare's own works can be situated at the emergence of the English nation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Most studies have been directed at exposing the ideological processes underlying Shakespeare's various reproductions as the national poet. Jean E. Howard and Marion F. O'Connor's edited volume of essays *Shakespeare Reproduced: The Text in History and Ideology* (London: Methuen, 1987), Gary Taylor's *Reinventing Shakespeare: A Cultural History from the Restoration to the Present* (London: Hogarth Press, 1990), and *The Shakespeare Myth*, edited by Graham Holderness (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), have focused critical interest on the way that Shakespeare has been constructed as the national poet and explored both the ideology of these appropriations, and suggested a re-appropriation of Shakespeare as a subversive figure whose works disclose the contradictions in the ideology of the ruling classes. These general studies of 'Shakespeare reproduced' have lately been more focused upon issues of national identity. Graham Holderness's article "'What ish my nation?': Shakespeare and National Identities" (in *Textual Practice* vol. 5 no. 1 (Spring 1991), pp. 80-99) foregrounds this idea and explores Shakespeare as a 'point of origin' of national identity, which is also open to invasion and re-territorialising. Following the end of the 'cold war', the political re-landscaping of Europe (including the collapse of the Soviet Union, East Germany and Yugoslavia) has focused minds upon the nation-state as a constructed political entity - particularly as tribalism and globalism have challenged the nation-state as the prevailing political form of Western societies. The moves towards European integration has also helped to shape new investigations.

*Shakespeare in the New Europe* reflects this new area of Shakespeare studies, containing an important essay by Jonathan Bate called 'Shakespearean Nationhoods' (pp. 112-119) in which Bate asks, "What is my nation? What if Shakespeare asked that question now? I would reply that his has been many nations and can potentially be every nation' (p. 115). More recently, a volume of essays edited by John J. Joughin, *Shakespeare and National Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997) has explored a variety of issues regarding national culture and 'transnational' cultures. Joughin argues that the 'Shakespearean mediation of the national is very much part of our persistent need to situate the past in order to comprehend the present.' However, 'amidst this process of re-appropriations, just as Shakespeare has been co-opted to secure nationalism, then he has also continued to contest and transform it in complex and contradictory ways' (pp. 1-2). Inevitably, the new interest in national identity - which, as Joughin points out, inevitably involves a relationship with and a writing of the past - has returned to Shakespeare's history plays in order to explore both how Shakespeare explored national identity in his time and how those histories have subsequently been reappropriated in political, literary and theatrical discourse. Jean E. Howard and Phyllis Rackin recently published *Engendering the Nation: A Feminist Account of Shakespeare's English Histories* (London: Routledge, 1997) on Shakespeare's history plays; Holderness has written on both Branagh's film of *Henry V* (in "What is my Nation?") and the BBC Shakespeare Series' *Henry VIs* (in 'Radical Potentiality'); and both *Shakespeare in the New Europe* and *Shakespeare and National Culture* contain articles which discuss Shakespeare's history plays on the stage.<sup>19</sup>

An important ambiguity which runs through many of these studies is the question of what or who the nation actually is in this country. Britain has several political formations: there is Great Britain, an imperial nation; there is also the United Kingdom, a conglomeration of separate nations and principalities; and there is also England, whose national identity is often confused with or indeed defines Great Britain. This circularity and its politics has brought its own kind of criticisms: as Shakespeare is both the English national poet and the poet of the British Empire, his appropriations blur the boundaries between the two, and lead to confusions which some see as a form of literary and cultural imperialism. However, the other

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<sup>19</sup> These essays are Michael Hattaway's 'Shakespeare's Histories' and Richard Wilson's 'Nato's Pharmacy: Shakespeare by Prescription' in *Shakespeare and National Culture*, pp. 58-80.

side of this is that the close identification with the union and with the empire has left post-imperial England - with Scotland, Wales and Ireland struggling to establish their own unique identity - struggling to find its own ethnicity, its own unique national voice. In the theatre, the contrast is neatly embodied by the contrasting companies the Royal Shakespeare Company and the English Shakespeare Company. A dissertation by Elizabeth S. C. Brandow hits the nail on the head with its clever title, 'History, Royal or English?'<sup>20</sup> As we shall see, the ESC's project was concentrated upon recovering a uniquely English cultural identity which would tap into the same kind of energies being rediscovered by re-emergent nations such as Ireland and countries in Eastern Europe. However, the RSC responded with *The Plantagenets*, in which English culture is equated with British national culture. As this kind of study shows, these categories of England and Britain are sites of contestation: they are broadly defined and often overlap. In this study, I have adopted the practice of concentrating upon English national identity, exploring the role of Shakespeare and the *Henry VI* plays in constructing, exploring, even deconstructing 'England' after its empire.

What I want to do here is not to be trapped into thinking that either the nation or 'national identity' are abstract, transhistorical truths; rather, I wish to examine the *Henry VI* plays in performance in terms of a specifically 1980s view of war, conflict and national identity, governed by a series of historical events, their representations in the media, and their handling by the government. Following the election of the Conservative government in 1979, the implementation of free market ideologies transformed cultural institutions, introducing concepts of competition and of conflict into consensual areas of culture upon which national identity at the time rested. The Falklands Crisis in 1982 was the occasion for a substantial appropriation of the signs and the rhetoric of national identity: war was used as a way of asserting a political hegemony because it reasserted or 'rediscovered' the 'true English spirit.' Shakespeare too was an object of appropriation. Theatres faced radical transformations in both their funding structures and their relationship with government and society. The three performances of the *Henry VI* plays that I shall be concentrating upon were produced in this context and intervened in it: at times, subverting or interrupting

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<sup>20</sup> 'History, Royal or English: A Study of the Royal Shakespeare Company's *The Plantagenets* and the English Shakespeare Company's *The Wars of the Roses*' (unpublished M.A. dissertation, University of Birmingham, 1989).

the ideological processes of Thatcherism, at other times endorsing it and even finding ways, in its representation of national history, of reconciling tradition and the market-place.

In this study, I will follow a broadly cultural materialist line whilst incorporating some performance criticism as a way of seeing beyond the narrow political boundaries established by Sinfield, Holderness and Hodgdon. The first two chapters will develop the institutional arguments put forward by Sinfield and Holderness, and examine the invention of Shakespeare's 'matter of England' plays as contingent upon the changing relationship between theatre, politics and society. The third chapter will concentrate upon performance issues, using performance criticism of the three 1980s productions to examine the way in which they addressed in performance some of the central myths of the 1980s.

## 1. Inventing Tradition: Shakespeare and the Nation in Post-War Performances of *Henry VI*

‘In none of the plays is there a hero: and one of the reason is that there is an unnamed protagonist dominating all four. It is England ..’<sup>1</sup>

The history of *Henry VI* in performance turns on this central and critical intervention by E.M.W. Tillyard in 1944, which approaches the mass of diffuse and discontinuous materials which constitute Shakespeare’s history plays and constructs for them a new character, England, as an organising principle for their interpretation. The character of England emerges out of the ‘meta-narrative’ which Tillyard constructs by viewing the history plays as a single, unified work - in doing so, Tillyard imposed a unity

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<sup>1</sup> This quotation is taken from E. M. W. Tillyard’s *Shakespeare’s History Plays* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1944) p. 160

upon plays which are now regarded as deliberately open ended.<sup>2</sup> This was in many ways an invention that was peculiar to Tillyard, but it had an enormous impact on Shakespeare studies at the time as it opened up the neglected history plays to a new form of interpretation, which looked to history for grand designs and cycles of meaning that situated modern events into a universalising continuity. Before Tillyard's intervention, the *Henry VI* plays had been infrequently staged and when they were staged, it was usually to fulfil an ambition to stage the Complete Works rather than to argue for the plays' theatrical vitality. After Tillyard, a new play was recuperated - or rather invented - for the theatre by combining the three plays and seeing them with *Richard III* as a coherent unit. In particular, the 1963 production *The Wars of the Roses* demonstrated a clear debt to Tillyard's work: the production established the practices of 'tetralogy thinking'<sup>3</sup> and of adaptation in the performance of the *Henry VI* plays, but the production also realised on stage Tillyard's 'unnamed protagonist' and defined the plays for a theatrical generation as 'the matter of England' plays. In this way, a new major Shakespearean character was created for English culture: England. As the narrative of Shakespeare's England, the *Henry VI* plays were resituated from the margins of the performance repertoire to a 'cultural space'<sup>4</sup> which resembled a starting point or a foundation stone for the entire repertoire and ideology of 'national' Shakespearean performance.

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<sup>2</sup> See Hattaway, *The First Part*. Hattaway describes the play's structure as 'non-Aristotelian, in that the action is not end-directed, and the meaning cannot, therefore, be deduced simply from the play's resolution.' (p. 9). The idea that the plays' lack of formal structure is in itself a kind of structure through which disorder can be appropriately dramatised was first argued by J. P. Brockbank in his influential essay, 'The Frame of Disorder - *Henry VI*' in J. R. Brown and B. Harris, eds, *Early Shakespeare*, Stratford-upon-Avon Studies, 3 (London: Edward Arnold, 1961), pp. 73-99. Sigurd Burckhardt's *Shakespearean Meanings* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1968) develops this argument, refuting the artificial imposition of order upon an artistically disordered text. For a full and concise summary of changing critical interpretations of the *Henry VI* plays after Tillyard, Hattaway, 'The First Tetralogy and *King John*.'

<sup>3</sup> This phrase is borrowed from Barbara Hodgdon, *The End Crowns All*, to define performances and readings of the plays which approach them as a total narrative. For a very different view of Shakespeare's history plays, see Hodgdon's much earlier essay 'The Wars of the Roses: Scholarship speaks on the stage', *Deutsche Shakespeare-Gesellschaft West Jahrbuch 1972*, pp. 170-84. This chapter has also benefited from the opportunity to consult an early draft of *The End Crowns All* which discusses Peter Hall and John Barton's work at greater length than in the published version.

<sup>4</sup> See Alan Sinfield's 'Making Space: Appropriation and Confrontation in Recent British Plays' in *The Shakespeare Myth*, edited by Graham Holderness (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), pp. 128-144, in which the 'physical space' of theatre is held against the 'cultural space' of dramatic writing, i.e. 'a language, institutions to present it, and understanding audiences.' (p. 128). It seems reasonable to apply Sinfield's idea to theatrical performance.

The artificiality of Tillyard's intervention has long been recognised and debated in scholarly circles, where it has largely been either discredited or revisited in a more complex form. Its articulation in the theatre has had a very different history, however: Tillyard's unifying thesis has provided an interpretative framework for the *Henry VI* plays which has made them both meaningful and recognisable to modern audiences unfamiliar with the chronicle structure of their narrative. *Henry VI*'s modern performances, beginning with *The Wars of the Roses* in 1963, have by and large taken as an implicit assumption that the plays are really about England and its identification as a nation.<sup>5</sup> The performance of England and of Nation has operated on two levels: as an interpretation of the plays articulated through performance; and as a cultural event in which the actors and the audience explore through the staging of history and Shakespeare the performance of national identity. The performance of England in *Henry VI* then has interesting metatheatrical implications, as these productions were regarded as significant cultural events of their time which made statements about national identity which were (apparently) authorised by Shakespeare. Because the productions staged Shakespeare's character England, the plays have earned a privileged place in the modern 'performance canon' of Shakespeare theatre: each of the major British productions in the theatre since 1963 have been within the context of the invention (or reinvention) of a national Shakespeare company. *Henry VI* in performance both expresses and analyses national identity via a series of returns - to England's historic past (the Wars of the Roses) and to England's cultural past (Shakespeare and theatre).

The appropriation of the *Henry VI* plays as national dramas or as an English *Oresteia*<sup>6</sup> locates the performance of these plays within the symbolic processes which construct the ideology that underlies the

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<sup>5</sup> There has been much written about these productions, their performance and their adaptation. In addition to the works cited here, see also Ruby Cohn's *Modern Shakespeare Offshoots* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1976), which discusses the adaptation; Peggy Ashcroft's 'Margaret of Anjou', *Deutsche Shakespeare Gesell-Schaft West Jarbuch* (1974), pp. 7-9, which gives a first hand account of the character of Margaret; also on Margaret, see Robert Potter's 'The Rediscovery of Queen Margaret', *New Theatre Quarterly* vol. 4, no. 14 (1988), pp. 105-119, which compares Ashcroft's legendary performance with more recent interpretations of the character (who is unfortunately neglected in this thesis); Alice B. Griffen's 'Shakespeare Through the Camera's Eye', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 17 (1966), pp. 383-87, which discusses the filming of *The Wars of the Roses* for television; in addition, see also reviews of the production in Speaight's *Shakespeare on the Stage*, David's *Shakespeare in the Theatre* and John Russell Brown's 'Three Kinds of Shakespeare', *Shakespeare Survey* 18 (1965), pp. 147-155.

<sup>6</sup> *Representing Shakespeare*, p. 42.



modern concept of the nation. This becomes an issue when the *Henry VI* plays are performed either as or within a cycle of plays which have an overall significance for those prepared to sit through the whole cycle. Of course, many people will only see one part of a *Henry VI* cycle, but it is nevertheless the case that cycles of plays which attract both publicity and a committed audience have been an important part in the shaping of the RSC's identity. Shaughnessy goes as far as to suggest that the cultural use of the *Henry VI* plays has a ritual significance, in that their performance helps to inculcate amongst the audience an inclusive sense of belonging that cements a collective national identity.<sup>7</sup> Shaughnessy describes history play cycles as an 'acute experiential reality', distinct from normal kinds of theatre, which 'seems to miniaturise the movement of history itself.' Attending a cycle 'means engaging in a cultural ritual fraught with considerable self-conscious import and prestige, while the arduous quality of the theatrical marathon fosters a slightly delirious sense of determination and *esprit de corps* among cast and audience alike - a camaraderie that is appropriate to patriotic narrative.' These anecdotal reflections on the cycle experience are well put, but Shaughnessy does not go far enough in locating the 'cultural ritual' of their attendance within the specific historical conjuncture from which they have emerged. Far from being a tradition in Shakespearean performance, the history play cycle has been a phenomenon of the modern stage and reflects an increasing pressure on the large classical theatre companies to locate themselves within the meta-narratives of national cultural production. They have their origins in the pre-war fashion for playing Shakespeare's complete works and were energised with an elevated sense of meaning and of importance by Tillyard's rediscovery of Shakespeare's 'national epic.' However, Shaughnessy does recognise that for institutions like the RSC and the ESC, the use of cycles has had an important and definitive role in the shaping of their corporate and ideological structures. 'The recurrence of cycles is itself cyclical' and cycles for the RSC have 'an economically and artistically regenerative role, forging a sense of unity, clarity and purpose .... to carry the national burden of Shakespeare, his and our, supposed mythical history.' This is the reality that underlies the rhetoric of national identity which cycles promote: the installation and

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<sup>7</sup> The following quotations are taken from *Representing Shakespeare*, pp. 37-39. Shaughnessy addresses the renewing and renewable quality of history play cycles as a redemptive ritual, cleansing the 'old' body of the theatre.

promotion of a theatrical company seeking to possess the cultural capital, and the public subsidy that goes with that, of a national company.

Alan Sinfield argues that *The Wars of the Roses* celebrated and investigated the RSC's emerging status as a national institution as a response to the new financial structures developed for the theatre by government and by the ideology of 'welfare capitalism.'<sup>8</sup> In other words, the attempt to perform and embody England was motivated principally by pressures that were specific and local to the post-war theatre, and reflected its attempts to negotiate a public role for itself in the wake of the 'nationalisation' of the theatre. Far from being a traditional way of playing Shakespeare, the performance of England was an entirely new and contingent phenomenon produced by the post-war reshaping of the theatrical landscape. Here, it might be helpful to take into account Eric Hobsbawm's political theorisation of the way that national symbols and traditions have been invented, as this will shed some light on the ideological processes underlying the Shakespearean performance of nation:

It is clear that plenty of political institutions, ideological movements and groups - not in the least nationalism - were so unprecedented that even historic continuity had to be invented ... It is also clear that entirely new symbols and devices came into existence as part of national movements and states, such as the national anthem ..., the national flag ... or the personification of 'the nation' in symbol or image.

Hobsbawm argues that all 'traditions' are in fact 'invented traditions', in which 'a set of practices, normally ... of a ritual or symbolic nature, ... seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past.'<sup>9</sup> Hobsbawm's analysis can be applied to the 'tradition' of playing history play cycles. These cycles achieve their regenerative power by referencing the past and the establishment, or rather the invention, of a new tradition, so that a new set of circumstances can be normalised and the discontinuities with the past turned into reassuring continuities.

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<sup>8</sup> 'Welfare capitalism' is a useful phrase taken from Alan Sinfield's 'Royal Shakespeare: Theatre and the Making of Ideology', in *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, edited by Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994). For more on the context of the 'nationalisation' of the theatres see Janet Miniham's *The Nationalisation of Culture: The Development of State Subsidies to the Arts in Great Britain* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1977) and N. V. Linklater's 'The Achievement in Drama' in *The State and the Arts*, edited by John Pick (London: John Offord, 1980), pp. 77-108.

<sup>9</sup> Quotations are from Eric Hobsbawm's illuminating introduction to *The Invention of Tradition*, edited by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp.1-14.

In a review of *The Wars of the Roses*, P.C. Bayley discovered in the performance a lost tradition, writing that 'we have been *given back* a great national epic.'<sup>10</sup> Bayley uses the phrase 'given back' uncritically, to resituate the innovatory practices of Hall and Barton within a tradition which encompasses both Shakespeare and the national epic. The adaptation is rendered falsely as the rediscovery of a lost text. Alan Sinfield reminds us that directors often disguise novelty as 'authentic Shakespeare', going on to comment (in the case of *The Wars of the Roses*) that 'actually ... Hall and Barton were creating a fashionable combination of E. M. W. Tillyard, Jan Kott, and Konrad Lorentz.'<sup>11</sup> Bayley's act of rediscovery, however, goes further in recovering to Shakespeare 'the national poet' the one thing that he had previously been unable to provide - a great national epic. Bayley's comments are additionally interesting for the serious tone he adopts in recounting this solemn moment in English history. The familiar pronoun 'we' replicates in critical discourse the kind of theatrical self-identification found in the theatre and works as a simulation of the performance strategy in print by registering a cultural affinity with his readership: the 'we' is utterly inclusive, not just referring to the relationship between writer and reader, but also to the 'audience' of readers, the nation. This sense of a commonality, of a shared identity, which Bayley instantiates, disarms critical analysis and replaces it with an almost ritualistic rehearsal, even celebration, of the concept of nation which is reinforced by the rediscovery of a 'great national drama.' Such responses helped to define the RSC's public role, and justified its entitlement to public funding. But moreover, it produced an ideology of nationhood and of the nation-state which organised both the institution of the RSC and its role in the public mind, and made the *Henry VI* plays the formative location of that ideology. The appeal to a common identity uses both pasts to authorise that identity as historic and as traditional. The combination of history and Shakespeare is a powerful source of legitimisation, both for a country redefining itself after the loss of empire, and for an institution redefining itself as a 'national'

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<sup>10</sup> From P. C. Bayley's 'Stratford 1963' in *Critical Survey 1* (1963), pp. 141-144.

<sup>11</sup> Alan Sinfield, *Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992). See also Sinfield's 'Making Space: Appropriation and Confrontation in Recent British Plays' in *The Shakespeare Myth*, pp. 128-144, where he makes very much the same point, but develops his argument a little. Here, Sinfield argues that directors are caught between contrary pressures: on the one hand, the pressure to reinvent Shakespeare's plays in performance and make them 'work' for a modern audience and on the other hand, to elide that reinvention and give the illusion of continuity with the myth of Shakespeare (p. 130).

theatre. By reclaiming for *Henry VI* such an important place in their own repertoire, the RSC established a unified idea of Shakespeare around which to construct their performance repertoire and their identity as a 'national' representation - and, as we shall see, this had important implications for both the performance of *The Wars of the Roses* and the subsequent stage history of the *Henry VI* plays.

The theory and politics of national symbology, and Shakespeare's relation to them, have been interrogated in some depth by Graham Holderness, who adopts a cultural materialist perspective in a series of essays and books on history and 'the Shakespeare myth' which explore the specific relationship between Shakespeare, history, and national identity.<sup>12</sup> In 'What ish my Nation?' Holderness broaches the contradictions within the identification of Shakespeare with the English nation by considering the question of British national identity. He deconstructs Branagh's film version of *Henry V*, by exploring its reinforcement of English national identity and its celebration of the 'great English actor' by exploring Branagh's nationality, which is in fact Irish. In this way, Holderness locates the central dichotomy at the heart of national representation, which is the problematic distinction between the nation as England and the nation as Britain. The concept of nation which the RSC and other theatre companies addressed themselves to was inherently unstable - as Holderness's 'exposé' on Branagh shows, the concept of nation was, historically, an invention, as Hobsbawm has described. This instability both contains and expresses a deep uncertainty about who actually *is* the nation: whether the RSC represents England or Britain, whether it centralises and homogenises the diversity of British culture into a single, hegemonic English identity, or whether it should speak for and represent all parts of British national culture. Tillyard's unnamed protagonist is no straightforward hero, but emerges from Hobsbawm and Holderness as a complex and conflicted character permanently embroiled in a metaphysical and definitional crisis.

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<sup>12</sup> In particular, *The Shakespearean Myth* and Holderness's *Shakespeare Recycled: The Making of Historical Drama* (London and New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992) have informed the theoretical procedure of my study. See also *Shakespeare: the Play of History*, edited by Graham Holderness, Nick Potter and John Turner (London: Macmillan, 1988); Holderness's 'Production, reproduction, performance; marxism, history, theatre', in *Uses of History: Marxism, Postmodernism and the Renaissance*, edited by Barker, Francis, Hulme, Peter and Iverson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991). All quotes are from Holderness's article ' "What ish my Nation?"

The place of the *Henry VI* plays within this process of national representation then becomes both surprising and intriguing. As the plays themselves become a study of England in crisis, they also become a study of the concept of England in crisis. Whereas the cultural event of *The Wars of the Roses* and later productions of the plays announced and registered the stability of English national identity, the performances themselves were frequently more problematical about the question of national identity, using the theme of disorder to explore and define the crisis of national identity as a progressive alienation of the subject from meta-narratives such as nation, history, culture or even Shakespeare. A unique feature of *Henry VI*'s modern performances is their extreme violence (especially in the Cade scenes and in the battle scenes of *Part Three*) which is often grotesque and cartoonish, and presents men as essentially animals who delight in the play of violence. The reduction of the ennobled national man of *Part One* to the scavenging, amoral animals of *Part Three* is a running theme of productions from 1963 to 1988. On the one hand, this theme finally endorses the imperative of a secure national identity for the human subject, but it also throws into a radical form of questioning the reality which nation relates to, and finds the contrast between the concept of nation and the reality of human experience often to be a jarring and clumsy one.

*Henry VI*'s place in the modern performance canon is then an ambivalent one: on the one hand the plays are a *locus* for the theatrical performance of England, whilst on the other hand their performance is a performance of the crisis in the very concept of England. Holderness provides a useful way of theorising this ambivalence in his witty study of the symbolic significance of the white Dover cliffs in national representations.<sup>13</sup> The cliffs of Dover, he argues, are inscribed with myths about the origins of the British nation. They are the geographical entry point for past colonisers, the Briton's ancestors. In Branagh's *Henry V*, this myth is invoked, and the symbol of the cliffs is presented as a reassuring and nostalgic look back to the origin of the nation. However, as it forms an effective boundary, both physically and metaphorically, its symbolic status has a dangerous ambivalence: as it is both the site of the original conquest, it holds out the possibility of future invasion through the same route. The cliffs represent both the origin and the furthest boundary of the nation, and so also represent its most vulnerable point: 'Precisely

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<sup>13</sup> ' "What is my nation?"', p. 81.

because in this myth Dover is the source of national identity, it is also the weakest point of the territory's physical defence ... [at] this margin of the kingdom, which has the perilous quality of all territorial borders, the riskiest, most dangerous aspect of the whole enterprise ... is encountered: internal dissension, mutiny within the ranks, self-betrayal.' Understanding Holderness's analysis throws some light on the equally ambivalent and perilous location of the *Henry VI* plays within the territory of the Shakespearean performance canon (Peter Hall actually called them 'uncharted territory'<sup>14</sup>). As Hattaway points out, the history plays have been used repeatedly since the Second World War by directors of alternative national theatres looking to establish 'an artistic programme' for their company.<sup>15</sup> In the case of the *Henry VI* plays, their status as 'early' or even 'raw' Shakespeare has reinforced the plays status as 'founding' works through which a national company can explore and discover its own, national identity. As we shall see, actors and directors have persuaded themselves that in rehearsing and performing the *Henry VI* plays, they were following the dramatist as he tested his skills and erected the bare architecture of his later work.<sup>16</sup> However, the plays also present all kinds of problems, in that they do not easily fit together in the way that theatre directors would like - hence the widespread practice of adaptation, rewriting and restructuring of the *Henry VI* plays to make them 'fit' an overall idea of Shakespeare's styles which is consistent and which can form the starting point of a Shakespearean repertoire. The attempt to bend these plays to a unified view of Shakespeare's works is itself indicative of the extent to which the Shakespeare of the *Henry VI* plays can challenge conventional constructions of the 'mature' Shakespeare of later works such as *Henry V* or

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<sup>14</sup> In Hall's first talk to *The Wars of the Roses* company, on 25<sup>th</sup> April 1963: 'We will be in uncharted territory, but the plays are Shakespearean in every aspect ... it's all early work, particularly *Part One*, which has a "Boy's Own Paper" feeling.' This is quoted by Richard Pearson in *A Band of Arrogant and United Heroes: The Story of the Royal Shakespeare Company's Production of The Wars of the Roses* (London: The Adelphi Press, 1990) p. 23.

<sup>15</sup> 'Shakespeare's Histories', p. 351. Russell Jackson, himself an experienced observer of Shakespearean theatre, concurs with this view, writing that each of Shakespeare's artistic directors 'has felt it to be a part of the duties, and assertion, of office to encounter the great history cycles.' 'Director's Shakespeare', in *Shakespeare: An Illustrated Stage History*, edited by Jonathan Bate and Russell Jackson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 176-196, p. 188. My study also includes Jane Howell's productions of the *Henry VI* plays in the BBC Shakespeare series. Obviously the same things cannot be said of her work, although it is interesting to note that the BBC Shakespeare Series had originally planned to begin with the *Henry VI* plays.

<sup>16</sup> One of the reasons Hall put forward for beginning with the *Henry VI* plays was that they were easier for a new company to play than *Antony and Cleopatra*. See Hall's article 'Shakespeare and the Modern Director', in *Royal Shakespeare Company 1960-3*, edited by John Goodwin (London: Max Reinhardt, 1964), pp. 41-48, p. 44. In the programme for *The Wars of the Roses*, Barton and Hall claim that the *Henry VI* plays are early works which are 'impaired by inconsistencies and confusions.'

*Hamlet*. The return to *Henry VI* is in essence a return to a point of origin, a return to the *arche* of the Shakespeare myth. The identification of the plays as on the one hand 'early' but on the other forward looking sketches out the same structural ambiguity possessed by the appropriation of the Dover cliffs into the national myth, that the terrain is both facing out to the 'no-man's land' of pre-Shakespeare and leads inwards to the vast terrain of Shakespeare and his varied meanings. Like the Dover cliffs, the *Henry VI* plays have attained the dual role of being both the source and the 'extreme verge' of Shakespeare's reproduced identity in the theatre. The importance of the Shakespeare myth to English national identity, which is the real issue of Holderness's study, makes *Henry VI* a tributary source of national identity: a point of origin, not of the colonisation of the nation, but of its writing and its performance. (Holderness points out the suitable irony that one of the cliffs of Dover is called the Shakespeare Cliff). What makes the *Henry VI* plays important here is the vital sense that they are 'early' Shakespeare, that they show Shakespeare tackling the subject of national identity for the first time, in rough verse and with amateurish skill, yet nevertheless erecting concepts and boundaries out of which the national poet was to emerge.

The ambiguity of being a point of origin lies, as Holderness says, in the 'perilous' nature of boundaries: from a boundary, one can look inwards to the comfort of familiar ground, or one can look outwards to the strangeness of foreign shores and the threats that might come from there:

Dover is the point of entry, the aperture through which a new force of domination can enter the territory, settle it and then ... part it asunder ... The inevitable result of this process is however not unity, but parturition, splitting, division; not the formation of a single unified whole, but the multiplying of centrifugal energies. The myth imagines national origin as a cyclical process of invasion, unification, plantation, and division.<sup>17</sup>

Boundaries may appear fixed, but they are always available for reinterpretation and reappropriation. *Henry VI*, as the textual equivalent of this point of origin, and of an aperture, manifests the dangerous characteristics of perilous boundaries in its textual problems and in the threat that this 'raw Shakespeare' might pose to a unified view of Shakespeare as the national poet. What emerges is an attempt to contain the

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<sup>17</sup> "What ish my Nation?", p. 85.

subversions that lie inherently within a text that, textually speaking, places Shakespeare as an Elizabethan rather than as a poet of all time, and could undermine the coherency of the Shakespeare myth which institutions like the RSC have contributed to. This effort to contain Shakespeare is most evident in two significant practices that have dominated *Henry VI*'s performances: the practice of adaptation and the practice of what Barbara Hodgdon calls 'tetralogy thinking.'<sup>18</sup> In both ways, modern performances have sought to disarm the perils of *Henry VI*, by ejecting and rewriting un-Shakespearean material, and by placing the plays within a larger narrative, so that its staging of disorder and social collapse has an eventual resolution. In the final event, *Henry VI* (in performance) is only nominally about England and partially about itself: both are manifestations of a preoccupation with 'unity', whether of text, nation or theatre, and the problem of being both unified and centralised in a democratic society.<sup>19</sup> The cultural context of this preoccupation is a complex and messy exploration of the contradictions of democratic socialism or 'welfare capitalism' amidst the perceived historic crisis of definition and role experienced by England following the war and the loss of empire.

In this chapter and the next, I wish to interrogate further the performance of England and the problematics of nation in modern performances of *Henry VI* by discussing the concept of nation which they arrive at within its historical and cultural context, and more importantly in the political and economic contexts which drove theatrical institutions to seek to define themselves in various ways, responding to changes in the financial structures imposed upon them. I begin with Peter Hall and John Barton's *The Wars of the Roses* and I study this production in some detail, for it occupies a key point in establishing the

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<sup>18</sup> In *The Wars of the Roses*, p. vii, Hall points out that all theatre (and indeed all criticism) adapts, in that it is selective in its use and interpretation of materials. However, in the case of *Henry VI*, another kind of adaptation is taking place - because there is no such thing as a play called '*Henry VI*' by Shakespeare, there are only three quite different plays which have formed the basis of this invented work. When Hall and Barton made assumptions about the unity of the three plays, they effectively created a new play and then adapted that to the stage and it is this same play, which exists only in the minds of the adapters, which has been adapted subsequently.

<sup>19</sup> On one level this argument does not work well, because theatre practitioners are interested in story rather than in abstract ideas of unity - their main aim is to find a way to make the plays accessible and relevant to a modern audience, so perhaps this argument about unity seems rather forced in this context. However, this argument is really concentrating on the intellectual basis that Hall and Barton (and their successors) put forward for their adaptations, and the way that that basis emerged from the institutional pressures of the RSC's attempts to establish itself in the new funding structures erected in the 1960s. In this light, I think that the argument about unity, and its extensions to other areas of the RSC - including its sense of the 'nation' that it hoped to be a theatre for - is important.



modern tradition and performance practices of *Henry VI* in performance and it institutes Tillyard's thesis as a new tradition in the theatre.

**'The Pressure of Now': Cultural Authority and the Politics of Subsidy in *The Wars of the Roses***

The tradition of performing the *Henry VI* plays as Shakespeare's 'matter of England plays'<sup>20</sup> was invented by John Barton and Peter Hall in their seminal 1963 production of *The Wars of the Roses*. Conceived as part of the imminent four hundred year anniversary of Shakespeare's birth, the production was a deliberate and strategic attempt to raise the RSC's profile as a public arts body, and to offer to the public something that was unavailable in the commercial sector of the theatre: an epic national drama which raised and performed national consciousness.<sup>21</sup> *The Wars of the Roses* depended upon state support: according to David Addenbrooke, *The Wars of the Roses* would have been 'virtually impossible' to stage within a commercial structure.<sup>22</sup> It inaugurated the RSC as a public body and laid claims to the works of Shakespeare, the theme of the English nation and the performance of English history as its unique territory within the domain of national art: three areas which not only served altruistically the public good, but also raised the very concepts of nation and history for examination. This production has been subsequently part of the RSC's mythology, as *The Wars of the Roses* has come to be seen as a founding text, a point of origin for the company. However, the success of that original moment, enshrined in myth, tends to elide the crisis which necessitated such an enormous project in the first place. In 1963, the RSC was on the verge of being cast out of the subsidised group of theatres for resigning from the national theatre scheme. This embroiled the company in a desperate and hard-fought attempt to recover national status, which *The Wars of the Roses* had a central place within.

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<sup>20</sup> My source for this phrase is Bernard Crick, who uses it to question *The Wars of the Roses* claim to be political drama in his article 'The Political in Britain's Two national Theatres', *Themes in Drama* 1977, pp. 169-94. However, the phrase seems to have been in general circulation since the 1960s.

<sup>21</sup> See Barbara Hodgdon, '*The Wars of the Roses*: Scholarship Speaks on the Stage': 'it would seem that such a series of theatrical events was didactically conceived and celebrated.' (p. 174). (FIX - further discussion)

<sup>22</sup> David Addenbrooke, *The Royal Shakespeare Company: The Peter Hall Years* (London: William Kimber, 1974), p. 61

The production has been retrospectively mythologised through memorial recycling in both historical and critical studies of the play, which consistently refer back to it as a definitive performance of the plays and as the production which most successfully found a way of 'playing' *Henry VI* in the modern theatre. This continual manifestation of the production beyond its performance exemplifies what Robert Weimann calls '... the underlying circulation of authority' of the theatrical transaction, that is to say 'the authorisation of spectators to recollect, discuss, and reappropriate the performed play after its theatrical transaction is over.'<sup>23</sup> Weimann acknowledges the 'authority' of the spectator to reappropriate the play, but it is through its reappropriations in theatre history, in critical studies and especially in press reviews that *The Wars of the Roses* has continued to exert an authorial pressure on subsequent performances of the *Henry VI* plays. When Terry Hands presented his full-text productions of the *Henry VI* plays to the press, many of the reviews started from the assumption that Hands *should* have cut them as Hall and Barton had done. *The Wars of the Roses* have also made an impact upon Shakespeare studies: Robert Shaughnessy refers bleakly to 'the obdurate legacy of *The Wars of the Roses*' which is 'perpetuated in the proliferating discourses of theatre history.'<sup>24</sup> This legacy has dominated all subsequent performances of *Henry VI*, which have been repeatedly compared to *The Wars of the Roses* as a benchmark production, thereby limiting their impact in the press and in critical studies.<sup>25</sup> Its authority has been most distinctly felt in the two major stage productions of the 1980s at the ESC and the RSC, both of which used the innovatory practices of Hall and

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<sup>23</sup> Robert Weimann, 'Thresholds to Memory and Commodity in Shakespeare's Endings', *Representations* 53 (Winter, 1996), p. 1. Weimann's article is taken from his forthcoming book *Shakespeare and the Power of Performance* which, regrettably, has not been published at the time of writing.

<sup>24</sup> In *Representing Shakespeare*, p. 41

<sup>25</sup> An example of this negative effect can be found in the number of comparisons made between *The Wars of the Roses* and Katie Mitchell's *Henry VI - The Battle for the Throne* (RSC, 1994) in press reviews. More contemporary productions such as Jane Howell's notable television trilogy or the RSC and ESC productions which preceded it, were not referred to, almost as if Katie Mitchell was the first person to revive the plays since the 1960s. Moreover, memories of that production governed reviewers' perception of the performance, as many presented it as an adaptation of *Henry VI Part Two* and *Part Three*. The mistake arose out of an early press release, written at a time when Adrian Noble was lobbying for such a text rather than the full-text of *Part Three* which Mitchell wanted. Reviewers were not to know this of course, but none of them noticed the absence of any material from *Part Two*, so that the production and its artistic success were seen as within the tradition of adaptation established by Peter Hall and John Barton, rather than a brave exercise in textual fidelity.

Barton - that is to say, adapting the three plays into two, and combining them with *Richard III* - as if they were conventional and even obvious ways of playing the *Henry VI* plays.<sup>26</sup>

Until the 1980s, the major concern for critics was the way in which Hall and Barton's textual interventions established editorial and interpretative practices which raised the issue of the relative propriety over Shakespeare between the academy and the theatre. This was especially a preoccupation of academics published in *Shakespeare Survey* in the 1960s, which ran a series of articles dealing with the implications of 'director's Shakespeare'<sup>27</sup> - exhibiting, perhaps, a sense of unease about the way that directors like Hall and Barton were achieving more authority in the interpretation of Shakespeare than academics.<sup>28</sup> In 1985, Alan Sinfield's seminal essay in *Political Shakespeare's* transformed the way that *The Wars of the Roses* has been approached in critical discourse. Rather than examining the performance in the context of national experience, Sinfield interrogated the concept of nation as one which the RSC raised itself for its own purposes. Sinfield argues that the ideology which underlay the production was constructed deliberately from the beginning, in order that the RSC might secure public funding and justify itself as a national institution. The RSC is placed within the context of the new funding structures established for the theatre following the war. John Barton's adaptation wrote against the grain of the received text in order to 'substantiate a particular view of the political relevance of the plays' designed to support the RSC's claim to public subsidy.<sup>29</sup> *The Wars of the Roses* was, then, an extravagant foregrounding of a particular idea of Shakespeare as the national poet, which intersected with the demands

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<sup>26</sup> Barbara Hodgdon even goes so far as to describe Noble's production as a 'homage' to *The Wars of the Roses*, perhaps restating prior claim over the histories in the face of the opposition from the ESC. (*The End Crowns All*, p. 87).

<sup>27</sup> This phrase is the title of an article by Robert Smallwood, 'Director's Theatre', in *Shakespeare: An Illustrated Stage History*, edited by Jonathan Bate and Russell Jackson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 176-196.

<sup>28</sup> Modern performance criticism begins in these years, as academics pondered over how to respond to the RSC initiative, which they saw as both extremely good, in that it opened out interest in Shakespeare, but also as potentially threatening, as the territory of the academic was being encroached on by a band of upstart crows beautified in their feathers. The debate was exercised over many years. The most distinguished pieces to emerge from it were Robert Weimann's 'Shakespeare on the Modern Stage: Past Significance and Present Meaning', *Shakespeare Survey* 20 (1967), pp. 113-20; Gareth Lloyd Evans, 'Shakespeare, the Twentieth Century and "Behaviourism"', *Shakespeare Survey* 20 (1967), pp. 133-142; and John Russell Brown's 'The Study and practice of Shakespeare Production', *Shakespeare Survey* 18 (1965), pp. 58-69.

<sup>29</sup> 'Royal Shakespeare', p. 184.

of 'culturism.'<sup>30</sup> Sinfield traces this ideology to the lefts' disappointment with the stalled socialist revolution of the late 1940s, which resulted in a narrowing of left-wing thought to the role of 'quality' in life and society, and the responsibilities of the state to maintain culture in the face of urban and capitalistic developments. Sinfield's thesis has dominated critical accounts since, most notably in articles and books by Robert Shaughnessy, Christopher McCullough, Robert Wilson and Barbara Hodgdon.<sup>31</sup> The politics of performance within the subsidy structure, and its transformation into the present structure of sponsorship, are presented as the primary pressures on the RSC's self-identification as a national theatre. Hodgdon writes that 'twenty years after a major war, as part of a Shakespeare celebration, it would seem that such a series of theatrical events was didactically conceived and celebrated.'<sup>32</sup> Shaughnessy expands upon this point:

This cycle, the RSC's first such large-scale enterprise, was a determined articulation of the company's claims upon substantial public funding: the construction of England's own Oresteian myth was to be viewed as a matter of self-evident theatrical, critical and cultural importance [...] The achievement of the cycle was the first example of the RSC's public service provision.<sup>33</sup>

Both academics argue that the adaptation of the *Henry VI* plays was a move designed to establish 'proprietary rights' over Shakespeare. This was a strategic move for a company which had recently crowned itself as the 'Royal' Shakespeare Company:

*The Wars of the Roses* demonstrated that it was in the staging of such cycles that the RSC's unique and important cultural contribution lay; it also proved how the skilful reconstitution of the margins of the Shakespearean canon could provide a grounding for the effective colonisation of its centre.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Culturism is Sinfield's own terms for the 'ruling idea' which insisted that great art had to be protected from the rigours of the market place. Compare 'welfare capitalism' discussed above. Both concepts show the influence of Raymond Williams and both are definitive terms in the cultural materialist history of post-war British culture.

<sup>31</sup> These are: Robert Shaughnessy's *Representing Shakespeare*; Hodgdon's *The End Crowns All*; Robert Wilson's article 'Nato's Pharmacy: Shakespeare by Prescription'; and Christopher McCullough's 'The Cambridge Connection: Towards a Materialist Theatre Practice', in Holderness, ed, *The Shakespeare Myth*, pp. 112-121.

<sup>32</sup> 'The Wars of the Roses: Scholarship Speaks on the Stage', p. 175.

<sup>33</sup> *Representing Shakespeare*, p. 42.

<sup>34</sup> *Representing Shakespeare*, p. 58.

Shaughnessy and Sinfield place *The Wars of the Roses* in a dynamic site of contests and ideology, arising out of the political failure of the left in the late fifties to forge a new nation out of the post-war remnants of society. Following on from Sinfield, Wilson identifies the liberal audience which the RSC both emerged from and tried to create:

A new university-educated middle class of teachers, media workers and local government officials found its combination of dissidence and dependence mirrored in productions like the epic Brechtian cycle of *The Wars of the Roses*.<sup>35</sup>

*The Wars of the Roses* is consequently reappropriated as a prime event in the general transfer of liberal ideals of quality and nationality to the arts, and to the modern reproduction of Shakespeare in particular, in which the identification of a class and its contradictions were re-presented and performed as the drama of the nation, engaged in through the re-performance of history. The ensemble structure which Hall instituted at the RSC ennobled and embodied his vision of a collective society unified through culture. Christopher J. McCullough makes an interesting argument that Hall's creation of an ensemble company was based on his experience of Leavis' Cambridge seminars which made minority groups into representations of society. The group then becomes a 'training ground for the vanguard of a petit-bourgeois revolution.' When Hall speaks of a 'national culture' it is in practice this idea of a collective society which he imagines: 'Hall's belief in the moral purpose and power of great art rests upon the idea that our society may be unified in the experience of Shakespeare's drama.'<sup>36</sup>

All of these academics critique *The Wars of the Roses* for its cultural politics, although it is doubtful that they arise from direct experience of the productions. Rather, they intersect with and critique the wide and varied amount of literature produced by and about *The Wars of the Roses* and interrogate its construction as a myth. However, to interrogate the myth is not the same thing as the performance itself; yet there is some confusion between the two, particularly in the work of Wilson, Shaughnessy and Holderness. Sinfield is intelligent enough to locate his critique within the culture of welfare capitalism and the right's appropriation of existentialism in the 1950s. However, as Sinfield views the production from a

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<sup>35</sup> 'Nato's Pharmacy: Shakespeare by Prescription', p. 67.

<sup>36</sup> Christopher J. McCullough, 'The Cambridge Connection: Towards a Materialist Theatre Practice', pp. 115-6

cultural and ideological perspective, he misses the full context from which it emerged and so misses the nuances of crisis and struggle which lie behind the RSC's self-determination as a national theatre. This theory does not explain the government's hostile attitude towards the RSC in the 1960s, nor does it really give sufficient account for the RSC's perceived and actual radicalism in experimental theatre. As I hope to show, the RSC did not aspire to be a national theatre, but was forced into making this argument to counter the claims of the new National Theatre upon government subsidy. Hall began by reacting against the National Theatre, recognising that the Stratford company would have to expand in order to survive in the future: however, when the RSC failed to obtain its expected subsidy, Hall was forced to develop the argument that the Stratford company could be seen as an alternative, second national theatre and *The Wars of the Roses* was used to justify this claim. *The Wars of the Roses* was not conceived as part of a territorial expansion of the RSC into the colonies of nationhood, but as a response to a deep crisis in the developing institution which forced it to exploit its only real asset: the cultural authority of Shakespeare.

In the next few pages, I wish to explore this situation in more depth: it is an important story to tell, because it brings into focus the complex cultural situation which gave rise to both the RSC and *The Wars of the Roses*, and helps to explain their deep ambiguities and contradictions. The story will also clarify how the *Henry VI* plays came to be seen as 'matter of England plays': it will, I believe, show that this interpretation, which has cast a shadow over all subsequent British performances of the plays, did not arise out of tradition but out of the contingent circumstances of the RSC as it was shaped by the cultural politics of being a national theatre.

First of all, the National Theatre (before it had even been built or performed a single play) helped to shape the RSC. When Peter Hall was appointed the artistic director of the Memorial Theatre in 1959, one of his tasks was to respond to the threat that was posed by the imminent launch of the National Theatre. The National Theatre had been planned for over a century and in the 1950s the first stone was laid (although it would be twenty-years before the theatre itself would be built). When Hall took the appointment, he persuaded the Memorial Theatre governors that the National Theatre was finally on the

horizon: 'Olivier would make it happen. It would be with us, I thought, within five years.'<sup>37</sup> The Memorial Theatre had a small amount of savings and Hall insisted that he be given access to them, to fund the expansion of the Memorial Theatre's activities. This involved breaking with the long tradition of playing at the Memorial Theatre and establishing, in effect, a new company, with a new identity, which would appeal to a young intellectual class which, Hall presumed, would be alienated by the National Theatre.<sup>38</sup> Hall bluntly told Fordham Flower that the planned National Theatre would 'deal a death blow to Stratford if Stratford remained as it was.'<sup>39</sup> There was an understandable unease about the whole project at Stratford. After all, the committee responsible for the developing of the National Theatre had for a long time been called the Shakespeare Memorial National Theatre Committee, which was worryingly close to the Memorial Theatre's own name and, indeed, its identity.<sup>40</sup> The combination of 'Shakespeare' and 'National' led to the inevitable prediction that the National Theatre would be a predominantly Shakespearean theatre, attracting the biggest Shakespearean actors with both prestige and resources that the Memorial Theatre could not compete with.<sup>41</sup> This was a threat to the distinctiveness of the Memorial Theatre, and forced it to

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<sup>37</sup> *Making an Exhibition*, p. 147. Hall was right, although the National Theatre lived in the Old Vic for many years before its move to a permanent home on the South Bank in the 1970s. The delay in the building of the theatre meant that the impact of the National Theatre was less than it could have been in the 1960s.

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<sup>39</sup> This is from Peter Hall's memoirs: *Making an Exhibition of Myself* (London: Sincalir-Stevenson, 1993), p. 147.

<sup>40</sup> The National Theatre was the product of a movement to build a memorial to Shakespeare in London. This followed an offer to the London Council made by a brewer called Richard Badger to pay for a statue of Shakespeare on London's South Bank. In 1905, a General Committee for the Shakespeare Memorial in London was established which fielded various ideas for memorials before settling upon the idea of a theatre as a 'living' memorial on the South Bank - this revived suggestions which had been made periodically in the previous fifty years for a national 'house' for Shakespeare to be built in London. These prototypes of the National Theatre were superseded by William Archer and Granville Barker's *A National Theatre: Schemes and Estimates* (London: Duckworth, 1907), after which the committee became the Shakespeare Memorial National Theatre Committee. The scheme was unsuccessfully debated in parliament in 1913 but the committee continued, purchasing land in Kensington during the 1930s. The mood in politics and in the nation after the Second World War was more sympathetic to this kind of project and a National Theatre Bill was successfully passed, without opposition, in 1948. However, the location of the theatre was changed from Kensington to (coincidentally) the Committee for the Shakespeare Memorial in London's original choice of the South Bank. This account is based upon Geoffrey Whitworth's invaluable account of the early years of the National Theatre (Whitworth was himself heavily involved in the Shakespeare Memorial National Theatre Committee): *The Making of a National Theatre* (London: Faber and Faber, 1951); see also John Elsom and Nicholas Tomalin's *The History of the National Theatre* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1978) which describes the development of the National theatre as we know it today, and which contains useful accounts of the complex negotiations between the RSC, the National Theatre, the Arts Council and the Government in the early 1960s.

<sup>41</sup> It is interesting to speculate that without the awkward presence of the RSC, the National Theatre would probably have more resembled the RSC than it presently does.

reconsider its own structure as a privately-run, self-funded, regional and touring theatre. Hall's initial strategy was to transform the Memorial Theatre into a major centre of Shakespearean performance, with a repertory company system and a base in London producing work of significant value to make a claim for public subsidy (the RSC's first season - and its move to the Aldwych - was funded entirely out of the Memorial Theatre's savings).<sup>42</sup> The formation of this new company and its struggles to assert itself publicly against the threat of the National Theatre was the immediate institutional context of *The Wars of the Roses*.

Hall lobbied the palace for permission to change the Memorial Theatre's name to the Royal Shakespeare Company: Hall disliked the old title because it 'sounded like a gravestone.'<sup>43</sup> The word 'memorial' implies something static and old, whereas 'Royal' implies a cultural seal of approval for a dynamic institution. Hall changed the organisation from a kind of museum to a modern company. The early major productions of this new company - *King Lear* and *The Wars of the Roses* - were partly about exploring what 'Royal' actually means, showing the inherent poles of grace and violence that hide within the word and exercise its cultural power. However, Hall and his colleagues were not adverse to exploiting the cultural value of being a 'Royal' Shakespeare Company. Thirty years later, Hall would be utterly candid about the cultural capital wielded by such a name: 'They will give money to something called the National Theatre or the Royal Shakespeare Theatre if you scream hard enough ...'<sup>44</sup> The value of the name, and the very public screaming that Hall made through both the media and political channels, gained the company vital attention and cultural weight: '... both organisations ... are *much too big*. And the reason is that we are so philistine and mean-spirited in this country that both these organisations had to grow huge in order to attract the resources to make proper working conditions.'<sup>45</sup> The agenda for Hall was always a pragmatic one. The word 'Royal' gave an impression of official sanction and many people still have the impression that the title was conferred upon the Memorial Theatre in the late fifties. Hall helped to

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<sup>42</sup> *Making an Exhibition*, p. 148-50.

<sup>43</sup> *Making an Exhibition*, p. 148.

<sup>44</sup> Peter Hall, being interviewed in Patrick Miles' 'Chekhov, Shakespeare, the Ensemble and the Company', *New Theatre Quarterly*, vol. XI, no. 43 (August, 1995), pp 203-210. The quote is from p. 204.

<sup>45</sup> 'The Ensemble and the Company', p. 208.



create that impression, writing in 1964 that 'The Royal Shakespeare Theatre was called the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre until 1961 when the Queen commanded that its name be changed.'<sup>46</sup> However, a Royal charter had been granted forty-years earlier. Hall came across this information and used it to justify the name change - this was a strategic move to legitimate the institution's existence and ingratiate it within the symbols of national identity.<sup>47</sup> By adding 'Royal' to the RSC, Hall made the institution a national one. However, using the word 'royal' in this way suggested a specific idea of the nation as the nation of kings: in other words, a nation whose identity was contingent upon a central and transhistorical authority. The Royal appellation was a direct challenge to the National Theatre and put the RSC on a level with it in its competition for public funds.<sup>48</sup>

Hall was responding to the new and imminent threat posed by a national theatre to any kind of expansion of the RSC.<sup>49</sup> This was effectively a Battle for London staged between the RSC and the National Theatre - a battle which, like the civil broils in *Henry VI*, was (in ideological terms) a battle for the nation. The key year in this 'battle' was 1962, three years into Hall's tenure: in 1962, Lord Olivier was appointed the artistic director of the National Theatre, which also gave its inaugural performance of *Hamlet* at the Old Vic; it was also the year that the RSC nearly sunk, as it seemed for awhile as if Hall's gamble with the old Memorial Theatre's savings had failed. It was also the year that *The Wars of the Roses* was conceived. 1962 is described by Sally Beauman as

... the year in which British theatre was carved up, to be dominated by two major subsidised companies; it was the year the Arts Council began its evolution from tiny department to dispenser of millions of pounds of grant aid; it was the year the future scale of the National Theatre was determined, and the RSC's need for the Barbican

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<sup>46</sup> 'Shakespeare and the Modern Director', p. 7. The same statement was also made in all RSC programmes (including *The Wars of the Roses*) at this time.

<sup>47</sup> However, it was later to attract Royal attention. In 1976, Prince Philip helped to revitalise the RSC by lending his name to the published scripts of *Henry V*. See *The Royal Shakespeare Company's Production of 'Henry V' for the Centenary Season at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre*, edited by Sally Beauman (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1976) whilst Prince Charles has been a consistent friend of the RSC, even going so far as to counsel Kenneth Branagh on how to play a king-in-waiting for *Henry V* (see *Representing Shakespeare*, p. 119).

<sup>48</sup> This was until the mid-1980s, when the National Theatre became the Royal National Theatre, and once more blurred the names of the two companies.

<sup>49</sup> My account of the RSC's struggle with the government is mainly based upon Sally Beauman's *The Royal Shakespeare Company: A History of Ten Decades* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982) and John Elsom and Nicholas Tomalin's *The History of the National Theatre* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1978).

created; in which the disparity in subsidy and salaries between those two organisations was laid down, and the position of (comparative) centralised affluence established.<sup>50</sup>

Beauman recognises that beneath the rhetoric of the national theatre, what was effectively at stake was the first organisation of the British theatre scene since its de-regulation in 1848.<sup>51</sup> The National Theatre 'was to be the apex of the state-supported system .... that was its new function.'<sup>52</sup> However, there was little consensus about what form that organisation should take, and many theatre practitioners, including Peter Hall and the commercial theatre owners, were worried about the National Theatre as a centralising force which would take precedence over other theatres and suck in the limited resources of the theatre scene. Through the fifties, an alternative view caught hold that the regional theatres needed funding, and that money should be directed there rather than to a national theatre. This was one of the attractions of the idea of making the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre the national theatre, at one point a seriously mooted idea and always a possible way forward in Hall's own mind.<sup>53</sup> In 1961 the government appeared to swing behind this new view when the Chancellor announced that no money would be released for the National Theatre initiative. Instead a 'true' national theatre would be composed out of existing theatres as a regional chain to make a sort of cultural franchise.<sup>54</sup> Peter Hall was a member of the new national theatre committee and assumed that the RSC had won its case for public funding, to the extent that he was even prepared to consider a merging of the RSC, Old Vic and National Theatre, presumably with the ambition that the RSC,

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<sup>50</sup> *The Royal Shakespeare Company*, p. 252

<sup>51</sup> When the hegemony of the patent theatres was ended, opening up the theatre to the commercial world. Coincidentally, the idea of having a national theatre was also born in 1848 - or perhaps this was no coincidence, as the collapse of the patent system effectively left the theatre world without a structure and without a direction. In 1880, Matthew Arnold drew attention to the non-emergence of an alternative organisation of the theatre: 'We left the English theatre to take its chance. Its present impotence is the result' (quoted in *The Making of the National Theatre*, p. 33). Behind the rhetoric of the National Theatre, which made grandiose claims for years, there appears to have been this desire to reorganise the theatre system and this is effectively what the National Theatre eventually did. The present National Theatre organises and hierarchies the present public of dramatic arts.

<sup>52</sup> Elsom and Tomalin, *The History of the National Theatre*, p. 142

<sup>53</sup> *The History of the National Theatre*, p. 116. In his autobiography, Hall downplays this, pointing out that he and Flower flatly rejected initial approaches from the National Theatre Committee. However, when Hall obliquely mentions that he was 'for a time' involved with the scheme, he draws a polite veil over a protracted period of political wrangling. *Making an Exhibition*, p. 170. Flower claimed that they had withdrawn from the scheme on the principle that 'competition is healthier than monopoly' - again, this seems to be a rather generous gloss on the situation. 'Policies and Pounds Sterling' in *Crucial Years*, pp. 28-30, p. 28.

<sup>54</sup> *The History of the National Theatre* p. 119.

as an established company with a set of established values and national credentials, would in practice become the central plank of the funding structure. However, the sudden re-emergence of the National Theatre initiative, following an appeal from the London Council (which also offered matching funds) and the increasingly unwieldy national franchise theatre being proposed by the committee, provoked Peter Hall to resign from the committee and withdraw the RSC from the National Theatre scheme. The unexpected consequence of this divisive action was that the RSC's much needed subsidy was withdrawn - and it was this action that was to have a decisive impact on both the RSC's development as an institution and the performance of *The Wars of the Roses*. What followed immediately from that was, in the view of both Peter Hall and Fordham Flower, an attempt by the National Theatre and its supporters to undermine the RSC's London base by blocking its grant. The RSC had applied for a subsidy of £124,000 plus an extra £350,000 over three years to assist with renovations to the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, but after their withdrawal this subsidy did not materialise: the Arts Council eventually offered them the derisory sum of £10,000.<sup>55</sup> The Arts Council met, but it did not discuss the RSC problem at all, instead voting £150,000 to regional theatres. Hall and Fordham felt victimised: 'Both Chandos and Olivier, in Fordham's view, were .... exerting their not inconsiderable influence to ensure the RSC would remain under-financed, and be forced to pull out of London.'<sup>56</sup> They were entitled to feel this way, as the chairman of the Arts Council was Lord Cottesloe, whose support for the National Theatre would later be rewarded and memorialised in the Cottesloe Theatre. The National Theatre was mindful of the competition of the RSC, which for some time had presented itself and (apparently) regarded itself as the *de facto* National Theatre.<sup>57</sup> In July, T. C. Worsley wrote 'Perhaps it is time to be blunt. There are ugly rumours about that some of those who have negotiated the National Theatre scheme would not be sorry (to put it now lower) to see Peter Hall's RSC out of London.'<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> *The Royal Shakespeare Company*, pp. 254-5.

<sup>56</sup> *The Royal Shakespeare Company*, 260.

<sup>57</sup> *The History of the National Theatre*, p. 119

<sup>58</sup> Worsley writing in the *Financial Times*, quoted by Sally Beaman in *The Royal Shakespeare Company*, p. 261.

These were, in the words of a Royal Shakespeare Company pamphlet, 'crucial years.'<sup>59</sup> Faced with this crisis, Peter Hall was now forced into the position of having to make an argument for the restoration of public funding. The idea of the RSC as an alternative national theatre was first mooted at this point, and for the sole purpose of regaining lost subsidy. Peter Hall argued with the Treasury in 1962, pointing out that the RSC was operating on a 'National Level' to which he got this blunt reply: 'If this statement means no more than that their productions will in due course have to compete with those of the National Theatre, there can be no quarrel with it. I am bound to put formally on record, however, and to ask you to tell the Royal Shakespeare Theatre authorities that the Treasury would not be able to accept any wider implications which might be held to flow from any such assumption.'<sup>60</sup> However, Hall persisted and took his argument to the outside world, exploiting friendships in the press and developing good relations through special functions for them to orchestrate an impressive publicity campaign which raised the profile of the RSC in the country and raised a fuss about the imminent collapse of the RSC due to government neglect. Irving Wardle wrote near the time that 'the presence of the Royal Shakespeare Company in London is due entirely to its own determination'<sup>61</sup> and goes on to point out the problematic relationship between the RSC and the government:

The official attitude from the start has been inflexibly unwelcoming. No matter what the achievements of the company and its influence on the rest of the theatre, the Treasury has persisted in treating it as an anomalous luxury. Before the foundation of a National Theatre it was regarded as a wasteful distraction from the main task; and since 1963 the attitude seems to have been, 'Why do we need two national theatres?' Without a concerted press campaign, the Aldwych would almost certainly have perished within the first two years.

Wardle repeats the central thrust of the press's attitude, which was both nobly culturist and fictional, in that it presumed that the right of the RSC to funding was a natural one, and helped to reinforce the new institutions traditional existence. The press campaign was also described in similar terms by the RSC's

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<sup>59</sup> *Crucial Years* by the Royal Shakespeare Company (London: Max Reinhardt, 1963).

<sup>60</sup> Quoted in Elsom and Tomalin, *The History of the National Theatre*, p. 190

<sup>61</sup> Irving Wardle, 'London's Subsidised Companies', *Tulane Drama Review* vol. II no. 2 (Winter, 1966), pp. 105-119. Quotes taken from pp. 107-110

historian Sally Beauman, who wrote . 'For the next six months the publicity about the RSC was unremitting and impassioned. The company's predicament became a national *cause celebre*.'<sup>62</sup> The development of an approach to the media of this kind by a leading theatre was one of the overlooked innovations of this time. John Goodwin, who was Head of Publicity, had a key role in shaping the RSC's identity in the public's mind and this included developing a friendly relationship with the press: 'This includes putting forward ideas to journalists as well as supplying them with basic information.'<sup>63</sup> Hall's clever political manoeuvrings had wide ramifications for the company's identity: it now had to take on board the status of 'national theatre' and include that within its values and its products.<sup>64</sup> *The Wars of the Roses* was partly about the company exploring the concept for itself, but it was also the first major artistic statement about national identity made by the company, and its first significant pitch for national theatre status. Within its deep sense of crisis in national identity, *The Wars of the Roses* was also reaffirming national identity within its self, as one kind of expression or embodiment of that concept.

*The Wars of the Roses* was conceived in the context of this political territorialising of the interrelated landscapes of Shakespeare, London and the Nation. The media's coverage of the RSC's plight in 1962 helped to establish the RSC's reputation; but in the end this only sustained the RSC as far as getting more money out of the government. In order to establish the RSC as a theatre which could be both popular and provide 'good works' to justify its subsidy, Peter Hall conceived of a grand history play sequence to celebrate the four hundredth anniversary of Shakespeare's birth in 1964. This appropriated an idea from the original National Theatre plans in 1907, when both the schemes that William Archer and

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<sup>62</sup> Beauman, *The Royal Shakespeare Company*, p. 261 The campaign paid off in October, when the RSC won a subsidy of £47,000. Although Sally Beauman is sceptical about the impact of the campaign on the Arts Council, it nevertheless forced the RSC into developing its cultural profile in society and it is the importance of cultural perceptions of the RSC following this campaign which are most relevant.

<sup>63</sup> Judith Cook, *The National Theatre* (London: Harrap, 1976), p. 74. Goodwin was responsible for such marketing innovations as illustrated and informative programmes and production posters for sale in the foyer. *The Wars of the Roses* in particular benefited from these innovations, as it gave it additional mediums with which to contextualise its performance. The programme for this production was notable for the essays by Peter Hall and John Barton which explained and defended the textual changes. Hall took Goodwin with him when he moved to the National Theatre in 1976, a register of his importance to Hall's work.

<sup>64</sup> Roger Gellert makes the interesting claim (endorsed by the RSC) that 'theatre-goers were blessed in 1962 with a substantial blue-print for the National Theatre in the varied activities of the Royal Shakespeare Company'. 'The Plays: an Impression' in *Crucial Years* by the Royal Shakespeare Company, pp. 8-11, p. 8.

Granville Barker devised for the proposed national theatre were to begin with a sequence of Shakespeare's history plays, in order to 'make people aware of their cultural past.'<sup>65</sup> The basic assumption behind this proposal was still current in the 1960s. Kenneth Tynan insisted that 'one of [the] functions of a national theatre ... should be to create a place where the gigantic historical issues, as the Greeks and Shakespeare understood them, could be raised.'<sup>66</sup> Through the epic staging of Shakespeare's history plays, Hall sought to establish an English version of the Oresteian myth. This was a conscious attempt to create a modern-day myth that belonged to the nation, and this registered that *The Wars of the Roses* was not merely the ambitious product of an expanding provincial theatre, but that it was the product of a national theatre which was a cultural institution worthy of preservation and state support.<sup>67</sup> Hall was nationalising the institution by seizing and internalising Shakespeare as the property, by right, of a National Shakespeare Company. The development of the large national theatres in the post-war period was a version of the 'nationalisation' project undertaken by Atlee's government in the 1940s<sup>68</sup> but, from this point of view, it is perhaps better to speak not of a nationalisation of Shakespeare but a Shakespearisation of the Nation - not the making of Shakespeare the National Poet but the making of the Nation as the home of Shakespeare, of England as a protagonist in Shakespeare's play, as a Shakespearean character. It was in the beginning the hope of the SMNTC that the National Theatre would represent the nation, but instead the national theatres, the centres of excellence as they came to be called (or, as Jean Howard puts it, the 'citadels of high

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<sup>65</sup> That is, the second tetralogy. Prophetically, Archer and Barker argued that *Henry VI* could only be performed in a much reduced and rearranged form and for this reason dismissed the possibility of the National Theatre staging them - to date the National Theatre still has not attempted any of the *Henry VI* plays and, despite a number of significant productions, has avoided the kind of identification with Shakespeare's history plays that the RSC has so successfully developed since its institution. See William Archer and Granville Barker's *A National Theatre: Schemes and Estimates* (1907) and the discussions of their impact in Whitworth's *The Making of a National Theatre* (London: Faber and Faber, 1951) which also contains transcripts of the parliamentary debate on the second reading of the National Theatre bill; and in Elsom and Tomalin's *The History of the National Theatre*, pp. 34-5.

<sup>66</sup> Tynan quoted in Elsom and Tomalin, *The History of the National Theatre*, p. 199

<sup>67</sup> *The Wars of the Roses* programme contains the interesting statement that 'incorporated under the royal charter, with the Queen as Patron, it [the RSC] virtually belongs to the nation.'

<sup>68</sup> This is the view of Elsom and Tomalin, *The History of the National Theatre*, p. 87.

culture'<sup>69</sup>) performed the function of attempting to revive and make the nation. The rhetoric of nationhood, the language of Churchillian politics, was transferred to the institutions of the theatres.<sup>70</sup>

It was to this purpose that *The Wars of the Roses* was produced: it was designed to install an idea of Shakespeare that was consistent and which belonged to the RSC, in order to project a specific identity as the state funded producer of Shakespeare. It led Hall to make the claim that the RSC reinvented itself with the production: 'In early 1963, the company seemed to have vanished again until *The Wars of the Roses* history trilogy recreated it.'<sup>71</sup> As the eight play sequence generally sketched this view, the rewriting of Shakespeare's earliest plays, the plays which least conformed to the idea of Shakespeare which the RSC was centring within itself, was an important and symbolic act of authoring Shakespeare, at the same time that the organisation was using Shakespeare to authorise itself as a national, state subsidised institution. It was an idea of Shakespeare that was nationalistic and mythological, in the sense that Shakespeare was presented as the poet of English history, but in a specifically contemporary manner. The contradiction here of tradition and modernity registers Hobsbawm's idea of invented traditions, where the past is used to authorise what are in fact novel and contemporary circumstances:

The peculiarity of 'invented' traditions is that the continuity with it [the past] is largely factitious. In short, they are responses to novel situations which take the form of reference to old situations, or which establish their own past by quasi-obligatory repetition.<sup>72</sup>

Perry Anderson also acknowledges this phenomenon: '... traditionalism sanctions the present by deriving it from the past.'<sup>73</sup> The clarion call of the RSC, 'Shakespeare our Contemporary' (later defined no less

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<sup>69</sup> see *Shakespeare Reproduced: The Text in History and Ideology*, edited by Jean E. Howard and Marion F. O'Connor (London: Methuen, 1987) and *Engendering the Nation: a feminist account of Shakespeare's English histories*, Jean E. Howard and Phyllis Rackin (London: Routledge, 1997). The last work has only just been made available at the time of writing and unfortunately I have not been able to use it so far in my thesis.

<sup>70</sup> Interestingly, Hall's programme essay for *The Wars of the Roses* was printed alongside quotes from Churchill.

<sup>71</sup> 'Shakespeare and the Modern Director', p. 44. This was in part a consequence of the RSC's new two year contracts, which meant that the company it had formed in 1960 effectively came to an end in 1962. See Richard Pearson, *A Band of Arrogant and United Heroes*, p. 10.

<sup>72</sup> *The Invention of Tradition*, p. 2.

<sup>73</sup> Perry Anderson, *English Questions* (London and New York: Verso, 1992), p. 43.

elegantly by Hall as ‘the pressure of now’)<sup>74</sup> signalled the need to make the national theatre not a monument or memorial to the nation but an active, living force, positing a reproduced Shakespeare with the stamp of modernity and of history. The writing of *The Wars of the Roses* amounted to the writing of the RSC, and the modern version of Shakespeare it built itself around.

## II

The place of *The Wars of the Roses* in critical memory and theatrical history owes much to its ‘notorious’ adaptations of the *Henry VI* plays from three plays into two. It was this innovation that had the most distinctive impact on the subsequent productions directed by Noble and Bogdanov twenty years later.

Whereas Noble and Bogdanov proceeded on the assumption that they were approaching the plays in the correct and received way, Hall and Barton were, on the contrary, acutely conscious of the innovatory nature of their work. By the 1980s, the controversial practice of Hall and Barton had resolved itself into an established and traditional practice, so that what began as an apparent break with the past was now re-performed as a ritual continuity with it. By reviving the first tetralogy as a three part adaptation Noble was conscious that he was continuing an RSC tradition. However, this ‘tradition’ was invention. For Hall and Barton, the agenda was quite different and they were able to use the principle of adapting Shakespeare as a way of focusing public debate on the RSC’s cultural authority over the texts of Shakespeare.<sup>75</sup>

The debate which the playscripts provoked in cultural forums and subsequent critical writings was not welcomed by the RSC. At first sight, the adaptation seemed to be a radical and unconformist gesture,

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<sup>74</sup> This was in an interview with Charles Marowitz, published as ‘The Director and the Permanent Company’ in *Theatre at Work: Playwrights and Productions in the Modern British Theatre*, edited by Charles Marowitz and Simon Trussler (London: Methuen, 1967).

<sup>75</sup> The extent of John Barton’s rewriting has not always been recognised. Barton himself played it down in his programme notes, claiming that ‘a total of something over 12, 350 lines’ were reduced to ‘7, 450 lines, of which a little over 6, 000 came from the original.’ In other words, around half of Shakespeare’s own words were cut, and a quarter of the final playing script contained new material. Barton’s audit is the source for most subsequent restatements of the amount of adaptation involved, yet Barton is both inaccurate and misleading in his presentation of the data. First of all, a quick glance at the lines numbers in the first folio immediately suggest that ‘something over 12, 350’ is an understatement, whilst including (as Barton does) the relatively uncut *Richard III* in these figures gives a distorted view of the distribution of cuts. When *Richard III* is taken away from Barton’s total, we are left with less than four thousand words which are from Shakespeare’s *Henry VI* plays: in other words, an extraordinary two thirds (equivalent in number of lines to two Shakespeare plays) of the *Henry VI* plays were cut according to these figures.



out of step with the apparent moves of the RSC to establish itself within the apparatus of state controlled culture. However, the public debate about the adaptation also threw up vital questions about the RSC's cultural authority. The debate raised the kind of questions which Hall wanted the public to think about: questions about the legitimacy of the RSC as a national, cultural institution which had the authority to possess, perform and, if necessary, change Shakespeare's work. Winning this debate, and establishing the RSC as the only institution which was 'responsible' enough to make such grave changes, was crucial to establishing the unique role of the RSC in English culture. This would then form the basis of the RSC's continuing claim to public subsidy and Hall's persistent argument that the RSC was an alternative, second national theatre. The importance of the script was registered when, at about the same time, a copy of it was openly displayed in the British Theatre Museum, so that the public could see which lines belonged to Shakespeare and which belonged to Barton. The opportunity to audit the changes and additions made by the RSC was a gesture to remind the public that both the RSC and Shakespeare belonged to them. Shakespeare's words were in black type, whilst Barton's additions were distinguished by red ink, like a schoolteacher scrawling corrections across the errant pupil's work. In this way, the process of cultural appropriation was made public and available to scrutiny, but it also symbolically fixed in the public's mind the RSC's right, even duty, to perform such interventions in the Shakespearean text.

The struggle for possession of the Shakespearean text concentrated mainly on the battle to resituate the interpretation of Shakespeare's work from academic study to theatrical performance, and to institute the primacy of the theatre to command and authorise meaning. Hall's persistent claims to modernity underlined the extent to which theatre had a prior claim on Shakespeare. Barton's scholarly credentials were constantly fielded as an answer to the adaptation's critics. However, these critics were anticipated more than they were forthcoming: Hall to some extent stoked the fire of what would otherwise have been only a minor issue by opening the programme notes with the incendiary statement that the production 'perpetrates the ultimate literary heresy: Shakespeare cut, rewritten, and rearranged.'<sup>76</sup> The rhetorical appropriation of anticipated criticism was in itself a strategy for inviting criticism and debate about the text. Editorials were

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<sup>76</sup> This pronouncement is also the first line in Peter Hall's introduction to *The Wars of the Roses*, pp. vii-xiv.

written, reviewers considered the adaptation, radio debates and newspaper debates were set up, and in the process the RSC itself became a matter of debate around the country.

In 1964, John Barton was pitted against Kenneth Muir by Gareth Lloyd Evens in *The Guardian*.<sup>77</sup> In it, an academic was pitched against a director, as antagonists, struggling over Shakespeare. What is striking upon rereading this debate is the extent to which Barton and Muir agreed on key points: that what may be permissible for the *Henry VI* plays was out of the question for the major tragedies, that *Henry VI* was 'prentice work' and that the plays were probably not written by Shakespeare. Nevertheless, the debate was vigorous and hostile in tone. Muir was distrustful of the principle of adaptation, pointing out that many had tried to 'improve Shakespeare', including Dryden - and wondering how Barton expected to succeed where Dryden had failed. Muir was scathing about the adaptation, criticising the additions and deploring the transpositions. In return, Barton lambasted Muir for holding on to an idea of a pure Shakespearean text, when the texts which have come down to us are full of insertions, additions and interpolations made in the Elizabethan theatre. However, Barton restricted his argument to the early histories, admitting he would not treat a 'major play' in the same way as he had the *Henry VI* plays.

Intellectually, the debate achieved very little beyond raising the hostility and the sense of encroachment felt by the academic towards the director. However, Barton was able to present his credentials as an editor of Shakespeare, show his sensitivity to the historical authenticity of the text, and at the same time reassure the public that he was not a radical out to commit 'the ultimate literary heresy' on all of the great plays: on the contrary, the RSC was restoring to the public a great play lost for many years. Barton's adaptation was about recovering authenticity to a text which was traditionally inauthentic, 'dreadfully uneven in quality', of dubious authorship and 'a mass of dramatic deadwood, clichés, and inconsistencies.' Barton explains that 'we tried to strip all this away so as to put into firm focus Shakespeare's basic human and political view ... we tried to make the whole cycle of seven plays a unity

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<sup>77</sup> 'How far can we improve Shakespeare?' by Gareth Lloyd Evans in *The Guardian* Thursday November 26th 1964. The article began with an introduction by Evans, who then directed questions at Muir and Barton, with the two occasionally debating with each other.

by stressing what we believe Shakespeare's overall intentions to have been.'<sup>78</sup> Shakespeare's plays are characterised by Barton with words such as 'mass', 'uneven' and 'inconsistent'; Barton characterises his own adaptation with the key word 'unity.' When the acting scripts were published in 1970, they were prefaced by introductions (one by Hall, the other by Barton) that used the same sort of language. Hall found the *Henry VI* plays to be 'a mess of angry and undifferentiated barons, thrashing about in a mass of diffuse narrative.' Hall also repeats Barton's qualification that 'there is a difference between interfering with the text of mature Shakespeare and with the text of the *Henry VI*s. These plays are not only apprentice work, uneven in quality; we cannot be sure that Shakespeare was their sole author.'<sup>79</sup> In the production's programme, Hall and Barton are also careful to make plain that 'we must declare our conviction that mature Shakespeare cannot be monkeyed with - even cutting is perilous.' This is an interesting statement: the use of the word 'conviction' reinforces the credibility of Hall and Barton whilst the strong affirmation of the sanctity of Shakespeare's 'mature' works - to the extent that even *cutting* is 'perilous' - casts further doubts upon the quality of the *Henry VI* plays. Two very strong impressions emerge from this: the integrity and the cultural authority of the RSC to 'revise' the *Henry VI* plays; and the lack of integrity and cultural authority of the received scripts. The artificiality of these arguments is exposed in their contradictions. In the 1970 publication of *The Wars of the Roses* script, Hall restated the arguments for adapting the *Henry VI* plays and playing them with *Richard III*: however, Hall had told Charles Marowitz in 1966 that he was wrong to have adapted the plays and that it was also a mistake to play them with *Richard III*.<sup>80</sup> Likewise,

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<sup>78</sup> All of these quotes are from the debate in *The Guardian*, although Barton and Hall make many similar statements elsewhere at this time.

<sup>79</sup> Peter Hall, *The Wars of the Roses*, p. vii.

<sup>80</sup> 'I think also that, however you do it, *Richard III* doesn't quite fit the *Henry VI* [sic]. Shakespeare knew he'd written the *Henry VI* [sic] when he wrote *Richard III*, but he adopted a psychological examination of character in the central figure, which is a different attitude to playwrighting than in the other three plays. So maybe it was a mistake to put *Richard III* into the cycle.' in 'The Director and the Permanent Company', p.152. The confusion arose because Hall's introduction to *The Wars of the Roses* was basically an extended version of the programme notes he had written in 1963. Whether Hall had revised the essay for publication in 1970, or it had existed in its published form for some time, is not clear, but Hall presumably sanctioned its publication, so the contradiction is curious. Hall told Judith Cook in 1976 that 'I don't agree now with the way many people (myself included) used to cut Shakespeare' in *The National Theatre* (London: Harrap, 1976) in 1976 on taking up his appointment at the National Theatre - this was perhaps a reaction against the RSC and its past. However, in his recent autobiography, Hall writes that 'I blush at our frenzy of adaptation', which he describes as 'wrong-headed' (*Making an Exhibition*, p. 174).

Barton shifts uncomfortably in his introduction between a view of the plays as unlikely to have been written by Shakespeare and a view of the plays as early drafts which Shakespeare had not completed revising.<sup>81</sup>

Barton positioned himself as a reviser, completing Shakespeare's unfinished work and extracting the work of other dramatists - literally, in fact, playing Shakespeare. In 1964, John Barton umpired a *The Wars of the Roses* charity cricket match dressed as Shakespeare - this was an ironic choice of costume as Barton's adaptation of the *Henry VI* plays amounted to another kind of 'playing Shakespeare.'<sup>82</sup>

The 'Shakespeare' that Barton played was the 'universal' Shakespeare, connected to England through the pastoral image of cricket on the lawn at Stratford-upon-Avon. It was the 'authentic' Shakespeare of *Henry V* rather than the 'inauthentic' Shakespeare of *Henry VI*. Barton standardised Shakespeare's work by reclaiming an errant work to a unified repertoire of Shakespeare's work.<sup>83</sup> In order to forge a complete identity for Shakespeare, to give the RSC its corporate identity, those marginal works which resisted the modern view of Shakespeare, which appeared to be beyond understanding, were refashioned as works of 'mature' Shakespeare. Barbara Hodgdon writes that Barton's 'broad restructuring attempted to eliminate the artificial episodic quality of the *Henry VI* plays' - in other words the restructuring naturalised what Barton perceived to be the 'artificiality' of the early works. Excess 'is omitted whenever it impedes the ongoing mechanism of history as an active process' and 'the structure of

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<sup>81</sup> Barton uses the multiple authorship argument to question the integrity of the *Henry VI* plays, legitimating his editorial practice on the basis that they are not really Shakespeare. However, he then turns this around and instead seems himself as revising incomplete revisions made by Shakespeare. Barton is right to deny the authorial integrity of any text which has been through the grind of the Elizabethan theatre. However, the argument that the plays are written by Greene, or others and revised by Shakespeare strikes me as contradictory. Why would an 'apprentice' be employed to revise the shape of an acknowledged heavyweight like Greene? Barton cites the exclusion of the plays from Meres' list in 1598 as persuasive evidence for his case, yet Meres' failure to mention them may have been for many reasons - Meres makes no claim to be producing a definitive list of Shakespeare's work and it is wrong to misrepresent the list as definitive. The list is helpful in ascertaining terminal points for the dating of some plays, but it has no authority in the question of *Henry VI*'s authorship.

<sup>82</sup> This was the accidentally ironic title of John Barton's television series 'Playing Shakespeare' - see John Barton's book of the series *Playing Shakespeare* (London: Methuen, 1984) and also Michael L. Greenwald's *Directions by Indirections: John Barton of the Royal Shakespeare Company* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1986), which argues that Barton was not familiar with Kott or with Hall's political themes when drafting *The Wars of the Roses* - the process for him was a much more academic one.

<sup>83</sup> See *Representing Shakespeare*, p. 42: 'Assembling plays that had been variously treated as minor-league lyric tragedy, melodrama, shapeless chronicle, patriotic and sentimental pageant, or not staged at all, *The Wars of the Roses* standardised their heterogeneity in order to validate histories as a dramatic genre within a serious, scholarly and cosmopolitan theatre practice.'

the adaptation resembles Shakespeare's mature style in its clarity and in its broad rhythms of pace and climax.<sup>84</sup> The naturalising of Shakespeare and the editing of excess, the impermissibility of Shakespeare exceeding a narrow conception of Shakespeare based on an interpretation of his mature style, recuperates the *Henry VI* plays to an idea or ideology of Shakespeare that can be internally reconciled and unified. In effect, John Barton rewrote the *Henry VI* plays as if they had been written in 1604, not 1592. What is presented to us then is an ideology of Shakespeare founded upon certain ideas of maturity of style and grandeur of vision, where the true Shakespeare can be found in an epic performance of the central protagonist England, although this was in truth constructed by Hall and Barton. As Barton took on the identity of Shakespeare, Shakespeare took on the identity of the RSC.

### III

Following Sinfield's deconstruction of *The Wars of the Roses*, the study of production (in particular in relation to the theme of nation and the standardisation of Shakespeare) has tended to focus upon it as a reactionary work which ultimately endorses the establishment.<sup>85</sup> However, this is not all that can be said about the productions and, in focusing too closely upon the way that they were sold and the changes that were made to the plays, it is all too easy to overlook the performance itself and the extent to which it used crisis as a way of calling into question the very ideologies which the RSC was, at an institutional level, buying into. In performance, *The Wars of the Roses* examined the process by which the English nation came into being and traced the progression of its crisis following the collapse of central authority, embodied by the figure of Henry V. The final disaster of *Richard III* used black leather costumes to evoke the ambience of fascism in an Orwellian vision of the future of England under totalitarian rule. The final

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<sup>84</sup> 'The Wars of the Roses: Scholarship Speaks on the Stage', p. 176-7

<sup>85</sup> I am thinking especially of Shaughnessy's *Representing Shakespeare* and Hodgdon's *The End Crowns All*, both of which extend Sinfield's analysis, and Norman J. Meyer's article 'Finding "a Heap of Jewels" in "Lesser" Shakespeare: *The Wars of the Roses* and *Richard Duke of York*', *New England Theatre Journal* vol. 7 (1996), pp. 95-107 which explores the implications of Hall and Barton's unifying of the plays. However, Hattaway, in 'Shakespeare's Histories' and in his stage histories for The New Cambridge Shakespeare's editions of *Part One*, *Part Two* and *Part Three*, argues for the reconsideration of the production's significant rediscovery of the *Henry VI* plays as 'political drama' which, in Hattaway's view, returns them to their original, Elizabethan status. The achievement of *The Wars of the Roses* is also reasserted in Russell Jackson's 'Shakespeare in Opposition: from the 1950s to the 1990s' in *Shakespeare: An Illustrated Stage History*, pp. 211-230.

message of the work, then, was that totalitarianism emerges out of the collapse of consensus between central authority and the nation. This foregrounded the problems of morality in politics. As a dissertation on the consequences of bad management in society, the production was unquestionably conservative, yet within that paradigm, it exercised its own subversions by using the presentation of disorder and crisis in authority to address the prevailing sense of crisis felt in society at that time. In this historically local way, *The Wars of the Roses* was provocative in drawing attention to politics as a *locus* of the 'present crisis.' As political satire, *The Wars of the Roses* defined its own public role and used England or the nation as a radical concept for the exposure of power relations in society. In his introduction, Hall anticipates Sinfield's charge by reminding us that Shakespeare was 'not a reactionary in the modern sense' but that 'in his time nationalism was a progressive force' through which the people were able to struggle against the encroachments of post-feudal absolutist monarchies.<sup>86</sup> The development of the RSC at this time suggests an ambition to recover Shakespeare as a progressive force in society by analysing the nature and the apparatus of central authority through the performance of its crisis.

Hall sought to draw out homologies with the present day crisis of English nationalism by identifying power and politics as the main agencies of disorder. The areas of Shakespeare and English History became, in this discourse, discursive terrains available for both interrogation and appropriation for the imperative of what Hall simply and obliquely referred to as 'now.' Hall explained to Charles Marowitz that

the justifications used for ambition haven't really changed much in four hundred years. The terms have changed. Instead of saying 'I do this in the name of St. George' or 'the common weal' or 'the populace' or 'God,' we say, 'in the public interest,' 'the commonwealth', 'the man in the street' - all those things ... the nature of power, and the irony of power, and the corruption of power.<sup>87</sup>

Hall expresses an interest in the gap which emerges between the exercise of power and the concept of nation as an authorisation of that exercise. 'I do this in the name of ...' sums up Hall's attitude to power

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<sup>86</sup> *The Wars of the Roses*, p. xii.

<sup>87</sup> 'The Director and the Permanent Company', p. 151.

relations within the concept of the nation, where its reality is manipulated and exploited by individual ambition. Hall has been criticised for adopting hypocritically left-wing positions whilst pursuing a concealed reactionary agenda in order to maintain relations with the State. However, this misunderstands Hall's position, which was always at 'the radical centre' of political life. Hall's preoccupation was not with the rejection of authority so much as with the problem of marrying politics with ethics, to form an ethical but strong centre:

The tension between man the animal in action, murdering to protect or lying to save, and moral man trying to rule by a developed human ethic is what always makes history tragic. This is still the dilemma of power. Can a man be 'good' and politic? Do you have to be a bad man to make a good king?

In his own mind, the pursuit of the RSC's interests was itself an ethical project and Hall's claim to be serving the public good seem sincerely meant. However, Hall is cautionary about the realities of a radical centre:

But Shakespeare .... doesn't promise that a millennium awaits us; rather he says that history is a constant tragic pressure on all human beings and unless they govern themselves and their institutions pragmatically, there is a perpetual natural tendency to return to chaos.<sup>88</sup>

The interesting phrase here is 'unless they govern themselves and their institutions pragmatically.' The turn to 'institutions' in Hall's comments immediately calls to mind the RSC itself, and of Hall's own experience of the governing of institutions. Institutions are set against the 'natural tendency to return to chaos' as a civilising force which orders and centralises meaning, so that the 'establishment' is seen as a vital part of civilisation which must emerge from the 'tragic pressure' of history as an ethically reordered centre, based on liberal principles of culture and education. Hall's 'long revolution' attitude is rightly ascribed by Alan Sinfield to the cultural politics of welfare capitalism that defined Hall's generation.

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<sup>88</sup> Both quotations are taken from Peter Hall's introduction to *The Wars of the Roses*, pp. xii-xiii.

Yet here, as elsewhere, Hall is notably sombre about the promise held by his own rhetoric. Contrasting with the ‘tragic pressure’ of history, Hall would also speak of another pressure: ‘creation,’ he says, ‘is produced by the pressure of now.’ The word ‘now’ was a favourite expression of Hall in the early 1960s, and formulated what he saw as the basic challenge, which was to make Shakespeare a living dramatist: ‘we cannot keep this place alive unless we are truly in the marketplace of Now. We must be expert in the past, but alive in the present.’<sup>89</sup> In the 1964-5 programmes, the RSC’s declared policy was ‘to express plays in terms of immediacy for a modern audience and to make the production of Shakespeare “an experience that resonates with the thoughts and feelings of today.”’<sup>90</sup> The word ‘now’ was fielded enigmatically and reverentially, almost as a metaphysical concept which recalls the quasi-mystical writings of Artaud, Grotowski or even Jan Kott. Christopher J. McCullough argues that Hall’s concept of ‘now’ was based upon an idealisation of society as promoted through a new, university educated middle-class, a view which is broadly in agreement with Sinfield and Wilson. However, in exploring the ideological or theoretical imperatives of *The Wars of the Roses* performance agenda, none of these academics goes far enough in identifying Hall’s own sense of a crisis in national identity, or in seeing that much of Hall’s interest in politics emerged not from the vain pursuit of power, or the desire to sup with the devil, but from a real imperative to survive as a theatre in the new theatrical climate, responding to the erection of a subsidy structure and to the organising presence of the proposed National Theatre. One of Hall’s successors, Terry Hands, was later to say that the RSC had become a National Theatre ‘by accident’<sup>91</sup> and there is a kernel of truth in this. The pressure of now, in the case of this production, was twofold: from a severe crisis threatening the RSC’s existence and from a general perception of a cultural crisis in the nation.

The idea that Britain has been in crisis since the loss of its empire has been a repeated theme of post-war culture which has been revisited in various ways. In 1964, Perry Anderson argued that the discourse of national crisis was a phenomenon of modern society. *The Wars of the Roses* could legitimately

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<sup>89</sup> Hall speaking to Stratford Herald, quoted by Addenbrooke in *The Royal Shakespeare Company*, p. 66

<sup>90</sup> Quoted by Addenbrooke in *The Royal Shakespeare Company*, p. 66

<sup>91</sup> Hands makes this claim in an interview with Christopher J. McCullough in *The Shakespeare Myth*, pp. 122-128.



be placed within this discourse, as the *locus* of its socio-political interventions.<sup>92</sup> Anderson identified a 'genre' of writing on the 'condition of England' and the 'stagnation of England' which, he complained, are not so much an analysis of the crisis as an account of its symptoms. This discourse is described as a feeling or a general sense of crisis which organises a whole set of discontents, left and right. However, Anderson believed that the true origins of the crisis lay in the historic development of British capitalism. The 1963 productions in some sense fulfilled this diagnosis as they turned away from the symptoms of the crisis to address its historical origins. Hall saw the world of *Richard II* as the 'garden of England', recalling a utopian memory of pre-industrial England, whilst *Richard III* was noted simply as 'the bunker', linking it directly to Nazi Germany and the pangs of post-industrial modernity.<sup>93</sup> Within this arc, an allegory of English history was recounted through the semi-mythical recollection of the Wars of the Roses, which suggested that capitalistic industrialisation had led to a moral absence, the absence of culture, at the centre of power. Hall saw the 'present crisis' as a basically political one, which derived initially from a massive crisis in authority.<sup>94</sup>

This was realised in performance through a vivid and memorable set design which opposed England to an abstraction of the process of power which Hall and Barton, after Tillyard and Kott, identified as 'history.' John Barton's script narrowed the focus of the plays to centre upon the workings of history as a grand narrative force, and John Bury's set was constructed as a giant steel cage, materialising these forces upon the stage as an oppressive trap for its participants. History was both the centre of the production, its 'main protagonist'<sup>95</sup>, and its surface, its body and its soul, leaving the human subject to the desolate battleground constituted by its *mise-en-scene*. In this way, the meta-narrative of England was combined with a Kottian view of the oppressive workings of the meta-narrative of history. The purpose of playing *Henry VI* in this way was to attempt an aesthetic resolution of the human subject and history, to

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<sup>92</sup> Perry Anderson, 'The Origins of the Present Crisis', in *English Questions* (London: Verso, 1992), pp. 15-47.

<sup>93</sup> This is based on the notes Hall gave to John Bury for his set designs, which are published in *The Wars of the Roses*, p. 267.

<sup>94</sup> However, it is authority in itself which is criticised, but the mismanagement of power relations. This is very different to the anti-capitalist and anti-monarchist line pursued by Anderson as it effectively endorses the historical processes that it explores.

<sup>95</sup> 'The Wars of the Roses: Scholarship Speaks on the Stage', p. 175.

solve in fact the existential problem of post-war society, which opposed the oppressive, deterministic mechanisms of history to the freedom of individual will.

John Bury conceived of a metal and wood set to denote a world of medieval battles, a world which consists entirely of the clash of metals: 'In this hard and dangerous world of our production, the central image - the steel of war - has spread and forged anew the whole of our medieval landscape.'<sup>96</sup> Bury later elaborated:

It was a period of armour and a period of the sword: they were plays about warfare, about power, about danger. One spent one's time either in armour, or piercing someone's armour - or being pierced. And this was the image of the plays. We wanted an image rather than a naturalistic surrounding ... we were trying to make a world: a dangerous world, a terrible world, in which all these happenings fit.<sup>97</sup>

The design was then a realisation of the historical condition of the characters, an image, in Bury's own phrase, that posited a relationship between the actor/character and the forces of history. Moreover, the design did not represent history as a static force, but as a progressively decaying, corrosive force:

In this hard and dangerous world of our production, the central image - the steel of war - has spread and forged anew the whole of our medieval landscape. On the flagged floors of sheet steel tables are daggers, staircases are axe-heads, and doors the traps on scaffolds. Nothing yields: stone walls have lost their seduction and now loom dangerously - steel-clad - to enclose and imprison. The countryside offers no escape - the danger is still there in the iron foliage of the cruel tress and, surrounding all, the great steel cage of war. The costumes corrode with the years. The once-proud red rose of Lancaster becomes as a rusty scale on the soldiers' coats; the milk-white rose of York is no more than a pale blush on the tarnished steel of the Yorkist insurrection. Colour drains and drains from the stage until, among the drying patches of scarlet blood, the black night of England settles in the leather costumes of Richard's thugs. (*The Wars of the Roses*, p. 237).

The corrosion of the metals is equated with an equal corrosion of humanity. The 'black night of England' indicates a moral absence, wiped away by entropy. This vision of history is extremely complex: the human

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<sup>96</sup> From John Bury's note in *The Wars of the Roses*, p. 237

<sup>97</sup> *The Royal Shakespeare Company*, p. 212

subject is caged by it, trapped inside rusting armour, but at the same time, history is a representation of the inner bankruptcy of the characters. One of the most remarkable things about John Bury's set was the innovative, mechanical way the great iron doors were transformed to denote different scenic locations.<sup>98</sup> Contemporary reviewers likened this device to the sides of a battleship (*The Times*, July 17 1963) or the jaws of a vice. In *The Spectator* (26<sup>th</sup> July 1963), David Dyce-Jones observed that these doors were 'shifting and swinging within certain gaunt patterns to match the stylised manoeuvres onstage.' The movement of the doors in relation to the actors denoted an essential symbiosis between the actors' bodies and the world that they inhabited and were a part of. The human subject was seen as immersed in these great historical forces, unable to determine them, but determined by them. The progressive draining of colour in the costumes and the props, the reducing of everything to black, represented on the one hand, the gathering homogenising of all the elements of the world to a single element, a single mechanism and on the other hand, the revealing of that mechanism devoid of all pomp, all adornment, but totally exposed, in the starkness of the sets, in the naked ambition of Richard III. The rust accumulating on the metals marked time and displayed entropy - the essential movement of history towards decay and the stalling of the mechanism, as if humanity were enclosed within rusting armour, no longer able to move its joints.

The promise of resolution and renewal was presented in the form of a post-war social democratic utopia, which was represented by what Kenneth Muir protested was an 'unhistorical' use of the king's council as the *locus* of executive power in Henry VI's court.<sup>99</sup> The council table was the major principle for order in the production, both onstage, where it represented both harmony and disharmony in politics, and in the text, where it was the centre of many of Barton's textual interventions. Barton in fact used the council table as an organising principle for his play and many of his additions were designed to serve, in one way or another, the construction of a narrative of the council table within the script. The instalment of this narrative effectively rewrote, and recentred, Shakespeare's plays. The council transformed and

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<sup>98</sup> Bury's set designs for *The Wars of the Roses* have rightly been remembered as significant and innovative work - and this is perhaps a neglected area of *The Wars of the Roses*' influence on Shakespearean performance. Bury himself, commenting more than ten years later, said that '*The Wars of the Roses* ... was a big technical innovation show. We did a lot of engineering, we had to practically re-gear the way people were working which was only possible because we had a very fluid situation.' (Cook, *The National Theatre*, p. 58).

<sup>99</sup> In Gareth Lloyd Evans, 'How Can we Improve Shakespeare?'

confused the power struggle, as power was negotiated between the council table and the throne. The throne was rolled on and off stage in a manner which was apparently impressive, rather than being located in the single, unnegotiable centre point as in the folio texts. One is tempted to draw an analogy with the RSC's own relationship with another council table, that of the Arts Council, where the RSC was as symbolically royal and as pragmatically impotent as Henry's throne.

Peter Hall describes 'the bloody totalitarianism' of *Richard III* as 'the expiation of England' or, in another words, the atonement of England, the resolution of England to God, to meta-narratives.<sup>100</sup> (Bill Gaskill once told Hall that the company's name, the RSC had 'everything in it except God').<sup>101</sup> In *The Wars of the Roses* the abuse of central power upsets a natural order and leads to a bloody competition for power which can be resolved in only two ways: through democracy (the council table) or by death (Richard 'finds the rest of the universe against him and faces the impossible task of trying to kill everybody else.'<sup>102</sup>). The choice between apocalypse and democracy was a modern choice and articulated modern concerns about the problem of nation and its most significant threat - nuclear war. The performance of authority within the cycle does not easily sit against the cultural authority performed by the institution in its staging and promotion of the cycle. From a cultural point of view, there was a high degree of self-consciousness about the way that *The Wars of the Roses* dealt with the themes of crisis and order by projecting the crisis at the RSC onto the wider crisis of society, thereby identifying the RSC metonymically and symbolically with 'the nation.' The RSC was making a significant claim for itself when it articulated its own crisis as a part of society's crisis: that it was more than a theatre, it was a national theatre. Though contrived to address a funding problem, the argument that the RSC was already a national theatre, both embodying and serving the nation, became the rhetorical truth about which the ideology of this new institution gathered and solidified. However, within the moment of performance itself, a different kind of interrogation of nation and

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<sup>100</sup> Like the idea of a cycle, the idea of expiation is strongly suggestive of a ritualised view of theatre. Hall discusses the importance of ritual in the productions in 'Shakespeare and the Modern Director', where he explains that plays by Rudkin, Fred Watson, Boris Vian and Thomas Middleton, which the RSC performed in the early 1960s, helped him to understand the ritual and violence in *Henry VI*. Hall believed that *The Wars of the Roses* owed its success to its 'heavily ritualistic pattern.' (p. 46). In his programme essay, 'Blood will have blood', Hall calls York's death a 'pagan ritual.'

<sup>101</sup> *Making an Exhibition*, p. 148.

<sup>102</sup> Both of these quotes are from Hall's introduction to *The Wars of the Roses*, p. 13

authority was addressed, and although this achieved an eventual narrative resolution, it was via a long and deep questioning of Shakespeare's character England which was rich with subversions.

*The Wars of the Roses* was an agent in the struggle for legitimisation as a national institution, and a key point in the translation of the RSC from a commercial, independent company to a state funded institution. However, given the dynamic situation of the theatre, *The Wars of the Roses* was also the terrain where a national crisis was symbolically, through allegory, played out and exposed. The *Henry VI* plays were placed on the edge, between the mirror images of a nation in decline, trapped by history into a recurring succession of violence and battles over the centre, and a resurgent nation based on social democratic principles, the centre in abeyance. The negotiation between the crisis of institutions and nation which the plays recount, and the crisis of institution and nation which the production emerges from within and was intended to help resolve, exposed a fissure of contradictions which gave public voice to the very forces that Hall sought to contain with his expedient rhetoric. The attempt to reconcile Shakespeare's work to the modern idea of Shakespeare, to make all his works manifest in the same register, to make Shakespeare Shakespearean, was homologous to the attempt to reconcile the British nation to itself and its own history through the theatre, to reconcile the various conceptions of what a national theatre should be.

## 2. The Decade of Attrition: History, Authority and Authenticity

Following *The Wars of the Roses*, the character of England and the theme of nation has persisted as an underlying theory and thematic of subsequent performances of the *Henry VI* plays. However, there has been a distinct shift in the way that England has been performed and in the way that the *Henry VI* plays have been used to support or critique its concept. The discourse has moved away from Hall's interest in the structures of power and politics towards questions of ethics and of authenticity in politics and in the articulation of tradition. This new form of intervention was the result of cultural pressures ensuing from a collapse of faith in authority in the wake of Watergate and Vietnam, from the rise of a new free market agenda in executive politics, and from institutional pressures, where the insistence to survive and to negotiate art's role in a utilitarian, consumer society was ever more paramount. Issues of gender and of class division have also informed recent performances to a greater degree than before, turning them away from monolithic meta-narratives towards panoramas and social vistas which disclose political relations and question - or endorse - the authenticity of those who possess power.

Vietnam and Watergate were 'media events' which represented the importance of authenticity in politics and registered a distinct shift in culture away from the problem posed by Peter Hall in *The Wars of*

*the Roses*: 'Can a man be "good" and politic? Do you have to be a bad man to make a good king?' In the light of the sharp practices of President Nixon, who was forced to resign over the Watergate scandal, this seemed to be a redundant question.<sup>1</sup> In this climate, the RSC moved away from political engagement towards a minimalist, symbolic style which stressed authenticity over political relevancy in performance. The turn towards authenticity was, to begin with, not a reactionary one, but a way of responding too the inauthenticity of those in power.

However, this critique of the 'authenticity' of power was transformed by the opening up of the national theatres to commercial funding, which enforced a narrow and commodified view of English tradition and culture and resituated 'authenticity' as a marketable value rather than as a political critique. The productions of the *Henry VI* plays by the RSC (1977-79) and the BBC (1981-3) explored the theatricality of power in order to critique the pretensions to authenticity posed by power, whilst the later productions by the ESC (1987-89) and the RSC (1988-90) attempted to recover an authentic English national identity for the post-modern world.<sup>2</sup> In this chapter, I wish to explore how these 'matter of England' performances responded to the changes in the nature of the national theatres, at both ideological and economic levels: I will argue that *The Wars of the Roses* established a precedent by concentrating upon 'England' as the main character but that this character was substantially reinterpreted and engaged with in different ways as the structures of society were transformed by the Thatcherite revolution and the theatrical establishment was opened up to a new negotiation over its social and cultural role. At the heart of these changes are the crucial issues of authority and of authenticity in performance: the idea of the 'authentic' Shakespeare or the 'authentic' England at first charts an anti-authoritarian, even subversive trajectory

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<sup>1</sup> The 'Watergate' scandal hit America in 1972 after reporters exposed irregularities in Nixon's presidential campaign. Although Nixon did not face corruption charges, he resigned as President in shame and dishonour. The scandal was widely held to be a turning point in American politics and America's view of itself. However, it had reverberations across Western politics, as the scandal exposed levels of corruption in politics which helped to shape a sense of disenchantment about the emancipatory possibilities of democratic politics. This was also influenced by the Vietnam war, a messy conflict between America and Vietnam which continued despite public opposition in America and highlighted the barbarities that the 'civilised' nations of the West are capable of. Both events were important in shaping a distrust towards authority.

<sup>2</sup> The similarities between the two adaptations are discussed at length by Elizabeth S. C. Brandow in her unpublished M.A. dissertation, 'History, Royal or English: A Study of the Royal Shakespeare Company's *The Plantagenets* and the English Shakespeare Company's *The Wars of the Roses*.' See also *The End Crowns All*, pp. 87-98.

against established institutions but then, in the changing theatrical climate, this recourse to authenticity becomes rapidly commercialised until we arrive at *The Plantagenets*, in which tradition and cultural authenticity was heavily marketed.

### **Theatre, Business and Heritage**

Just as *The Wars of the Roses* established a number of precedents for performing *Henry VI* which were to influence and determine their performance for the next thirty years, so they themselves were also shaped by political, economic and cultural forces which drastically altered the nature of Shakespearean performance and the nature of national theatres. Most significantly, the increasing presence of business money in theatre funding and the rapid expansion of companies devoted to playing Shakespeare forced new agendas and imperatives for playing the *Henry VI* plays. Not only was the context for performance very much changed, but the position of theatre in society was subject to constant renegotiation and uncertainty through the 1970s and 1980s. In 1988, Terry Hands resigned as the Artistic Director of the RSC; at the time his public criticisms of the lack of support for the theatre by the then government were widely reported in the press. Upon leaving the RSC 1990, Hands bitterly described the 1980s as ‘a decade of attrition.’<sup>3</sup> The RSC that Hands had known for twenty-five years had been transformed (almost beyond recognition) by the pressure of commercial sponsorship, whilst the centre ground of Shakespearean performance was being challenged by a spate of new companies touring the country and by the rise of the National Theatre as a potent force in the theatre. Theatre was being developed as both more commercial and more inclusive in relation to its audiences, and the language of the market intruded upon the creative processes of the theatre. The political role of theatre receded, as the theatre became a massive cultural industry, producing and exporting Shakespeare as a vital commodity. Within this context, new concepts and critiques of the nation and of

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<sup>3</sup> According to Michael Mullin in his introduction to *Theatre at Stratford-upon-Avon, First Supplement: A Catalogue Index to Productions of the Royal Shakespeare Company, 1979-1993* (Westport, Connecticut and London: Greenwood Press, 1994), p. xxii. See also Robert Smallwood’s article ‘Twenty-five Years On’, *RSC Magazine* no. 4 (Autumn 1991), pp. 12-15. By the time of Smallwood’s article, Hands resignation had become an honourable retirement after twenty-five long years of service. However, Hands had resigned in 1988, publicly protesting about the new financial climate for theatrical production. See Jonathan Eagles, *Watching Shakespeare: A Theatregoer’s Review of the RSC, 1982-1995* (London: Minerva Press, 1997), pp. 78-9.



national drama arose, and the performance of England became an increasingly problematic and contentious issue. In 1988/9, the concurrent run of two productions of the *Henry VI* plays, both by quasi-national theatres and both reviving central planks of the 1963 productions, performed remarkably different versions of Shakespeare's England to different kinds of audiences. The collapse of a consensus within the construction and performance of Shakespeare may be, as Alan Sinfield argues, a symptom of the wider collapse of the consensual politics of the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>4</sup> But more fundamental and local changes to the theatre itself, and especially the RSC, dictated a new form of cultural politics, which looked increasingly more sceptically at traditional political activity, rejected Hall's belief in the emancipatory possibilities of politics, and instead turned towards the authentic voice of Shakespeare for legitimacy and authority. In considering the impact of *The Wars of the Roses* and the performance of England on subsequent productions of *Henry VI* plays, I will be paying particular attention to two contextual features of their performance: the rise of business sponsorship in theatre arts (and the changed role of theatre, audience and society implied by this development) and the rapid expansion of major Shakespeare companies in the 1980s. For this reason, I shall begin by discussing both of these issues in more depth, and relating them to the issues of authenticity and authority that I shall wish to highlight in my subsequent analysis.

Sponsorship has been a significant factor in theatre production since 1979, when the incoming Conservative government acknowledged its desire to expand the private sector's role in arts funding. This new ideology rejected previous assumptions about the State's role in fostering and supporting culture: it viewed arts subsidy as part of the 'dependency culture' of the welfare state.<sup>5</sup> The idea of corporate sponsorship of the arts began in America in the late 1960s, and the BBC-Time Life Shakespeare Series is an early example of its techniques being used in a British context. In 1978, when the contract between the BBC and various American companies was drawn up, the BBC did not look to any British companies for

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<sup>4</sup> 'Royal Shakespeare' p. 193.

<sup>5</sup> Sir Roy Shaw knowledgeably discusses the myopic views of Mrs. Thatcher's arts ministers in his article 'Sponsoring the Arts', which can be found in *The Spread of Sponsorship in the Arts, Sports, Education, the Health Service and Broadcasting*, ed. by Sir Roy Shaw (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1993), pp. 12-32. Sir Roy Shaw was secretary-general of the Arts Council until 1983, when his departure marked a new phase in the Arts Council's history. Since then, Shaw has been an assiduous critic of the present Council's policies in regard to commercial funding. Even so, Shaw is not a polemicist here and presents an intelligent overview of the changes which commercial sponsorship of the arts have made to arts policies in the last decade.

collaboration.<sup>6</sup> Not only were American companies a way of opening up the American market, there was also no culture of sponsorship in the UK for the BBC to exploit. However, ten years later, sponsorship was both an ideological orthodoxy and a reality for theatre practitioners across the country, not least in the major national theatres. Through sponsorship, the Arts Council was able to foster larger projects, such as the RSC's *Les Miserables*, and the 1980s saw a rapid expansion in the number of major Shakespeare playing companies. However, sponsorship also allowed business to intervene in and colonise the performance of Shakespeare, and the years since 1979 have seen the theatre increasingly tilted towards the interests of business. Recently, Wilson has scorned the present RSC as the 'ICI of the theatre.'<sup>7</sup> By using a multi-national drugs corporation as a simile for the RSC, Wilson rejects and satirises its self-promotion as a national cultural institution: the claims that the RSC may make for a special place within society, outside of market capitalism, are in fact bogus, and the RSC has become, like ICI, a dominant and manipulative institution within an area that is being increasingly defined by marketing strategies, and the ethos of commercial competition. Wilson is sharp and inevitably elides many of the ways in which the margins of the RSC's work continue to be difficult, subversive and artistically vibrant<sup>8</sup>: yet his satirical simile is designed to highlight the pressures of marketing which impact upon modern directors, structure their creativity and shape institutional philosophies. This brings the work of the RSC into collision with a series of descriptive phrases which many artists would balk at as reductive and demeaning: theatre as an 'industry', audiences as 'markets', Shakespeare as 'capital', performance as an 'exploitation of resources.' This raises important questions for the politics of all performances, but it raises particular questions about the performance of Shakespeare, and about the performances of England in the *Henry VI* plays.

The impact of business sponsorship has run far deeper than an invasion of terminology: it has permeated and restructured the whole artistic process, even down to institutional philosophies.<sup>9</sup> In the

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<sup>6</sup> The BBC Contract is discussed in further detail later in this chapter. For a more detailed analysis of the contract, see *The BBC Shakespeare Plays* pp. 10-11.

<sup>7</sup> This is in 'Nato's Pharmacy: Shakespeare by Prescription', p. 68.

<sup>8</sup> For example, Katie Mitchell's consistent and credible artistic project has regenerated The Other Place as the uncommercial end of the RSC's activities. The 1996-7 season showed some rare bravery, with *Cymbeline* produced in the Main House and *Henry VIII* being given a rare revival.

<sup>9</sup> Many people were either shocked or amused to see adverts for margarine and washing powder in the RST's foyer in 1992, but this was simply a consequence of pressure from business sponsors.

1980s, the RSC was sponsored by Royal Insurance in a three year deal which was worth £2.1 million.<sup>10</sup> As part of the deal, Royal Insurance insisted that its name be printed under the RSC logo in all its publications: in effect, it became the logo for Royal Insurance and Royal Shakespeare Incorporated, and the crown at the centre of the insurance company's logo was (without any sense of irony) printed nine times in *The Plantagenets* programme; the name of the company was printed in larger and bolder type than Shakespeare's name above it.<sup>11</sup> The repetition of the RSC logo with the Royal Insurance logo was a device to habituate people into connecting the two in their minds, so that Royal Insurance derived cultural authority from the RSC, Shakespeare and the performance of national history.

Sir Roy Shaw (a former Arts Council secretary and a vigorous critic of arts sponsorship) points out that companies cannot buy excellence: rather they can only buy the appearance of excellence which comes through the 'quality identification' with a prestigious company. To the government and the Arts Council, the mutuality of this arrangement was attractive: to many theatre practitioners, however, the arrangement was unwelcome and intrusive. This merger between business and the arts had significant effects on the management of large theatres and, some felt, it had a detrimental effect on the artistic work of theatres. As prestige became, in effect, a commodity, institutions like the RSC found that, more and more, they had to fulfil the demand for the appearance of 'quality' drama rather than the substance of a truly innovative production. By the time of *The Plantagenets* (which was perhaps the turning point for the RSC into a more business-conscious institution) the RSC was effectively selling tradition, whilst the political commitments of the past were no longer a part of the RSC's mainstream identity : an RSC sponsorship officer, when challenged about the morality of one of the sponsors, retorted 'We cannot afford to have ethics like that.'<sup>12</sup> The RSC's 'directors were now made to feel that their responsibility was not so much to their consumers as their shareholders, and what counted was the return on investment, rather than the ideological composition of the product.'<sup>13</sup> Peter Hall complained that theatre directors no longer ask 'do we

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<sup>10</sup> According to Sir Roy Shaw, in *The Spread of Sponsorship*, p. 16.

<sup>11</sup> *The Spread of Sponsorship*, p. 16.

<sup>12</sup> *The Spread of Sponsorship*, p. 19.

<sup>13</sup> 'Nato's Pharmacy: Shakespeare by Prescription', p. 68.

like the play' or even 'will the public like the play' but 'will the sponsors like it?'<sup>14</sup> Even more sinister, Terry Hands was apparently told in no uncertain terms that 'in future you will have to kow-tow to us' by a representative of the RSC's sponsors.<sup>15</sup> In the 1980s, Terry Hands claimed that he spent 75% of his time trying to raise revenue for the RSC, whilst around the country, theatre practitioners were finding that they were faced with new forms of censorship. The Theatre Royal at Stratford East was refused sponsorship after it staged a play which satirised Margaret Thatcher, whilst a National Theatre production of *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* was refused sponsorship because a sponsor's wife was offended by the title. The RSC and similar institutions found themselves in a situation where even their production of *Nicholas Nickleby* was considered too 'unsafe' to attract sponsorship.

The real change in the context of theatrical production was not so much one of economic reality - as the RSC continued to receive major support from the Arts Council - but one of economic appearance, as the government foisted the mindset of sponsorship upon a reluctant theatrical community.<sup>16</sup> What changed

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<sup>14</sup> Quoted in *The Spread of Sponsorship*, p. 25.

<sup>15</sup> Both quoted in *The Spread of Sponsorship*, p. 25. Hands apparently made his remarks on television in 1990, on the occasion of his 'retirement' from the RSC.

<sup>16</sup> The power of business sponsors over the RSC and similar institutions has been out of all proportion to the amount of investment that there has actually been in the arts from business. Although the Association for Business Sponsorship of the Arts (ASBA) was founded in 1976, the contribution of business to the theatre accounted for less than 5% of the costs of Drama in 1991/2, whilst the Arts Council was responsible for 34.1% of funding in the theatre. However, the culture of funding changed significantly under the Conservative Government, which pursued an aggressive policy of cuts in arts funding, matched with a pro-active policy of encouraging private sponsorship of the arts. The cultivation of the private sector in arts funding was a priority for arts ministers from 1979, and the government gave the clearest signals of its intent in 1983, when it appointed Luke Rittner, the Director of ASBA, to the post of Secretary General of the Arts Council (taking over from the pro-subsidy Sir Roy Shaw). A year later, the government created the Business Sponsorship Incentive Scheme, in which the government provided matching funds for new sponsors of the arts, and in addition paid the ASBA to administer the scheme, which allowed that association to expand its activities and increase its role in the arts sector. Despite the meagre funding then, the development of sponsorship was encouraged by the government to the extent that it forced a major culture change in those providing public funds, to increase the pressure on arts bodies to seek private money. Although their major source of revenue was still from the Arts Council and their own income, the theatre was nevertheless shaped by the government into the mindset of seeking sponsorship, giving business a disproportionate influence in contemporary cultural production.

In this discussion I have relied heavily on Sir Roy Shaw's *The Spread of Sponsorship* and Robert Hewison's *The Heritage Industry: Britain in a Climate of Decline* (London: Methuen, 1987), pp. 107-128. Sir Roy Shaw is a reliable source of Arts Council statistics and the quote from Terry Hands is also from this work. Hewison interrogates the cultural role of the Arts Council in more depth, arguing that 'the Arts Council has a central role in defining the terms and setting the conditions in which any discussion of the Arts can take place.' Both discuss the appointment of Luke Rittner and Hewison makes the point that all members of the Council are appointed by the government, implying that the Council was 'packed' with pro-sponsorship appointments. For an alternative view of these developments, see Digby Durrant, 'Who Pays the Piper?' in *Arts in Britain* (1988), pp. 33-35 and John

between 1963 and 1988 was more to do with perception, appearance and assumption than any significance contribution from business to the arts. Whereas Peter Hall had sought to cultivate an institution with a valid claim for public subsidy (a 'one nation' theatre), the role of the Arts Council was now so underplayed, and the place of the RSC in English cultural life so assured, that this was no longer a priority for Hall's successors: rather, the need to cultivate business sponsorship became the top priority, and the RSC, in effect, commercialised itself.

The change in the management culture of the RSC was primarily ideological, in response to an enforcement of market ideology upon an institution born out of the 'culturist' ethos of the 1950s; one of the most significant effects of this change in ideology was the way in which the RSC now approached and constructed its audience. The RSC's perception of its audience has slowly changed from one which places the audience in regard to the demands of public service bodies, and places an emphasis on 'good works', to a perception of the audience as consumers, and of the theatrical economy as a market. One visible effect of this has been the commercialisation of the foyer at the RSC theatres, which now sells RSC sweatshirts, RSC pens and so on to its audience: the RSC has, in effect, become a brand name, a franchise. As discussed earlier, the foyer had been exploited by John Goodwin as a way of developing the RSC's public profile through the use of programmes and posters: now a different agenda ruled the sale of RSC souvenirs.<sup>17</sup> The commercialisation of the foyer did not end there: 1988 audiences of *The Plantagenets* found themselves the subject of 'exit polls' as they left the theatre, conducted by Royal Insurance representatives, to discover whether the production was reaching the right kind of audience - the kind of audience that would also purchase insurance. Another significant development arising out of this situation was corporate entertainment and the rise of a new black-tie elitism in the theatre. A National Theatre promotional package from around this time presented the theatre as 'the perfect venue for glamorous and memorable business entertainment.' Sponsors and their guests were served drinks and sometimes a dinner before the performance; they occupied the best seats, and they often had their own private drinks bar for the

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Davidson, 'A plan to make arts get down to business', *The Sunday Times*, 13 December 1987, both of which defend commercial sponsorship, pointing out that companies benefit from competition.

<sup>17</sup> See p. 43, note 62 in this thesis.

interval.<sup>18</sup> Sponsors were not only penetrating the philosophy of theatrical institutions, they were colonising, and changing the audiences too. The public service ethos had developed a sense of the audience as representatives of society and the nation, and of the national theatres as serving the cultural and educational needs of the country. Under the Thatcher-driven development of sponsorship, audiences were now seen as consumers, the culture of the nation was transformed into billboards for the free market, and new divisions and hierarchies were implied by the demands of sponsors to reach specific 'opinion-forming audiences' and by the influx of black-tie elitism. The whole audience experience was radicalised by the new marketing culture which was transforming the national theatres and this has inevitable and complex effects on both the way that audiences experienced national dramas such as *The Plantagenets* and upon the way that their performance constructed and articulated the 'nation.'

The shift towards commercial funding established new imperatives within the RSC's cultural policies, not the least of which was the substantial shift in its self-promotion from one which stressed great national projects or 'good works' appropriate to a national institution to one which stressed populism and sought to reach out to diverse groups of people, to accommodate all audiences, and to recycle its reputation as an authentic producer of Shakespearean performance in the deregulated markets of the 1980s. The perceived didacticism of the 1960s, in which the RSC had deliberately sought its place on the cultural high-ground of national art, gave way to a new breed of economic determinism which implied a different role for Shakespearean production and the nation. In 1985, Alan Sinfield suggested that the collapse of consensus politics in the 1970s had damaged the RSC's hopes of bringing together conservative and radical audiences, and was instead presenting its mainstream activities towards conservative and traditional culture.<sup>19</sup> Since then, the strategy of the RSC has clarified itself as a populist one, attempting to define its audiences differently in order to bolster market diversity.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> On black-tie elitism and on the exit-poles, see *The Spread of Sponsorship*, p. 20-21.

<sup>19</sup> 'Royal Shakespeare', p. 193.

<sup>20</sup> The most extreme manifestation of this transformation was the promotional season 'Everybody's Shakespeare' in 1994, which was tied in with a series of BBC programmes. The season advertised the new direction in the RSC, which was to open up itself culturally to a mass audience. Shakespeare was to be made available to all, realising a trajectory that had developed since the 1950s critiques of the National Theatre argued for a genuine national theatre. A pet project of Adrian Noble's, the season publicised the changes he had been making since *The Plantagenets*, not just to the RSC's financial and organisational structures, but also to its basic philosophy. The

In this new theatrical market-place, the RSC was also faced with increasing pressures to compete, both with an increased number of high-profile Shakespeare companies, and with new companies staking a claim for national theatre status. The 1980s saw a rapid expansion in Shakespearean performance: companies like Branagh's Renaissance Theatre Company, Prospect, Check by Jowl, Compass, the Oxford Shakespeare Company, Northern Broadsides and the English Touring Theatre shifted the ground away from the RSC as the centre of Shakespearean activity in the theatre. Most of these companies toured extensively, so that most people in the country could experience a different kind of Shakespeare to the one constructed by the RSC. Added to this was the rising importance of the National Theatre. Following Peter Hall's appointment as the Artistic Director of the National Theatre and the long-awaited move to the South Bank, the National Theatre flourished in the 1980s and eclipsed the RSC for artistic achievement. It was Hall's ambition to turn the National Theatre into a 'true national theatre' which would emphasise touring as a way of bringing the theatre into the reach of the nation it purported to represent or even embody. However, budget constrictions forced him to abandon the ideal of a genuinely *national* theatre and Hall publicly blamed the Arts Council's lack of vision for this.<sup>21</sup>

The issue highlighted questions about the National Theatre and the RSC's authenticity as *national* theatres - after all, most people in the nation find it hard to attend plays in London. In 1986, the English Shakespeare Company tried to redefine what a 'true' national theatre should be by taking a cycle of Shakespeare's history plays on a national - and then an international - tour which placed an emphasis upon the regions of England: in fact, the production did not reach London for over a year, and its directors

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title reflects a democratic, inclusive and corporate view of the nation and Shakespeare. It can be read two ways: either, that Everyone (the nation) owns Shakespeare and has a right of authority over Shakespeare, or that Everybody (the nation) *is* Shakespeare. The former is more likely the intended meaning, but the ambivalence is interesting. The theme of 'everybody's Shakespeare' highlighted the collision of popular culture with high culture, as a previously respected cultural institution effectively opened its doors to the masses - or at least, invited them in. Since then, further developments have put this into practice: the partial withdrawal of the RSC from London, an increasing emphasis on regional productions and regional tours. Whereas the founders of the RSC had aspired to high cultural values, the aspiration now was to be popular, accessible and 'modern' in a non-intellectual sense. However laudable the democratising of Shakespeare may be, the lack of any kind of theorising of the relationship between everybody and Shakespeare is indicative of a marketing gimmick designed to respond to the new pressures of business, who are more interested in the composition and diversity of audiences than in the cultural value of the production in question. That 'Everybody' has authorial rights over Shakespeare, or over the past, implies a pure form of subjectivity in which the subject does not reside within history and culture but consumes it.

<sup>21</sup> *Making an Exhibition*, p.260.

(Michael Bogdanov and Michael Pennington) were scathing about what they saw as the domination of metropolitan culture over national identity. The ESC has an interesting and significant place in the history of Shakespearean performance: the directors' inhabited a similar mindset to Hands and Howell, in that they saw the return to an 'authentic' idea of a nation - embodied by a 'true' national theatre which went out to 'the people' - as a way of re-legitimizing Shakespeare's plays. However, the ESC was also significant in that it exemplified in many ways the kind of theatrical enterprise that the Arts Council was now promoting. Although the ESC cultivated a radical identity, the Arts Council was happy that the ESC were producing an accessible and highly marketable brand of Shakespeare - exactly the kind of Shakespeare being demanded by the new sponsorship culture. Bogdanov and Pennington believed that they were redefining the concept of national theatre in terms of an English ethnicity; however, they were in fact transforming the nature of Shakespearean performance by bringing the mainstream into the orthodoxy of populist productions and touring, both of which were in the interests of sponsors looking for a national, even international, audience. The ESC's international tour of Shakespeare's history plays in the late 1980s was the definitive statement of Shakespearean performance at this time, and the ESC was the exemplary Thatcherite theatre company - an irony, perhaps even a tragedy, in view of Bogdanov's deep antipathy towards Mrs. Thatcher's administration. Whereas the other companies mentioned sought their own identity, the ESC impinged upon and challenged key areas of the RSC's own cultural identity and established a challenge to the RSC's authority over Shakespeare. Although the RSC subsequently eclipsed the ESC, which has never matched its initial achievement, the RSC was altered fundamentally by the experience. By tackling Shakespeare's history plays, and producing the definitive version of them for the 1980s, the ESC captured one of the RSC's central achievements. The RSC fought back, using *The Plantagenets* to foreground its own role in society and to rebut the ESC's attempt to hijack Shakespeare's history plays. The struggle for cultural authority was conducted on the battlefields of the past: or rather, one should say, the past was used to promote both the companies and their sponsors in different ways.

The marketing of the past in this way raises important questions about the way that the audience is situated in relation to the representations of the past in theatrical performance. The identification of the audience as consumers rubs against the conventional contract between theatre and audience, and defers



authority ultimately to the audience rather than to history as such. The commodification of the past is characteristic of postmodernism, or what Jameson calls the 'waning of historicity': that is, a representation of the past has come to take the place of a sense of being within history.<sup>22</sup> Baudrillard, too, talks of postmodernism in these terms, mourning the 'leukaemia of history' and the 'precession' of representations which Baudrillard dismisses as 'retro fascination.'<sup>23</sup> The sense of being within history, of seeing oneself as having a future as well as past and of being connected with both, is important to Baudrillard and Jameson's concept of historicity, which they see as absent from modern representations of history: '... so many generations, and particularly the last, lived in the march of history, in the euphoric or catastrophic expectation of revolution.'<sup>24</sup> Baudrillard, analysing historical fiction in cinema, claims that the 'mythical energy of an event' has been lost: instead, the emphasis is on historical fidelity, on the reproduction of the materiality of history, its costumes, manners, language, rather than its spirit, or on a connection between the past and the present audience. Modern histories not only reproduce the past, but they exceed it, make it better than the past.<sup>25</sup> Baudrillard calls this 'hyper-real' - that is, when the reproduction of the past is purer and exhibits its sense of past, but does not establish continuity with the present. The past has, in effect, become a commodity: it sells nostalgia. The desire for a lost present and its authenticity has emerged as a value in its own right, replacing and superseding historicity.

This idea looks back to Walter Benjamin, who made the first important theorisation of the nature of art in a commercial sector dominated by reproduction.<sup>26</sup> Benjamin argued that modern processes

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<sup>22</sup> Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London and New York: Verso, 1991). See in particular Jameson's introduction (pp.ix-xxii) and his first chapter on 'culture' (pp.1-54). Barbara Hodgdon also discusses Jameson's analysis of postmodernism, particularly in relation to the ESC productions of the *Henry VI* plays in *The End Crowns All*, p.89: 'Depthlessness, a waning of historicity, and the random cannibalisations of signs stored in global memory: these definitional factors of postmodernism, tied to the appetite for a world transformed into images of itself, into pseudo-events and pseudo-spectacles, construct a predominately spatial logic that, by privileging a multiplicity of surfaces (from which original signifiers have been erased), denies temporality.'

<sup>23</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994). These quotes are taken from the chapter 'History: A Retro Scenario', pp. 43-48.

<sup>24</sup> *Simulacra and Simulation*, p.43.

<sup>25</sup> For example, the Shakespeare Birthplace in Stratford-upon-Avon has been substantially restored, but it is not only a reproduction of Shakespeare's house, it is cleaner, more perfect and more 'authentic' than the 'original' ever was.

<sup>26</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in *Illuminations*, trans. Hannah Arendt (London: Fontana Press, 1973), pp. 211-244.

undermined the 'aura' of the work of art by bringing it into the ready reach of mass culture, thereby diminishing its authority. The role of business in this is interesting, in that it wants both the 'aura' of Shakespeare and a mass audience, otherwise the attractions of sponsorship would not reach beyond corporate vanity. The RSC and the ESC had to sell the appearance of quality whilst actually reaching out to a popular audience in order to navigate these contradictory business needs. In *The Plantagenets*, the reproduction of the past was so spectacular it was indeed a 'hyper-real' reproduction of England and her past. Although not as lavish as the RSC, the ESC too was swimming in these cultural tides, as it sought to popularise Shakespeare and resituate the performance of his plays away from the 'fortresses of high culture'<sup>27</sup> to the 'terraces of popular culture.' Hence, the ESC showed a readiness to deploy images of popular culture, past and present, linking Shakespeare with modern popular culture through the use of rock music, computers, football, subcultural fashion and so on, and exploring artistically the popular elements of Shakespeare's own work. In this sense, the ideas of Jameson and Baudrillard are astute in highlighting the flaws in Benjamin's argument: but then, Benjamin would have had to be exceptionally prescient to predict that 'aura' could also one day be mechanically reproduced.

The productions of *Henry VI* since 1963 have developed in a context of rapid and radical change in the politics and the economies of playing. The pressures of market ideologies upon the artistic process has had ramifications for all theatrical production but in the particular case of 'national' dramas such as the *Henry VI* plays, the effect was to problematise the ideological basis of the word 'national.' The idea of a unified construction of Shakespeare, or of nation, was lost in the deregulated, free market world of competition developed in the 1980s. Instead, competing constructions of Shakespeare battled ferociously for the patronage of the consumer; the unprecedented spectacle of two national theatres with rival productions of the *Henry VI* plays playing in London at the same time was a product of these changes. The culture of sponsorship introduced competition and (by extension) conflict into the previously consensual concepts of Shakespeare and England. Of course, in the *Henry VI* plays, the staging of conflict in England has disastrous effects and even in an apparently conservative production such as *The Plantagenets*, the

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<sup>27</sup> The phrase is used by Graham Holderness in 'Radical Potentiality', p. 216.

apocalyptic staging of a divided England seemed to acknowledge a deep anxiety about these changes in society. For the theatres which were having to survive these new ideologies, the *Henry VI* plays became an important and vital way of re-performing Mrs. Thatcher's decentralised, deregulated idea of culture in a way which refuted the triumphalist rhetoric of her politics - and this is an area I will explore in more detail in the next chapter.

In the following sections I wish to explore how the performance of the *Henry VI* plays as 'matter of England' plays intersected with these processes. The Hall-Barton initiatives have continued to exert a dominant force on the performance of the *Henry VI* plays, but in a much changed theatrical climate, where issues of national identity and of cultural authority have been complicated and politicised by the introduction of business into the arts, and by the diversification of the Shakespearean repertoire through the growth of companies devoted to playing it. To begin with, I will discuss the two full-text productions by the RSC in 1977 and the BBC in 1982, both of which were involved in the early stages of business sponsorship of the arts and both of which attempted to use 'authenticity' or 'rediscovery' in performance as a way of critiquing and subverting the prevailing ideology of their institution. In the second section, I will explore how this shift towards the prioritising of authenticity intersected with the new sponsorship culture (in the ESC productions of 1987-9) and was eventually colonised by it (in the RSC's *The Plantagenets* in 1988-90).

### Rediscovering *Henry VI*

The productions of the *Henry VI* plays by the RSC (1977-79) and by the BBC (1981-83) both emerged out of the early phase of the new negotiation between culture and politics, and both shared a common agenda in that they used the performance of the 'full' texts of the plays as a strategy for subverting and calling into question these new processes. As culture was itself becoming politicised by the Right, the value of politics within arts changed considerably. The RSC's Trevor Nunn distanced himself from the early RSC's radical identity, whilst the BBC were keen to avoid any direct political comment in their productions. Although this seems to be, at first sight, a reactionary and coercive approach, Terry Hands and Jane Howell were nevertheless able to use a rejection of politics and the embracing of an authentic Shakespearean text as a

site of resistance to the new forces which were shaping theatrical production. In their work, 'authenticity' emerged as a counter-value to 'authority' in the Hall-Barton sense: the cultural authority in their case had resided in the authority to appropriate and exemplify Shakespeare in performance, to 'improve' the scripts and to possess the unique integrity to do so. However, for Howell and Hands, Shakespeare's own text was the deeper priority, and both directors deferred to the original First Folio editions as their prime authority - even though these texts are in themselves vexed literary artefacts.<sup>28</sup> Cultural authority resided with the texts themselves and their writer, whose deeper vision it was their task to explore, interrogate and perform. They challenged the 'traditions' of cultural institutions like the BBC and the RSC by recovering something of the original essence and, most importantly, the *popular* spirit of original Shakespeare in performance. Cultural authority, then, was sought in Shakespeare himself.

Although the government's pro-active support for commercial sponsorship did not begin until 1980, there was already a momentum towards a new relationship between business and the arts. The ASBA's founding in 1976, one year before Hands' production of the *Henry VI* plays, was an indication of the way things were moving. The RSC was already having to redefine and restructure itself, with the effect that its mainstream activities became increasingly removed from its experimental and political activities: as Alan Sinfield points out, these audiences were no longer presumed to be in the same house, as alternative spaces such as The Other Place were used to foster - and, some might say, marginalise - experimental work.<sup>29</sup> In 1974, the RSC was still beset with financial problems; its deficit was now so large that the RSC had to find a way to recover its position and re-establish itself as an important cultural institution. The company, then under the artistic direction of Trevor Nunn, decided to reinvent the company, to make a new start, and to signal this to the public, it was decided to stage a new cycle of Shakespeare's history plays. In

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<sup>28</sup> For a full discussion of the textual problems of the *Henry VI* plays, see Michael Hattaway's sections on 'Textual Analysis' in each of his three editions of the *Henry VI* plays for the New Cambridge Shakespeare.

<sup>29</sup> 'Royal Shakespeare', p.193. The development of The Other Place was one of the major achievements of the RSC in the 1970s. Like the open space theatres of the history plays, The Other Place was a reaction against big theatre and was indicative of the reluctance of both Nunn and Hands to pursue the 'national theatre' idea. The Other Place was an acknowledgement of the importance of fringe theatre and the bare stages of the RST in the 1970s reflected the influence of fringe theatre. For more detail see Colin Chambers' important book, *Other Spaces: New Theatre and the RSC* (London: Methuen, 1980) and Steven J. Phillips' 'History in Men's Lives: A Study of Two Cycles of Shakespeare's Histories' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Exeter, 1988), p. 140.

this way, the RSC hoped to be able to both repeat Hall's success in 1963 and, at the same time, put some distance between itself and its own past. Ironically, this was done by way of a centenary anniversary celebration for the theatre. Whereas previously, the RSC had attempted to establish itself as a modern company, the centenary celebrations served to highlight the RST as an old and valued cultural object, connected in history to the Victorian period of which it claimed to be a product.<sup>30</sup>

*Henry V*, directed by Terry Hands, was the centre piece of the 1975 season, and projected to the nation the RSC's new found conservatism in culture and the performance of nation. It was a strategic and deliberate choice for the beleaguered company. Not only was the company in deficit and facing cuts in state subsidy, it also needed vital repairs to the heating and air-conditioning system at the RST. Shaughnessy describes the choice of *Henry V* as 'almost mandatory' - it was a 'call to arms' both to the company and to the country. However, Hands actually voted against reviving the play, but he was overridden by the RSC's Planning Committee, who voted 11-1 in favour of the choice.<sup>31</sup> That Hands was the lone voice of dissent is interesting, particularly as Hands was chosen as the director. The choice was clearly not made for artistic reasons, but for strategic reasons. Hands was left with the job of restoring the company's reputation as a classical theatre without alienating its progressive audiences. Whilst the director and the company were able to introduce subversions of conservative values into their performance, the production was sold as a gift of hope to a nation in crisis.<sup>32</sup> In the celebratory book published in the same year, Trevor Nunn spoke of the play's 'special message of courage to the English in times of gathering darkness, fear, and falling empires.'<sup>33</sup> Sinfield is critical of the production, arguing that its presentation of war stressed the need for

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<sup>30</sup> The programme tries to explain that it means the centenary of the RST not the RSC. However, the theatre that was founded in 1875 burned down in 1926. It was also not called the RST. This would be like the present Globe Theatre in London celebrating its four hundredth anniversary in 1999 and this should alert us to the spuriousness - and the cultural meaning - of the RSC's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday.

<sup>31</sup> Phillips, 'History in Men's Lives', p. 138.

<sup>32</sup> Shaughnessy discusses this and the cultural politics implied by the choice of *Henry V* in *Representing Shakespeare*, p. 105-116. The production is also criticised by Alan Sinfield in 'Royal Shakespeare', pp. 196-7.

<sup>33</sup> In *The Royal Shakespeare Company's Production of Henry V*. Unlike *The Wars of the Roses* and *The Plantagenets*, there was nothing extraordinary about the RSC's playing script, which was a straightforward text of Shakespeare's *Henry V*. However, the text was laid alongside detailed production notes and articles from those involved in the project, so that the text was presented and enshrined in the robes of the RSC production. This was a more imaginative publication than either of the above. Neither Barton nor Noble provided much in the way of detailed information about the productions beyond some short notes, mainly on the process of adaptation, and a few

collective responsibility and deferment to brotherhood (i.e. authority) in society; he also criticises the lack of reference to any contemporary conflicts, such as Vietnam or Northern Ireland, which (in Sinfield's view) avoided engaging with the contemporary issue of conflict in society.<sup>34</sup> Although this preceded the era of sponsorship, the production's deliberate flirtation with conservative values in order to attract middle-class, reactionary audiences, adumbrated the subsequent shifts in the RSC to a more conservative position in English cultural life.<sup>35</sup> *Henry V* 'reversed a near-catastrophic decline in the financial and artistic fortunes of the RSC.'<sup>36</sup> It attracted the praise of Prince Philip, who admired the attempt to create a new sense of hope and patriotic pride in the country, and thought that this would inspire people to 'overcome the menace of rising costs and inflation in the years ahead' - which is an interestingly economic way of looking at national crisis.<sup>37</sup> The play was performed as a national drama, restoring value and achievement to a concept of the English nation which was otherwise in crisis, following a series of industrial disputes which highlighted division in society.<sup>38</sup> Its final image was of Henry in a white robe. He stood without any trappings or symbols of state, suggesting an image of a blank page of history that was waiting to be written upon.<sup>39</sup> This suggested a pure and renewed metaphor for England which strove for a 'metaphysics of Englishness' - the pure voice and image of England. In doing so it established the authentic character of England, authorising the RSC as the authentic theatre of Shakespearean history and the nation. It was in the wake of this season that Terry Hands embarked on a long-held ambition to stage the *Henry VI* plays in their entirety.

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photographs. *Henry V* therefore was a performance-oriented script, whereas the other two centred upon the text and textual issues.

<sup>34</sup> 'Royal Shakespeare', pp. 196-7.

<sup>35</sup> In 'Nato's Pharmacy: Shakespeare by Prescription', Richard Wilson argues that Hands' *Henry V* emerged out of the desire to satisfy business sponsors. There is nothing in my own research to support this statement. Although business figures could be involved as Associate Members of the RSC and obtain seats on the board of governors, the RSC was certainly not beholden to any major sponsor in 1975. Nevertheless, the substantive point still remains - the production arose out of a commercial need, not an artistic one, and the final product represents an artistic compromise.

<sup>36</sup> *Representing Shakespeare*, p.106.

<sup>37</sup> This is from Prince Philip's foreword to *The Royal Shakespeare Company's Production of Henry V*.

<sup>38</sup> In 'Royal Shakespeare' (p.196-7) Sinfield writes that he was shocked by the production's presentation of war.

<sup>39</sup> I am grateful to Martin Wright for this observation.

## II

Terry Hands deliberately fostered an interest in academic circles about the productions' return to the 'original' folio texts: this amounted to a daring rejection of Peter Hall and John Barton's authorial strategies in 1963 and seemed to fulfil John Russell Brown's clarion call to 'free Shakespeare' from directorial interference.<sup>40</sup> David Daniell, an academic who observed the production and is sympathetic to its agenda, wrote 'Terry Hands has imposed no directorial thesis at all: the plays are not arranged to demonstrate anything, except the full text.'<sup>41</sup> This was to be a faithful rendering of the folio texts, their 'rediscovery', played on a largely empty stage so that the nuances of conflict and the effects of the language could be performed with great purity. In interviews, Hands constructed himself as an academic investigator of the plays: 'We decided ... just to put it all very crudely, very naively down on the stage - everything that was there, warts and all, in the hope that one or two of them would turn out to be beauty spots. There was something to learn.' Hands returns to the words 'learn' and 'learning' repeatedly to describe the structure of rehearsals and what he believed he and the company were doing with the plays. For example, Hands described to Homer Swander how the company approached the number of short scenes in *Part One*: 'we wanted to find out if this was deliberate, a poetry of juxtaposition ... if we were going to learn anything it was absolutely incumbent on us just to do it and find out - which we are still doing.'<sup>42</sup> The performance model Hands projects is one of the folio text being literally 'put down' on the stage. It was only by inhabiting the texts as they stand that the company was able to learn Shakespeare's deeper structures and recover the original ideas and traditions which inform what now appear to be 'bad' plays. This constructs the rehearsal process (and perhaps too the performance process) as a form of research and the company as researchers, testing the object under scrutiny, copying its structures and making sense of its complex patterns, but never interfering with or collapsing the object itself: what remains is an authentic object, a

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<sup>40</sup> John Russel Brown, *Free Shakespeare* (London: Heinemann, 1974).

<sup>41</sup> David Daniell, 'Opening up the Text: Shakespeare's *Henry VI* Plays in Performance' in *Themes in Drama 1: Drama and Society*, edited by James Redmond (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 247-277. This quote is taken from p.247.

<sup>42</sup> This and the preceding quotes are both from an interview with Hands by Homer D. Swander, extracts of which have been published in Swander's 'The Rediscovery of *Henry VI*', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 29 (1978), pp.146-63. Both quotes can be found on p.149.

purity of transposition of the text from the page to the stage which registers the autonomy of the text in performance. Barbara Hodgdon describes this emphasis on purity as ‘an archacology of mystification’ which restores the ‘aura’ of Shakespeare to the performance of his work - that is, an aura of remoteness, of a disconnectedness with the present. Hodgdon also explores how the modernist staging of the plays helped to support the re-mystification of Shakespeare: ‘the stark, geometrical planes and volumes of individual stage images, generate an illusion of visual purity that, in turn, fosters the illusion of a “pure text,” of “Shakespeare speaking.”’<sup>43</sup>

The strive for authenticity in text and performance was a relatively new imperative in Shakespearean performance and in this formation even unique. Hands’ language recalls that of Grotowski or Brecht, both of whom introduced concepts of research and criticism into the practice of performance. However, those theorists were primarily interested in using plays as a research tool for investigating other kinds of phenomenon - the structure of power in society, or the nature of spirituality in the modern world.<sup>44</sup> Hands appropriated their language and terms, but delivered instead an investigation into the text itself as the primary agenda for the performance. The turn to authenticity implied a theoretical devolution of authority to Shakespeare himself. Whereas, as we have seen, Hall and Barton attempted to assert their authority over the Shakespearean text, achieving this partly by testing its boundaries, Hands sought to recover the authority of the original texts and preserve its boundaries - even the normal amount of cuts that would be made in a Shakespeare production were not made here.

David Daniell’s idea that there was ‘no directorial thesis’ has to be treated very carefully, as even Hands would probably agree that there was a directorial vision at work in the production. What is interesting about this case is the extent to which Hands avoided speaking about his role as director or interpreter and instead emphasised the ‘authenticity’ of the texts that his company were performing. In the 1970s, John Russell Brown’s *Free Shakespeare* had established an idea of the director as a figure of authority attempting to imprison Shakespeare in limiting visions and interpretations of the plays. Brown’s

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<sup>43</sup> *The End Crowns All*, pp. 86-7.

<sup>44</sup> See Jerzy Grotowski’s *Towards a Poor Theatre*, edited by Eugenio Barba (London: Methuen, 1969) and Bertolt Brecht’s *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of An Aesthetic*, edited and trans. by John Willet (London: Methuen, 1964).



challenge to the hegemony of the director in Shakespearean performance may well have been an attempt to reassert the role of academics in the interpretation of Shakespeare's works; but it was also part of a wider cultural paradigm in which 'the author', authorising figures, were coming under attack for 'imposing' (to borrow Daniell's phrase) limiting ideologies upon social groups. When Brown challenged the authenticity of directors authorising interpretation, he locates his own polemic within this paradigm - again, Watergate and Vietnam are important events to bear in mind when tracing these cultural contours. For *Hands*, the production and its values were based upon a rejection of the textual interference of the 1963 directors: however, the rejection of the Hall-Barton method of performance was in itself an act of interpretation, and implicitly constructed or valued the folio texts as authentic. By resorting to an authentic text, *Hands* deferred authorial responsibility to Shakespeare and effaced himself and the company as authors of meaning in their performances. Authenticity was not respected but appropriated as a value, in attempt to restore to Shakespeare what Benjamin calls the 'aura' of the work of art, its cultural and historic authority.<sup>45</sup> Within the context of arts and politics in the 1970s, this turn to authenticity was not necessarily a reactionary procedure. Though it is certainly very different from the political language of the RSC in the 1960s, this turn nevertheless had its own politics, or rather, it operated a subversion through the very rejection of politics and the attempt to recover the authority of the past, in order to disabuse us of the inauthenticity of authority in the present.

The 1977 productions were no less 'relevant' or 'directorly' than the 1963 ones had been: it was only that 'politics' had been disregarded in favour of a nostalgia for cultural authenticity and the radical possibility of rediscovering that authenticity. This produced a different kind of national history to the one that Hall had sought, one which rejected absolutes, meta-narratives and grand designs in favour of an inclusive and social representation of England. *Hands* erased the monumental idea of England produced by the totalising discourse that Hall conceived and recuperated from his rediscoveries an alternative, 'authentic' concept of England in history and in the present that was alert to the problem of violence in

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<sup>45</sup> Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.'

society, and used images culled from the battlefields of Vietnam and the football terraces to make the link between state-legitimated violence and the violence of disorder.

The Hands' *Henry VI*s critiqued and rejected the use of meta-narratives, exposing their role as a mask for the operation of power and authority in society which, in the post-Watergate *milieu*, amounted to a rejection of ideology and nation, in favour of a new and authentic vision of national history. There was no sense of history as an absolute: the stage was very economical, with the minimum amount of furniture and hand props, and this centred the performance on the historical subject as opposed to an intellectual idea of history. On a performance level, this allowed Hands to explore some of the human textures of the plays. For example, Margaret's sexuality was emphasised and her relationships with Suffolk and Henry were explored in detail, testing and making ambiguous the depth of Margaret's feeling, whereas in the abbreviated versions, Margaret was often a political agent and nothing else. Hands' sense of 'interior' plays allowed him and his actors the freedom to explore these nuances of the text, to explore other areas of the play beyond the historic and the epic, to the extent that these performances were domestic drama relative to the epic *The Wars of the Roses*, as they focused upon the narratives and the conflicts of individual characters. Barbara Hodgdon criticises this approach as 'formalist or structuralist Shakespeare' which 'privileges actors' performances as integral to a transhistorical, autonomous aesthetic.'<sup>46</sup>

Although all three were played by the same cast and as linked works, there was no metanarrative or ruling concept binding the three productions together - instead, multiple narratives were drawn out, elicited rather than synthesised, so that the performance operated its own form of compression whilst maintaining formal fidelity to the text. Each part had its own distinct character, but they fitted together to form what Hands called the 'super-narrative'<sup>47</sup> of *Henry VI*. The difference between this and the 1963 production was that the interior events of each play were allowed to have their own moment without the continual resort to an overbearing main narrative. Hands recognised that many of the main characters in each play were unique to that play. By opening out the text to performance in this way, the 1977 *Henry VI*s were able to trace the tension between the metanarratives of nation and authority, and the individual narratives of social

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<sup>46</sup> *The End Crowns All*, pp. 86-7.

<sup>47</sup> Swander, 'The Rediscovery of *Henry VI*', p.149.

life. The rejection of Hall's monumentalism was apparent in the *mise-en-scene*. Whereas Bury's set had been overwhelming, Hands' designer Farrah's was understated and empty, and marked only by a few key stage items which organised the world of the stage without choking it. The proscenium arch was stripped away to reveal the brick work, to make the audience aware that they were in a theatre.<sup>48</sup> Guy Wolfenden's score was limited to basic drum beats which created a minimalist ambience and suggested the repetitive nature of political and human conflict. The vast, mainly empty playing spaces hinted at the aching lack of a metanarrative with which to resolve, contain and eliminate violence and social disorder.

The absence of a controlling metanarrative was also stressed by Hands' strategic decision not to conclude the trilogy with a performance of *Richard III*, challenging the orthodoxy that the four plays constitute a single, providentialist narrative. The last scene of the trilogy left unresolved tensions: we knew that the 'everlasting joy' of the king was challenged by the ascendancy of Richard in the previous scene. That the production did not conclude with a unified vision of England in history is extremely interesting. The performance's final note, after a nine hour stint for the audience, was not so much inconclusive as radically sceptical about its own conclusion and, indeed, the possibilities for genuine closure or genuine national unity. After Edward IV's closing speech, musicians started to play the only tune they knew, which was militaristic and bombastic in tone and in response, swords were drawn from their scabbards; then Edward signalled a change of tune and the musicians started to play a dance tune but the court could not remember the steps. This showed a culture which had been so steeped in warfare that it had to struggle to remember the dances and the music it left behind. It was a powerful image of a nation which had lost or forgotten a great part of its culture, which was struggling to find a lost cultural identity that was dimly remembered, and its loss keenly felt.

Reviewers of the trilogy complained that it did not conclude with *Richard III*; the *Henry VI* plays were nevertheless played as part of a tetralogy, in that (in an interesting development of the Hall-Barton initiative) Hands revived *Henry V* from the 1975 season. This shifted the narrative arc backwards, so that *Henry VI Part Three* became the bloody climax of a four play cycle in which the political ascendancy of

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<sup>48</sup> Phillips, 'History in Men's Lives', p. 141.

Henry V, embodying England and its values as a reawakening of national spirit, was slowly and brutally dissected. Here, the *Henry VI* plays played against the grain of the RSC's previous struggle to assert itself as a national institution. The *Henry VI* plays were a much more stark and honest look at the character of England that *Henry V* promoted. Hands returned to the style of pre-*Henry V* RSC productions, which were characteristically minimalist and 'reflected its fragmenting public with confusing spectacle.'<sup>49</sup> The incorporation of the later history play was also a device familiar from the RSC in the early 1970s, when non-related Shakespeare plays were juxtaposed in invented cycles. In this way, Hands was able to assert the authority of the RSC in constructing his own cycles and he was able to undo some of the optimism of *Henry V* with a performance of crisis and division where he had previously celebrated harmony and order in culture: this not only reread his *Henry V*, it also emphasised its more subversive and questioning subtext. *Henry VI* completed *Henry V*, fulfilling the epilogue's prophecy, and in so doing substantially reread and upset its narrative of nation and history by way of an extended deconstruction of the positive endorsement of nation made by that production, a cascade of crisis and division issuing from Henry's attempt to secure a centralised authority in a diverse nation.

David Daniell argues that criticism paved the way for the 1977 productions as it moved to a much more complex view of Shakespeare's historical narrative which recognised 'the patterns of parallels, repetitions, inversions, echoes, restatements, anticipation's, unwitting insights - a dialectic of all kinds of competing forces, which reverberates forwards and backwards by means of oaths, prophecies and forebodings as well as encounters, styles, settings and pacings.'<sup>50</sup> In other words, scholars like Philip Brockbank and Sidney Burckhardt had moved away from Tillyard's thesis to explore the textuality of history in the *Henry VI* plays and Hands too was performing a similar operation, in which history is not just seen as a forward momentum of conflict and resolution, but the complex textuality of society, in which prophecy and oaths are as much about history and historiography as narrative. The ability of the plays to make meaningful juxtapositions in ways which question the chronicle structure was one of the productions' significant discoveries. The key theatrical and narrative device that Hands used was that of

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<sup>49</sup> 'Nato's Pharmacy: Shakespeare by Prescription', p.67.

<sup>50</sup> Daniell, 'Opening up the Text', p.248.

superimposition, which borrowed a cinematic technique for the stage and allowed juxtapositions to emerge from the performance which enforced a different kind of reading of the text.<sup>51</sup> Scenes were overlapped, sometimes with scenes played together onstage, other times so that characters and events from adjacent scenes were meaningfully juxtaposed. For example, Margaret's first entrance, picking her way through the battlefield, was visually contrasted with Joan being dragged off the stage. This juxtaposition drew suggestive parallels between Joan's capture and Margaret's capture, and invited the audience to read them against each other. It was also an effective way of registering that Joan's narrative had in some sense been transferred to Margaret. Superimposition made for a powerful form of social commentary, showing political authority, whether it be in the figure of Henry V or the fractious nobles who bore his legacy, superimposed upon the social order which they maintain control over. Hands was interested in the sudden movement in the plays from 'grandeur to simplicity': 'from high rhetoric about Joan down to a soldier in the rain and cold.'<sup>52</sup>

This performance of history represents it as a mask, a disguise for the deep neurosis of society. The performance began with Henry V's funeral played as a series of unmaskings and exposures. Henry V's coffin (representing the death of history?) spotlighted as a dead object, draped with the colours of England and France: around the coffin the stage picture fragmented as it was spatialised by political and class tensions. What began as a double line of nobles fragmented as the intervening messengers interfered with and reordered the nobles. The coffin meanwhile was a discarded and forgotten object. Then the black curtain was withdrawn to reveal an ever deeper blackness, an expanse of space behind that challenged expectations of another Hall-Barton epic, or a historical pageant of romantic Shakespearean performance.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> An alternative reading of this technique might be that it reanimated the medieval theatrical technique of simultaneous staging.

<sup>52</sup> Quoted by Swander, 'The Rediscovery of *Henry VI*' p. 149.

<sup>53</sup> Unfortunately, the Shakespeare Centre's video records begin in 1982, so there is no visual record of the Terry Hands *Henry VI* plays and this may be one reason why they have faded from view in recent years. However, two detailed accounts of the production were written at the time and I have used these as the source for my comments: Homer D. Swander's 'The Rediscovery of *Henry VI*'; and David Daniell's 'Opening up the Text: Shakespeare's *Henry VI* Plays in Performance'. I have also been helped by the following reviews: G. M. Pearce, 'Review of Terry Hands' RSC London Production of *Henry VI*', *Cahiers Elizabethans*, 14 (1978), pp. 107-9; Roger Warren, 'Comedies and Histories at two Stratfords, 1977', *Shakespeare Survey* 31 (1978), pp. 141-53; Sally Emerson, 'Adventure Stories', *Plays and Players* (September 1977), pp. 20-23; Carol Chillington Rutter, '*Henry VI* pts I, II, III', *Educational Theatre Journal* 29 (1977), pp. 566-69; J. M. Maguire, 'Review of 1, 2, 3 *Henry VI*', *Cahiers*

The main set piece was a moveable bridge. Barbara Hodgdon has argued that Farrah's design was based on narrative paintings that collapse time and space in order to display social hierarchy.<sup>54</sup> In this manner, the audience was constellated within an abstract representation of social order so that the empty space of the theatre was a paradigmatic, social space, full of schematic meanings. This was most evident in the staging of *Part Two*, which was presented on a green carpet, which was a metonymic representation of pastoral England. On the green, a red rope divided the nobles from the lower orders, so that the display of social order becomes the means for its disruption - later on, Cade made a noose out of the rope so that, after its various transgressions, the rope itself became the symbol of social repression.

These productions were performed within the context of a paradigmatic shift in culture and politics, particularly towards the arts, but also to all institutions representing post-war authority structures. The critiques of the 1960s radical left had turned into the sour disillusionment of the post-1968 intellectual scene and the post-Watergate popular scene, as the public in Britain and America voted for administrations which promised to reduce the influence of government in public life. The RSC's *Henry VIs* were both products of and interventions in this context. Emerging out of the 1975 season which re-established the RSC as a cultural force in society and redefined it for the following decade, the *Henry VIs* were a bleak coda to that redefinition, in which England was presented in shades of disillusionment and anger. History was a fractured and divided force, offering no solutions, but providing no lessons either: history was not an abstract destiny or providentialist force, but a constructed metanarrative for authority, invented by those in power and those who sought power to legitimate their own, inauthentic claims.

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*Elizabethans*, 12 (1977), pp. 77-80; and G. K. Hunter, 'The Royal Shakespeare Company Plays *Henry VI*', *Renaissance Drama IX* (1978), pp. 91-108. The number of critical reviews of the Hands *Henry VIs* indicates the extent to which it was regarded by the academic community as a major event in Shakespearean performance at the time. However, the productions have faded in contemporary scholarship, which has been more interested in areas of cultural history.

<sup>54</sup> See *The End Crowns All*, pp. 86-7. It is not clear whether Hodgdon was able to consult Farrah's design plans or whether this is simply an impression Hodgdon formed herself. Steven J. Phillips presents an alternative view: he contrasts Bury's costumes, which 'were intended to make the audience aware of the political and social world the characters inhabited and shaped' whilst Farrah's designs 'were more often than not symbolic.' ('History in Men's Lives', p. 143). Either way, the substantive point remains, that the designs were meant to symbolise a social order and it was this, rather than abstract ideas of history, which the production concentrated upon.

## III

The deconstruction of ideology and institution in the performance of national history was also a feature of the BBC Shakespeare Series' productions of the *Henry VI* plays.<sup>55</sup> These too exhibited an abrasive and critical attitude towards the political ideology of the institution which the BBC Shakespeare Series itself was designed to articulate and endorse. The BBC-Time Life series of Shakespeare's complete works has been much interrogated for its vainglorious policies regarding the staging of Shakespeare in authentic, traditional manner.<sup>56</sup> Susan Willis argues that the series appealed to the

'charge of the light brigade' values that built the British Empire - it was a grand project, no one else could do it, but it ought to be done. Thus, in the moral equation of gallantry, duty transformed into desire, and the scheme was sanctioned because, as Henry Fenwick observed, it seemed 'gloriously British and gloriously BBC.'<sup>57</sup>

However, it was in its infamous contract with Time-Life that the series incorporated into its underlying structure the rejection of the central theatrical movements that had driven Shakespeare's modern performances up to this point. In order to guard Shakespeare against modern interpretations, the firms that underwrote the series used their financial promise for aesthetic leverage, insisting that certain production values be incorporated into the contract: namely that the plays be set within their own period or the Elizabethan period, that they be no longer than 2.5 hours and that they were to have 'maximum

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<sup>55</sup> In addition to the works discussed here, see also Hattaway, Nowell, Dominique Goy-Blanquet and Michèle Willems, 'Representations télévisuelles de la guerre' in *Shakespeare et la guerre*, edited by Marie-Therese Jones-Davies (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1990), pp. 161-69, which discusses the representation of war in the series; and Michael Mullin's 'Shakespeare USA: The BBC Plays and American Education', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 35 (1984), pp. 582-589 gives an American perspective on the series. Howell was not the first person to bring the plays to television. The BBC produced them twice before, as part of the *Age of Kings* series in 1961 and in the televised version of *The Wars of the Roses* in 1966.

<sup>56</sup> Prior to Willis' *The BBC Shakespeare Plays*, the series' ideology has been explored and critiqued in a number of publications, most notably by Graham Holderness in 'Radical Potentiality'; Neil Taylor, 'Two Types of Television Shakespeare' *Shakespeare Survey* 39 (1987), pp. 103-111; Stanley Wells, 'The Television Shakespeare' *Shakespeare Quarterly* 33 (1982), pp. 261-77; and Michele Willems, 'Verbal-Visual, Verbal-Pictorial Textual-Televisual? Reflections on the BBC Series' *Shakespeare Survey* 39 (1987) pp. 91-102. Reception of the series amongst academic circles was largely one of derision, but the articles cited show an attempt to interrogate this contempt and explore the series' ideological construction and to identify moments of subversion within the series.

<sup>57</sup> *The BBC Shakespeare Plays*, p.5.

acceptability to the widest possible audience.’<sup>58</sup> The stringency of this edict was tested when Michael Bogdanov attempted a modern dress oriental version of *Timon of Athens* - he was removed from the project.<sup>59</sup> The insistence upon traditional and authentic Shakespeare was then a product of the BBC’s relationship with private funding. The series had begun as a grand gesture underlying the BBC’s public service provision and its claim to be the ‘true’ national theatre of the country. However, private sponsorship demanded a product that was safe and saleable. The idea of traditional performance was a manufactured one, which bore no relation to a stable and unchanging set of performance practices in the theatre, but presented instead an imitation of tradition. The series as a total performed tradition and performed England in traditional ways. The BBC-TimeLife partnership foreshadowed the kinds of public and private negotiations which were to dominate the performance of Shakespeare in the 1980s, often to its detriment. To begin with, the series confirmed the worst expectations of such an arrangement, as the first series produced wooden productions which were conventional almost to the point of caricature; however, when Jonathan Miller took over as the producer of the BBC Shakespeare, the series began to find its own identity whilst working within, and occasionally testing the boundary, of the restrictions imposed by the BBC-TimeLife contract. Jane Howell’s production of the first tetralogy was the most significant, and the best remembered, of that period. The productions were remarkable in the way that they tried to evoke an Elizabethan-style in the staging - partly by using a set which recalled (rather than reproduced) the Shakespearean stage - in a way which ironically produced a very ‘un’-traditional performance of Shakespeare. The production was unafraid of approaching the violence in the plays, which was used to emphasise the violence of war. In doing so, Howell strained the limitations of the series, by making a political comment about war in society, and by making a production which was too violent for the inclusive, family and educational audience sought by the series’ sponsors. Horrified by the final product,

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<sup>58</sup> *The BBC Shakespeare Plays*, p.11.

<sup>59</sup> Bogdanov told Christopher McCullough that the BBC series had ‘turned off yet another generation.’ Bogdanov’s own Shakespeare series, *Shakespeare Lives*, was an attempt to recuperate a modern Shakespeare for television audiences. See Christopher J. McCullough, ‘Michael Bogdanov’ in *The Shakespeare Myth*, pp. 89-95.



the American broadcasters insisted on wholesale cuts to the battle scenes, rendering the broadcast version in America virtually incomprehensible.<sup>60</sup>

The BBC Shakespeare Series' *Henry VI* plays were joined with *Richard III* for a winter season in early 1983, although the majority of the rehearsals and the actual recording of them was in 1981.<sup>61</sup> Howell told Harry Fenwick that to begin with the plays had little appeal to her. *Part One* seemed to her childish, 'a young man's play'. She told Fenwick,

When I read the first play I thought, 'This is a load of old rubbish; what on earth is this all about?' But I then started to perceive that it was very funny ... I think it would be very easy to misread the first play if you weren't born and bred in the theatre tradition, if you didn't know your theatre gags. For example, you get the French army who say, 'The English are all spotty-faced cowards; they're a lot of weaklings. Let's go and kill them' and a lot of people charge through a door. There is a tiny pause and they all come back and say, 'Aren't the English brave? Aren't the English wonderful?' It's a *gag*, it is a shorthand gag, and there are a lot of those in the first play.<sup>62</sup>

Howell's background in pantomime and small theatre work gave her an insight into the theatrical structure of the plays which radically altered her appreciation of their achievements:

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<sup>60</sup> See *The BBC Shakespeare Series*, p. 63, for all a full account of the debacle. Willis described the final product as the 'nadir' of the Shakespeare series in America.

<sup>61</sup> The productions are usually placed in 1982 but this is evidently an inappropriate dating, as only *Part Three* was taped in that year. *Part One* was taped between 13-19 October 1981 and transmitted on Sunday 2nd January 1983; *Part Two* was taped between 17-23 December 1981 and transmitted on Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> January 1983; and *Part Three* was taped between 10-17<sup>th</sup> February 1982 and broadcast on Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> January 1983, with *Richard III* shown the following week to complete the season. The long delay in transmission was unusual but not exceptional - Jonathan Miller's *Antony and Cleopatra* was also sat on for a year by the BBC, whilst at the other extreme both *Henry VIII* and Howell's *Titus Andronicus* were both transmitted within weeks of being recorded. The typical delay for a BBC production was around 6 months. The first tetralogy was held back longer than any other production in the series: this may well have been a consequence of a change in the production team (Shaun Sutton took over from Jonathan Miller for *Part Three* and *Richard III*) and of a change in scheduling policy at the BBC. Although the American broadcasts were severely censored because of the graphic nature of some of the battle scenes (apparently rendering them almost incomprehensible) it seems unlikely that this was a significant factor here. As the productions relied heavily on the topicality of the plays themes as a starting point, this risked making them seem outdated. Fortunately, the Falklands Crisis, which broke out just as *Richard III* was being completed, made the plays' interest in war and imperialism all the more vital. See Susan Willis, *The BBC Shakespeare Plays*, pp. 319-321. The viewing figures for each production were: 1 800,000 2 500,000 3 500,000, RIII 500,000 (source: 'Two Types of Television Shakespeare', p. 104).

<sup>62</sup> Harry Fenwick, 'The Production', in *The BBC-TV Shakespeare: Henry VI Part One* (London: BBC, 1983), pp. 21-31, p.21.

I found, working on it, the structure of the first play became more and more interesting and more and more controlled and more and more conscious. It's *not* a load of old rubbish, it's actually a very fine play, a wonderful play, very, very exciting.<sup>63</sup>

The plays are *wonderful*, there is no problem with the plays whatsoever. They are all of them in their individual ways extraordinarily powerful, major works. I think my respect for these plays has increased threefold. When you come to understand it, it is all of value, it is all of use: there is no spare fat on them anywhere.<sup>64</sup>

Like Hands, Howell approached the plays as a coherent trilogy.<sup>65</sup> She was interested in its over-all structure, its complex narrative, its interweaving characters and plots, and the 'through-line' which develops across the sequence.<sup>66</sup> An unusual two-tier company of 39 main actors and around 42 secondary actors was assembled for all four productions, with many roles doubled and the same basic sets repeated in order to stress the continuity and parallels across the four plays.<sup>67</sup> This season was the only occasion when the BBC used the same cast for more than one production.<sup>68</sup> The use of a permanent set, an established

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<sup>63</sup> Fenwick, *Part One*, p.22.

<sup>64</sup> Harry Fenwick, 'The Production', in *The BBC-TV Shakespeare: Henry VI Part Three* (London: BBC, 1983), pp. 20-31, p.21.

<sup>65</sup> Many critics then and since have expressed doubts about Howell's *Richard III*. Michael Manheim described it as 'disappointing' (p.138) in Manheim, Michael, 'The English History Play on Screen' in *Shakespeare and the Moving Image: The Plays on Film and Television*, edited by Davies and Wells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 121-145, p. 143. This complaint is echoed by Susan Willis (*The BBC Shakespeare Plays*, p. 223) and Stanley Wells complained that it was 'a melodramatically simplistic conclusion to a richly varied experience' in Stanley Wells, "The History of the Whole Contention," *TLS* 4 Feb 1983. Howell was not happy with the work either. By this point the company was tired and the work it produced was weak, the concepts that had driven the productions were spent (*The BBC Shakespeare Series*, p. 223).

<sup>66</sup> Fenwick, *Part One*, p. 21.

<sup>67</sup> The main cast frequently doubled. However, as Harry Fenwick points out, there was theoretically no need for doubling across productions. This was after all television and the adoption of a company approach was a self-imposed limitation. The doubling always had a thematic logic to it. Peter Benson, for example, played Henry VI, but he also played a singer at Henry V's funeral (whose face and voice open the production) and reprised a similar role in *Richard III*. Trevor Peacock, an actor who has often worked with Howell, played Talbot and Cade, inviting us to think of the two characters in similar terms. For more on Howell's use of doubling, see *The BBC Shakespeare Plays*, p. 176.

<sup>68</sup> Originally, Cedric Messina had argued that a repertory company should be created for the whole series and this was at one point going to happen. However, objections from Equity forced the BBC to shelve the idea and rely instead on different casts for different productions. This is very regrettable for in many ways Messina's original concept would have met many of the objections that were levelled at the series, for being star-orientated, variable and unimaginative. A single company would have been able to settle into the series, give it an over-all identity, and suggest cross-currents in the works and so on. It would also no doubt have quickly become a creative platform for directors and would, in addition, be a strong support for any guest stars. This would have been very innovative both

company and thematic doubling were all part of a deliberate attempt to mix theatrical techniques with television, which had the curious double effect of not only reminding viewers of the plays' roots in popular theatre gags and routines, but also televisions' roots in the same traditions. The inspiration for this method was Howell's own belief that only a deep understanding of theatre could recuperate the plays and present them in a modern environment. Literary studies, she told Michele Willems, had got it very wrong: 'I know why the academics don't like this play; it's because they don't know the rules, because it's theatre rules, it's not literary rules.'<sup>69</sup> As she was to insist in all of her interviews, the plays had 'ground rules' which must be recognised and explored:

I did attempt to obey the ground rules by which the plays were written. They were written for a known space, for a known company. Certain effects require that space if they are going to work ... That does *not* mean you can only do Shakespeare in a wooden O, but you have to know what the rules are before you break them, and you have to know what you lose and what you gain.<sup>70</sup>

As this makes very clear, Howell did not see the 'ground rules' of the play as an authoritarian legislation but as a limit or a structure which could discipline the company's creative work. The starting point was to place this structure, to identify the play, 'to know what the rules are before you break them.' Howell found a structure in the history of popular theatre, from medieval mystery plays to carnivals, from the Elizabethan theatre to television, from which Howell derived both an environment for her work, in the form

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for television and Shakespeare and suggests that Messina is not quite the cultural demon he is sometimes thought to be. Union pressure also prevented James Earl Jones from taking up the lead in *Othello*, which just goes to show that capitalist organisations did not have the monopoly in quashing creative possibilities in the series. The invitation to Jones, incidentally, came from Messina. For further information, cf. Susan Willis, *The BBC Shakespeare Plays*, pp. 13-5. James Earl Jones had a curious involvement with the *Henry VI* plays. In America, producers were worried that audiences would not understand the plays (which was probably true, as the Americans censored them almost into oblivion) so James Earl Jones provided voice-over narratives for the start of each one. As Jones was then most famous for being the voice of Darth Vader, the series became known in America as the 'Star Wars of the Roses.'

<sup>69</sup> Michèle Willems, 'Entretien avec Jane Howell, réalisatrice de la première Tétralogie, de *The Winter's Tale* et de *Titus Andronicus* with Michèle Willems', in Michèle Willems, ed., *Shakespeare a la Television*, Publications de l'universite de rouen, pp. 79-81.

<sup>70</sup> 'Entretien avec Howell', p.83.

of a playground motif for the set, and a vocabulary of different performance styles.<sup>71</sup> The creative part of the production process was to then find modern meanings within these structures, to make the theatre of sixteenth century England speak to the television audiences of 1980s Britain. By returning to Elizabethan playing practices, Howell was able to re-authenticate and reauthorize television as a stage for playing Shakespeare, highlighting televisions' roots in popular theatre. This in turn allowed Howell to make the kind of links with contemporary problems which her sponsors wished to avoid. What Howell and her company produced was an essay on the politics of popular history, drawing vital links between the traditions of popular theatre which the plays are rooted in and the contemporary media construction of present historical events, from displays of national order to street reporting of social disorder. Howell used her experience in television and pantomime to construct a unique televisual environment for the plays in which the media view of history could be staged, dramatised and analysed.

Howell and her designer Oliver Balydon conceived of a set which would stylistically connect the world of the past with the landscapes of the present, and suggest common processes underlying both crisis. The set blended modern and medieval metaphors, simultaneously invoking the popular theatres and the heraldry of fifteenth century culture and the brightly painted urban adventure playgrounds of modern times. The set was, in fact, based directly upon such a playground in Fulham,<sup>72</sup> and the idea of the playground quickly became embedded in Howell's mind as a ruling metaphor for the productions, a binding image which mediated both her sense of the plays and her sense of modern politics. The set was a wooden construction made of gash timber and slats, with an upper level connected by stairs and a gantry in the centre. The jagged, irregular lines of the battlements were arranged to give the sense of an industrial

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<sup>71</sup> James Bulman and Stanley Wells both admired the attempt Howell made to re-create 'the original conditions of performance.' James C. Bulman, 'The BBC Shakespeare and "House Style"' *Shakespeare Quarterly* 35 (1984), pp. 571-581, p. 574; Stanley Wells, 'The History of the Whole Contention.'

<sup>72</sup> Jane Howell explained to Michèle Willems, 'Some sets you find in your head, some sets are in books. I knew this one was in the street ... I wanted something ... detailed in the background, where every bit would work [...] it's not a concept, it's a feeling really.' 'Entretien avec Jane Howell' pp. 82-4. Oliver Balydon elaborates, 'The ideas that came to my mind were of fairgrounds and circuses and mystery plays - that sort of thing. I was working along those sort of lines and on day Jane called and said, "Do you have the time to come out to Fulham?" and I said, "Sure, why?" She said, "I was driving down a road in Fulham and I saw above a brick wall these big painted posts and they look really medieval. I think it's an adventure playground. I haven't been on the other side yet. Can you come?"' (Fenwick, *Part One*, p.24).

skyscape<sup>73</sup> - this was particularly effective when the set was cast in silhouette. Netting hung round the back of the stage, marking it off as an arena, whilst behind it was a mixture of screens and brick wall which allowed effective lighting to vary the texture of the set, as well as foregrounding its artificiality: as Stanley Wells said at the time, Howell dared to remind us that we were in a television studio.<sup>74</sup> In the first plays, the wooden frames were brightly painted with strong primary colours, giving a playschool feel to the production, as if it were being performed in a children's studio. In subsequent plays, these colours faded and the set was burnt, battered and knocked, representing the development of history from these childish exteriors to the black, paranoid interiors of Richard's court.<sup>75</sup> This was the set's principal function, as the actors rarely interacted with the set (though they frequently abused it).

The set made a connection to the popular theatres of modern and early modern times, to mystery plays, carnivals, fairgrounds, playgrounds and so on. By looking for the plays roots in this kind of theatre, Howell resituated television away from the cultural high-ground of the BBC Shakespeare Series towards the popular, artificial and studio based forms of television, to children's television, news broadcasting<sup>76</sup> and media events - in the words of Dennis Bingham, 'some of television's least artistically respectable, but most characteristic, techniques.'<sup>77</sup> This was combined with her sense of structure: the playground, she argued, was a structure for rules, games and codes, much like society. The setting was a 'modern structure' which 'supported the idea that the action of the play had the nature of an elaborate, increasingly vicious and violent game, a cult game, something along the lines of American football.'<sup>78</sup> Rules, boundaries, and games made a televisual theatre where the construction of authority was represented critically, where public

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<sup>73</sup> Harry Fenwick made a similar observation about the battlements. There were 'equally images of modernity and shadows of medieval castle.' (Fenwick, 'The Production', *Part One*, p. 24.)

<sup>74</sup> Wells, 'The History of the Whole Contention.'

<sup>75</sup> In 'The History of the Whole Contention' Stanley Wells wrote, 'In the first play, particularly, we are very conscious of the conventionalised setting and it becomes a way of helping us accept the plays' artificiality of language and action.' However, 'a sense of reality increases, until in *Richard III* many of the scenes seem to take place in virtually real interiors.'

<sup>76</sup> In *The BBC Shakespeare Plays*, Susan Willis argues that Shakespeare's plays are structurally similar to television news broadcasts (p. 82).

<sup>77</sup> Dennis Bingham, 'Jane Howell's First Tetralogy: Brechtian Break-Out or Just Good Television?' in *Shakespeare on Television: An Anthology of Essays and Reviews*, edited by Bulman and Coursen (Hanover and London: University press of New England, 1988), pp. 221-229, p. 228.

<sup>78</sup> *The BBC Shakespeare Plays*, p.171.

spectacle was seen as part of the game of power, part of the generation of the codes of authority and the regulation of the playing space. By foregrounding the artificiality of these events, Howell scrutinised the role of the modern popular, public theatre of television as a creator of audiences, as a disseminator of public spectacle, as historiographer commenting upon and legitimating events over process, in short as a hegemonic manipulator.

The setting was the productions' most distinctive and discussed feature, as it foregrounded the theatrical-televisual dualism of the productions. The combination of the two forms has given some theoretical headaches to academics who feel it necessary to pin down the work as one thing or another - as Dennis Bingham, were the productions good theatre, or just good television?<sup>79</sup> Critics have been divided over whether the *Henry VI-Richard III* sequence was the most 'theatrical' or the most 'televisual' episode in the BBC Shakespeare Series (but there is general agreement that it was the most successful attempt to realise 'blatantly theatrical ideas' in a televisual context). Stanley Wells, Neil Taylor and Graham Holderness all admire the way in which Howell translated Shakespeare into television, and look upon the sequence as something of an experiment - Holderness in particular argues that the translation of media opened up the 'radical potential' of the plays.<sup>80</sup> On the other hand, Michele Willems, Hardy Cook and Dennis Bingham argue that the use of alienation and stylisation rejected the 'naturalism' which is inherent to the television medium<sup>81</sup>. Susan Willis is more creative in her suggestion of an innovative blend of media, which experiments with 'the potential of theatre and television in combination.'<sup>82</sup>

Howell's response to the constrictions imposed by the BBC's sponsorship contract was to exploit its boundaries as a creative discipline, making the *Henry VI* plays a site of resistance for the performance of Shakespeare and nation within a cultural area that suffered the worst from both the politics of public

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<sup>79</sup> Bingham, 'Brechtian Break-Out or Just Good Television?'

<sup>80</sup> Wells, 'The History of the Whole Contention'; Taylor, 'Two Types of Television Shakespeare'; and Holderness, 'Radical Potentiality.'

<sup>81</sup> Wells, 'The History of the Whole Contention'; Taylor, 'Two Types of Television Shakespeare'; Holderness, 'Radical Potentiality'; Willems, 'Verbal-Visual'; Hardy Cook, 'Jane Howell's BBC First Tetralogy: Theatrical and Televisual Manipulations', *Literature and Film Quarterly* v.20, no. 4 (1992), pp. 326-31; Bingham, 'Brechtian Break-Out or Just Good Television?' See also Elijah Moshinsky and John Elsom's 'Does Shakespeare Write Better for Television?' in *Is Shakespeare Still our Contemporary?*, edited by Elsom (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), pp. 114-139.

<sup>82</sup> *The BBC Shakespeare Plays*, p.176

service and the politics of commercial sponsorship. Howell was true to her sponsors' need for a production style which was based either on the period of the play, or upon the period of Shakespeare's day. Howell's answer was to mix both, showing a fifteenth century world in an abstracted, but in essence authentic, televisual version of the Elizabethan playing space. The playing environment alienated the narratives of nation and allowed audiences to see the structures and the environment within which the crisis in nation and in history developed. The production consistently challenged conventional notions of Shakespearean performance without being stylised or flamboyantly radical. The first scenes showed a foreign culture, hardly recognisable as English. A singer opened the production with a religious chant, but drawn from Catholic rather than Protestant traditions. Henry V's coffin was brought in to a crowded stage of mourners by grim pall-bearers - the coffin, however, was just a rough black box with a chalk picture of a skeleton sketched on its top. The remarkable stage did not reveal itself until the end of the scene. The sketch of the skeleton was a foretaste of Howell's vision, which was rooted upon finding the structure, the skeleton, of Shakespeare, of television, and of the nation. The first vision of the nation was profound in its evocation of pastness, defamiliarising the past with images of a long-forgotten ritual culture, aware of its own mortal structures. The set was constructed to be a sketch of the skeleton of history, the camera techniques were used to juxtapose the high rhetoric of the politicians with the increasingly frank depiction of violence and war.

### **Cultural Belonging: ESC Vs RSC**

The two major *Henry VI* cycles of the 1980s deliberately revisited the 1963 productions in order to reperform their initial success in establishing the RSC as a national institution, and in doing so they erased the eccentric, marginal and critical place which Terry Hands and Jane Howell had moved the plays into. The ESC productions in 1987 and the RSC's 1988 productions were opposite in many respects, but they drew their differences from a common context, in that both institutions were having to respond to new economic and political pressures. They also held in common certain assumptions about the plays: that they were early, 'rough' Shakespeare, that they were essentially 'young plays,' and that they were 'matter of England plays.' The 1987 productions by the ESC deliberately recalled Hall's work in their overall title,

*The Wars of the Roses*. Adrian Noble invented his own title for the 1988 productions at the RSC, *The Plantagenets*, but recalled the past in other ways: by the individual title of the plays (*Henry VI*, *Edward IV* and *Richard III*) and by publishing the adapted script as a memorial to the event (and in so doing, commercialising the text and including it among the sweatshirts and posters in the foyer souvenir shop).<sup>83</sup> However, the way that the two directors revisited the past was quite different. Bogdanov used Brechtian devices to alienate the processes of history and bring into focus culture as a value struggled over by the people against the encroachments of centralised forms of power. Noble, meanwhile, produced a lavish and spectacular vision of the past, which strove for historical authenticity, in a deliberate rejection of the ‘radical’ theatre proposed by Bogdanov.<sup>84</sup> The two shared an ambition for ‘authenticity’ and competed over the cultural value of being the ‘true’ national Shakespeare theatre and the ‘true’ national theatre.

Both productions returned to the editorial procedures of the 1960s by cutting the three plays into two new plays. Although there were minor additions interpolated into the scripts, neither relied as heavily upon imported material as Barton’s script had done; rather, they owed a ‘restructuring debt’ to Barton’s work.<sup>85</sup> However, neither production approached the adaptation with as much care and intellectual rigour as Barton had done, and neither adaptation was credited with a single author: both were ‘company’ adaptations, developed in rehearsal. In the ESC’s case, the adaptation was hurriedly written and rehearsed in a few hectic weeks during which the company was also experiencing its most severe financial and personal problems (including the premature death of a leading company member). By Bogdanov’s own admission, the *Henry VI* rehearsals were frantic: ‘the *Henry VI* rehearsals were fast and furious. Discuss a

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<sup>83</sup> The script was published to coincide with the transfer to the Barbican (see *Representing Shakespeare*, p. 78)

<sup>84</sup> There was a genuine antagonism between the two productions, which ran for a time concurrently in London (the only time that this has happened in the performance history of *Henry VI*), with one commentator going so far as to call it a modern day War of the Theatres.<sup>84</sup> *The Plantagenets* included a comprehensive stage history of the plays in its programme which rudely ignored the ESC’s work, whilst Bogdanov railed against the charge of plagiarism, implying that it was more likely that Noble had copied him.<sup>84</sup>

<sup>85</sup> This point is made in *The End Crowns All*, p. 87. Both adaptations were extremely similar - Bogdanov even defends himself against charges (made inaccurately by Michael Billington in a press review of the London performances) of plagiarising *The Plantagenets*. Of course, *The Plantagenets* post-dated the ESC productions: however, it is not unreasonable to suppose that the RSC may have been influenced by the ESC. For a detailed summary of the adaptations and their similarities, see Brandow, pp. 19-23. Penny Downie recalls that the 1963 adaptation was consulted during the preparation of the script for *The Plantagenets* see Downie’s article ‘Queen Margaret in *Henry VI* and *Richard III*.’



scene, improvise it, set it .... And so many fights.’<sup>86</sup> Adrian Noble commissioned Charles Wood to write a script months in advance of production, but disposed of it at the start of rehearsals.<sup>87</sup> Instead, the playing script evolving through the rehearsal period, with the company exploring different ideas and Adrian Noble, with Stephen Rayne, writing their conclusions up. The company returned to the original script, constructing a performance of institutional authenticity.<sup>88</sup>

Despite these similarities, the productions were extremely different when it came to their performance. This was partly due to the way that the plays were placed within an overall cycle: both concluded with *Richard III*, but the ESC placed *Henry VI* within a heptalogy, drawing extra meanings from the four plays which had preceded it. The ESC adaptations contained interpolated passages to ease continuity across the eight-play cycle, whilst the RSC saw the three plays of *The Plantagenets* as a self-contained work. Lois Potter criticises the RSC for this, arguing that the narratives are not linked to a past or future and a sense of history is diminished.<sup>89</sup> They were also different kinds of productions: the ESC *Henry VIs* were designed for an international tour and had to be flexible and accommodating for different audiences, theatres and countries; whilst the RSC was based in two theatres and had the luxury of being able to construct an elaborate stage with more conspicuously expensive design values. The differences in budget meant that the RSC productions were able to overshadow the rough theatre look of their rivals and

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<sup>86</sup> Bogdanov and Pennington, *The English Shakespeare Company: The Story of 'The Wars of the Roses', 1986-1989* (London: Nick Hern Books, 1990), p.108.

<sup>87</sup> Apparently because the actors were unhappy with Wood's script. Fiennes recalls that 'I had seen *Tumbledown*, a controversial television film about the Falklands, which was very good indeed, but unfortunately I thought (as did many of the actors) that his adaptation of the *Henry VI* trilogy was disappointing, not because the ideas for staging it were not good, but because the wonderfully rich, strong and sophisticated writing of the young Shakespeare had been cut and slashed about and rearranged to such an extent that when you read the lines of the characters aloud, without the conceptualised stage directions, you didn't understand what was going on.' (Ralph Fiennes, 'Henry VI' in *Players of Shakespeare 3*, pp. 99-113, p. 100). There was no 'final draft' of Wood's script, although portions of it held by the Shakespeare Centre in Stratford give an indication of the kind of drama Wood was writing.

<sup>88</sup> In 'Recycling the Early Histories: *The Wars of the Roses* and *The Plantagenets*' *Shakespeare Survey* 43 (1991), pp. 171-181, Lois Potter makes the additional point that both adaptations 'darken the tone' of the original plays. Whereas each of the individual plays end on an upbeat note, the adaptations end on dark notes: the death of Winchester and the plots of Richard. Whilst taking Potter's general point that ending the first play with the death of Winchester rubs against the irony which Shakespeare pours into his endings, I cannot concur with Potter's assumption that the individual plays end on upbeat moments. *Part One* ends with Suffolk poised to manipulate Henry through Margaret; *Part Two* ends with Henry fleeing; and *Part Three* ends in the same way as both adaptations. (p.172).

<sup>89</sup> 'Recycling the Early Histories' p.171

this was no doubt intentional.<sup>90</sup> Most strikingly, however, the productions produced contrasting playing styles, and contrasting views of how to play Shakespeare. Bogdanov drew upon his experience in fringe theatre and devised an eclectic style that mixed historical periods anarchically and subverted the traditional ways of playing Shakespeare, whilst Noble made his production a richly medieval world, full of grand pageants and spectacles, and adhering closely to a historically accurate presentation. Barbara Hodgdon describes the competition between the two as a 'quarrel over representation': on another level, Hodgdon writes, this was a competition for 'the ownership of what Pierre Bourdieu calls "cultural capital."' <sup>91</sup>

## II

The English Shakespeare Company was established in 1986 by Michael Bogdanov and Michael Pennington as a touring company devoted to producing 'big' Shakespeare and exploiting the old 'number one' circuit of large regional theatres, which had largely fallen into disuse by dramatic theatre.<sup>92</sup> The scheme arose out of a touring unit for the National Theatre which Bogdanov had proposed to Peter Hall in the early 1980s. Although Bogdanov would later refer to the project bitterly as a 'pipe dream', the scheme was quite advanced, until a financial crisis forced Peter Hall to shelve it. An initial tour of two O'Casey plays was planned in collaboration with the Abbey Theatre in Dublin. The cast was to be a mix of English and Irish actors, who would rehearse in London and Dublin. The plays would open in Dublin, tour Ireland, then England, before closing at the Lyttelton. Other plans for the unit included a major tour of *Bartholomew Fair* and a production of a new work about the 1911 Llanelli Railway Strike, which would include a performance in an old railway shed at Llanelli, in collaboration with HTV. The repertoire reflected Bogdanov's inclusive approach to the concept of national theatre, which, through the touring unit, would be 'a link with the country, an attempt to make the National truly national.' This is a construction of a

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<sup>90</sup> Although the budget for *The Plantagenets* was the same as a normal, single play production.

<sup>91</sup> *The End Crowns All*, p.87. The term is taken from Pierre Bourdieu's *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. by Richard Nice (London, Melbourne and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984).

<sup>92</sup> The best account of the company's origins is Bogdanov and Pennington's own account of it in *The English Shakespeare Company*. Also worth consulting are: Elizabeth S. C. Brandow's 'History, Royal or English'; MACD. P. Jackson, 'The Wars of the Roses: The English Shakespeare Company on Tour' *Shakespeare Quarterly* 40 (1989), pp. 208-211; and Digby Durrant, 'Who Pays the Piper?'

national repertoire rooted in ethnicity: *Bartholomew Fair* is a classic city play for English culture, just as the Irish and Welsh plays would have been specifically aimed at Irish and Welsh audiences before being presented to the rest of the country as a product of Ireland or Wales.<sup>93</sup> Although the scheme never got off the ground, it formed the intellectual basis of the ESC and its tour of Shakespeare's history plays.<sup>94</sup>

Having failed to interest the National Theatre in the touring scheme, Bogdanov subsequently met up with Pennington and together they came up with the idea of a small-scale Shakespeare touring company. They approached the touring department of the Arts Council who pointed out that there were plenty of small scale tours - what was needed was product big enough to revive the old 'number one' circuit - they wanted 'big, popular Shakespeare.'<sup>95</sup> The Arts Council was keen to promote the idea of big, popular theatre and were looking for a suitably high-profile project to highlight their new agenda. A policy document published in 1984, *The Glory in the Garden* set out the Arts Council's response to the imminent closure of the large metropolitan councils,<sup>96</sup> which was to redirect money away from the metropolis to the under-funded regions.<sup>97</sup> The Arts Council's 'development scheme' received government support, as it would avoid the complete chaos that their abolition threatened to unleash in the arts world. The document brought together two new forces in the Arts Council - the development of a business language in relation to its activities and an increasing emphasis on the regions.<sup>98</sup> Although couched in the ideals of *Theatre is for All*,<sup>99</sup> the new belief in developing the regions did not imply any extra money, but implied a dilution of the resources that were already made available, creating the need for somebody - business sponsorship - to

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<sup>93</sup> Bogdanov claims that it was the failure of this scheme that principally motivated him to move outside of the main national theatre companies. He had first met Michael Pennington in 1980 in, ironically, a mixed English and Irish cast production of *Shadow of a Gunman*. Again, this production announced the ambition to be both true to ethnic difference and its promotion as a positive contribution to English national identity, as if English culture could be rediscovered through mixes with Celtic culture

<sup>94</sup> This account of Bogdanov's thought and background is based principally on Bogdanov's own account in *The English Shakespeare Company*. See in particular his introduction and pp. xii-xiii.

<sup>95</sup> *The English Shakespeare Company*, p. 5.

<sup>96</sup> The metropolitan councils were major funders of the arts across the country

<sup>97</sup> Robert Hewison discusses the implications of this in *The Heritage Industry*, pp. 115-118.

<sup>98</sup> In *The Heritage Industry* (p.117) Robert Hewison is particularly sharp in exploring the use of business language in the Arts Council's publications at this time.

<sup>99</sup> The title of another Arts Council document, which expressed concern that sponsorship was having a divisive effect on theatre. The theme of theatre is for all, combined with the momentum towards sponsorship and the funding of the regions provide the structure to which the RSC is currently developing itself into.

make up the 'shortfall.' Touring theatre was being developed as a major growth area for sponsorship. The ABSA reported a significant 20% increase in offers from theatrical backers in the last quarter of 1987, a boom which was in part fuelled by the dramatic success of the ESC.<sup>100</sup> The ESC fell into the Arts Council's lap, who encouraged Bogdanov and Pennington to expand their ideas to encompass the performance of a populist Shakespeare to exploit the regions, and move the performance of Shakespeare away from the metropolitan nationals. The new interest in touring expressed by sponsors shaped this new Arts Council vision of a decentralised theatrical landscape and they saw Bogdanov and Pennington as heavy-weights who could lend the project credibility. Bogdanov and Pennington either went along with this or failed to see the political implications of these new initiatives: instead, the idea of decentralising the national theatres appealed to both Bogdanov and Pennington's own feelings about the state of the British theatre and coincided with their desire to relegitimize what they saw as establishment texts by 'returning' them to the people. In *The Times*, Andrew Rissik wrote that 'choices have been made for them, determined by the wishes of their backers, who seem too have been excited by the prospect of two experienced Shakespearean directors able and willing to take large-scale productions on tour.'<sup>101</sup> Bogdanov and Pennington evidently thought that the Arts Council were in tune with their own wildest ambitions, which was to redefine and supersede the old national theatres with a company that was 'truly national' and would reach a popular audience - much along the line of the Irish national theatre Field Day, which in many ways resembles the ESC. Pennington later complained that the actions of the Arts Council had forced them to look for commercial funding.<sup>102</sup> The Arts Council was driven by a Thatcherite ideology, however, and Bogdanov and Pennington ended up disillusioned - Pennington threw his resignation down on the table at the Council in disgust, whilst Bogdanov drastically minimised the company's activities and redirected it away from its original national aspirations.<sup>103</sup> The ESC began as an idealistic crusade to change the nature

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<sup>100</sup> Davidson, 'A plan to make arts get down to business.'

<sup>101</sup> Andrew Rissik, 'Heady challenge of touring on the grand scale' *The Times*, September 18 1986.

<sup>102</sup> Michael Pennington, 'Cycling Shakespeare', *Drama* vol. 1 (1989) pp. 27-29. Pennington describes running the ESC as 'a sort of permanent emergency.'

<sup>103</sup> At the end of *The Wars of the Roses* tour, Bogdanov left the country to head the *Deutsches Schauspielhaus* in Hamburg, telling *The Times* 'I have been disillusioned by British theatre for years.' ('Bogdanov set for German Theatre', *The Times*, March 26th 1988).

of Shakespearean performance, but it was in practice a creature of the Arts Council and its new dogma. The two had naively thought of the Arts Council as enthusiastic benefactors but, as Digby Durrant writes, the role of the Arts Council was to advise and reassure investors of the quality of the productions: ‘.. they reassured bankers of the originality and quality of the whole venture. They gave it the cultural equivalent of a good Housekeeping Seal and convinced them that in so far as there is such a thing as a wise gamble in the fickle theatrical game they were on to it.’ In the new language of the arts economy, the Arts Council pursued a policy of ‘incentive funding.’<sup>104</sup> Although Bogdanov boldly proclaimed that ‘reliance on commercial funding is a dead end’, the Arts Council regarded the project as a ‘model enterprise’<sup>105</sup> and the ESC became the embodiment of the new values that ruled arts funding.<sup>106</sup> As the National Theatre and the RSC sought ways to establish themselves within the developing field of commercial tours, they faced serious competition: ‘The biggest and the most successful in tapping into the new enthusiasm of sponsors is the English Shakespeare Company.’<sup>107</sup>

At the heart of the confusion between Bogdanov’s ESC and the Arts Council’s ESC was the subtle but crucial difference between their concepts of ‘popular’ and ‘populist.’ The ‘populist-classical’ Shakespeare<sup>108</sup> which the ESC hoped to introduce to English theatre was very different to the Arts Council’s market driven understanding of the word. In Bogdanov’s terms, ‘popular’ refers to folk culture and the narratives which people make to describe themselves and the world, and it implies a resistance to forms of authority which encroach upon popular liberties. Bogdanov follows Howell and Hands in exploring the nature of popular culture in his *Henry VI* plays. Whereas Howell had interrogated the popular theatre structures of the plays, drawing out theatre gags and pantomime elements to illustrate the structures of Shakespeare’s art, Bogdanov instead plundered images from the popular imagination, using an eclectic mix of punks, hooligans and soldiers to construct the people of England in relation to authority figures, who

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<sup>104</sup> Davidson, ‘A plan to make arts get down to business.’

<sup>105</sup> John Ezard, ‘A magnificent seven’, *The Guardian*, December 21st 1987.

<sup>106</sup> In ‘Who Pays the Piper?’ Durrant argues that the Arts Council was now a facilitator for commercial sponsorship. If the Arts Council had not supported the ESC, ‘Allied-Irish would not have taken the risk. Clearly the Bank trusted the Council, seeing them as experts in the strange world of cultural entrepreneurship.’

<sup>107</sup> Davidson, ‘A plan to make arts get down to business.’

<sup>108</sup> The phrase is used by Pennington in ‘Cycling Shakespeare’, p.27.

were instead dressed in the figures of authority in conventional period history. The roots of Bogdanov's belief in tapping the popular mind was in the fringe movements of the early 1960s and 1970s. A faction of this highly politicised movement, best exemplified by dramatists such as Howard Brenton, came to believe that political theatre was essentially impotent and contained in the marginal theatre spaces where it played.<sup>109</sup> Their response was to move their radical ideas into the mainstream, to reintroduce politics to a popular audience. Bogdanov was associated with this movement into the centre ground by a fringe politics and he directed many of Brenton's plays at the National. This implied a great deal of faith in the cultural potential of audiences to realise themselves through the mixing of high culture and popular culture. By making Shakespeare 'popular', Bogdanov hoped to subvert the conventional elitist construction of the poet and reintroduce the people of England to their own cultural roots. However, the Arts Council was more interested in a commercially successful and accessible Shakespeare, that was spectacular rather than intellectually demanding and that satisfied broad expectations of Shakespeare in the theatre. They wanted populist Shakespeare, which pandered to novelty and to simple, iconic images and did not try to alienate its audience. This kind of Shakespeare was more suited to the demands of sponsors. In the history plays, Bogdanov explores this form of populism as a violent expropriation of cultural identity, a manipulation of authentic cultural expression by centralised authority for its own ends.

Although the English Shakespeare Company ended up as an international touring company the company was set up to address 'England' and English concerns within the context of UK nationalisms. In Pennington's own words, 'the ESC came about specifically to tour the UK.'<sup>110</sup> The first tour, which performed critically acclaimed productions of *The Henries*, had to a large degree kept true to the original spirit of the enterprise, playing only a small selection of international dates. The second tour, which commenced late in 1987, added an abridged first tetralogy and *Richard II*. This new cycle, now called *The Wars of the Roses* after the 1960s RSC productions, was rehearsed in the astonishingly short period of 13

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<sup>109</sup> See Christopher Innes, *Modern British Drama 1890-1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 190-204.

<sup>110</sup> 'Cycling Shakespeare', p.27. Pennington goes on to say, 'that really is our job, though it becomes increasingly difficult to do without spending large chunks of time abroad, trying to recoup the domestic losses we inevitably incur despite our popularity ....'

weeks.<sup>111</sup> At the beginning of November, 1987, with only 35 days to go before the commencement of the tour, it became clear that insufficient guarantees from host theatres meant that the company faced a potential £150,000 deficit. This crisis was accentuated later that month when the Arts Council decided to stagger its grant, in the face of a possible collapse of the company. By the 16<sup>th</sup> November, Bogdanov had called in enough favours to secure an extended world tour, where higher ticket pricing would offset the losses incurred by the English tour. By putting their houses up as security, Pennington and Bogdanov secured a grudging loan from the Allied Irish Bank. Pennington dryly commented that they spent more time trying to find the money than they did rehearsing. Bogdanov said, 'we cashed in on our reputations.'<sup>112</sup> Less than three weeks away from the beginning of the tour (set for 8<sup>th</sup> December), the project had been transformed from a subsidised, national event to an international, privately sponsored one, from a national populist venture based upon class accessibility to an exclusive and expensive international product.<sup>113</sup> Pennington complained that 'at the very moment we would like to reaffirm our commitment to UK touring, a remorseless economic logic is forcing us abroad.'<sup>114</sup>

The ESC made a particular kind of bid by calling itself the English Shakespeare Company, a name which posed a direct challenge to the cultural space occupied by the RSC, and which tried to appropriate the authorising values of both Shakespeare and England. The venture was originally to be called the *National Shakespeare Company* but, for legal reasons, this was an inappropriate title.<sup>115</sup> The final name, besides, spoke more directly to what Bogdanov was trying to get at with his new project, which was to raise English identity as both a problem and a possibility that greatly interested him and his partner. However, Bogdanov's conception of England was very different to either Noble's or Hall's, in that it pursued a philosophy based upon difference and regionalisation, which was a direct descendent of the anti-

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<sup>111</sup> Ezard 'A magnificent seven.'

<sup>112</sup> Quoted in Durrant, 'Who Pays the Piper?'

<sup>113</sup> Two ESC directors resigned over the crisis and the Arts Council, who had initially promoted Bogdanov's nationalist ambitions, now forced him to consider an international tour. Bogdanov describes the financial crisis in more detail in *The English Shakespeare Company*, pp. 87-88 and further details are provided by Durrant in 'Who Pays the Piper?'

<sup>114</sup> Pennington, 'Cycling Shakespeare', p. 28

<sup>115</sup> *The English Shakespeare Company*, p.16. By law, a company has to pay a fee in order to be able to call itself 'national.'

metropolitan arguments being voiced in the 1950s by critics of the National Theatre. Pennington explains that they wanted the company to be a touring one because ‘the tendency to centralise Britain’s artistic life in the metropolitan areas (rather like King Henry IV’s disdain for the regions) obviously creates two nations, paying one tax.’<sup>116</sup> Michael Pennington, who had a small role in the 1963 *The Wars of the Roses*, compared the ESC’s work with the earlier RSC production: ‘That was politically very different: Peter Hall was making a general statement about the nature of power politics; the ESC’s version is more precisely about England now, about a nation disunited, violent, trying to patch itself together.’<sup>117</sup> Conventional constructions of England and of Shakespeare were bogus in Bogdanov’s view: when asked whether the concept of Shakespeare embodied the spirit of England, Bogdanov replied by referring to the ‘dreadful tradition’ which has standardised the language of the plays and argues that they were originally spoken in a variety of accents: ‘I am sure that the plays were delivered in a variety of extraordinary accents that gave the lines a richness and texture that we have now lost, because we intone and incant the lines, as if it were some kind of game.’<sup>118</sup>

Shakespeare represented a site of contestation, as his manipulation both exposed the process of centralisation of power upon cultural identity and opened up the possibility of rediscovering the richness and the texture of a lost tradition. Bogdanov, like Hands and Howell, was essentially referring (nostalgically?) to a lost, authentic Shakespeare. In the preface to his book, Bogdanov gives a romantic and vivid description of the kind of cultural nationalism that he had found in Ireland and Eastern Europe. He was impressed in Ireland by ‘the deep, dark despair, the laughter and tears, story telling and music, the religion, the politics, a sense of cultural belonging that is once again manifesting itself in Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Hungary.’ Although English, Bogdanov’s cultural background was shaped by his family roots in Eastern Europe and by his education and long experience in Ireland. Born into an immigrant family, Bogdanov graduated from Trinity College, Dublin, and spent the next ten years in Irish theatre and radio. Bogdanov found in Irish nationalism the kind of strong cultural identity which he associated with Eastern

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<sup>116</sup> *The English Shakespeare Company*, p. 4.

<sup>117</sup> From an interview in *The Times*: Heather Neill, ‘Histories for our time’ *The Times*, Jan 27, 1989.

<sup>118</sup> McCullough, ‘Michael Bogdanov’, p.93.



Europe. 'The Irish leapfrog England to middle Europe, the last vestiges of a culture and a language that was once spoken the length and breadth of the Continent.'<sup>119</sup> The Celtic identity contrasted with the absence of an English nationalism that was rooted in ethnicity rather than in imperial domination. It seemed natural for Bogdanov to look for a similar sense of rootedness in English. This implies a nationalism which is ethnic rather than based upon the achievements of the State, rooted in its own representations, and ambiguous enough to include a diverse range of activities. This form of nationalism draws its intellectual roots from the nationalist movements in Scotland, Ireland and Wales, which have had an increasing prominence in public debate in the last twenty-five years. Bogdanov described the cycle as being about 'the recurrent theme of a divided nation: on the problem of the Irish, the Welsh, the Scots and the North; on the question of how, in fact, Westminster rules, something which has been and is anathema to a group of islands which are still basically tribal.'<sup>120</sup> In short, Bogdanov was exploring the possibility of a 'tribal' English nationalism of the kind that prevailed in the other countries of the union, as a counter to the forms of nationalism embodied in the imperial values of Westminster. At the time, this kind of ethnic nationalism seemed a plausible and authentic alternative to the power-based rhetoric of the old imperial powers, and reflected a historic, even epochal, shift towards decentralised power constructed about autonomous, regional units, bound nevertheless with history, specifically cultural history. The realities of history mattered less than their representations, of human emotions, successes and failings. It was this notion of nationalism, rooted in his Irish and European backgrounds and given shape by the Field Day theatre,<sup>121</sup> that Bogdanov strove for.

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<sup>119</sup> *The English Shakespeare Company*, p. xiii.

<sup>120</sup> John Ezard, 'Tour plan for 21-hour Shakespeare marathon', *The Guardian*, September 17th 1987.

<sup>121</sup> The promotion of cultural populism also had its roots in Bogdanov's Irish experience. The major theatrical event in Ireland in the early 1980s was the founding of the Field Day Company, an important company in its own right, but also an important forerunner of the English Shakespeare Company. Field Day was a company which, despite its Republican sympathies, wanted to explore the solutions to Northern Ireland's problems through culture rather than through politics. This new orientation reinvented theatre's role in a troubled society, as an agency for the refounding of a common cultural identity, whilst offering culture as a way to get beyond the fragmented politics of a divided society. Like the ESC, Field Day presented a cultural, populist politics, aiming itself at a general public rather than an educated, politically aware elite. It broke through the established theatrical topography, which divided metropolitan, national theatres from exclusive fringe theatres, by exploiting and capitalising on long neglected regional theatres. Field Day provided the blueprint for the ESC, which also tried to reinvent the big, regional theatres as a way to break the cultural monopoly of the big theatres and the exclusivity of the small theatres. But it was also in its strong nationalist agenda that Bogdanov found a distinct resonance. See Marilyn J.

The idea of a national theatre company which would embrace and foreground ethnic difference as a positive, affirmative statement of national identity, was the concept upon which the English Shakespeare Company, and all of its early productions, was constructed. Shakespeare's history plays were an obvious source of material for Bogdanov, as their locations ranged across England and Wales, contrasting centralised power with localised regions of resistance. Taken together, the plays presented a diverse portrait of England, as well as raising the question of England generally, dramatising the idea of theatre which Bogdanov had in mind, and presenting in one production (or set of productions) what Bogdanov had previously planned to do in four separate productions. Through the inclusive diversity of the history cycle, the different ethnic theatres of the shelved touring unit could be combined in one, epic project.

The ESC's *Henry VI* plays were called *House of Lancaster* and *House of York*: unlike the RSC's *The Wars of the Roses* and *The Plantagenets*, these titles no authentic link with Shakespeare's titles. The implication of naming the plays after dynasties was that there would be no individual focus: instead each play would be constructed around the ascendant power bloc on the stage. The word 'house' introduced an interesting parliamentary metaphor, of the struggle between political parties realised in terms of English history. Bogdanov pursued his own textual path too, making additions to the texts in modern prose, so that this was a text which made no claims to be authentic or to establish the illusion of authenticity.<sup>122</sup> Bogdanov disarmingly referred to his additions as 'Bogspeare.'<sup>123</sup> However, it was not textual authenticity that Bogdanov sought, but cultural authenticity: that is, a concept of nation rooted in and authorised by a lost ethnic conception of Englishness. The productions recalled Hands' strategy in 1977, in that they followed on from the *Henriad* and established the kind of nation implied by the ascendancy of centralised power within the concept of the nation. Henry V was the pivotal figure in Bogdanov and Pennington's mind because he represented a centralised and imperial authority, which depended upon the subjugation and the

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Richtarik's fascinating book *Acting Between the Lines: The Field Day Theatre Company and Irish Cultural Politics, 1980-1984* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) for further details.

<sup>122</sup> In 'Recycling the Early Histories' (p.172), Lois Potter argues that this made the ESC adaptation more freer and accessible than the RSC one, although the RSC production 'actually did more cutting and transposing.' In other words, the RSC adaptation actually reinforced the density and difficulty of the plays' narrative, constructing an exclusivity about the work to counter Bogdanov's collectivism.

<sup>123</sup> *The English Shakespeare Company*, p. 124.

manipulation of the people. The *Henriad* had been a performance of the development of this form of power and its destructive effects on English folk culture, as Hal turned his back on the rich, diverse expressions of the Boar's Tavern to take power and then manipulated those same forces into fighting a pointless war in France, which was staged in a way that was deliberately reminiscent of the Falklands Crisis. The *Henry VI* and *Richard III* plays were added to perform the consequences of this rape of culture and of centralised authority. To Bogdanov and Pennington, Henry was the epitome of all that was base about tradition, centralised power, the construction of Britain as a national, imperial identity and modern society. The context of Henry's importance was Bogdanov's political views at the time, which were strongly critical of the unrepresentative nature of 'British' parliamentary democracy. Bogdanov makes space in his book for a vigorous polemic against Thatcherism:

I was burning with anger at the iniquity of the British electoral system. Eleven million people had voted for Thatcher, fourteen million against. Scotland, Wales and the North were almost totally Labour and only in the fat, green, get-rich-quick Yuppie haven of the South did the Conservative Party hold sway. Moreover, Boadicea had rallied her troops around her with a senseless war of expediency, sailing heroically (in some people's eyes) twelve thousand miles to the Falklands to do battle for "a little patch of ground that hath in it no profit but the name/To pay five ducats, five, I would not farm it."

The parallels were plain. *The Henrys* were plays for today, the lessons of history unlearned. The Grand Mechanism of the Polish critic, Jan Kott, in full sway, the escalator shuttling mice and men up to the top, where the golden crock of Imperialism shone brightly, waiting for the next attempt to snatch it from its podium. We were in the era of New Brutalism where a supposed return to Victorian values under the guise of initiative and incentive masked the true goal of greed, avarice, exploitation and self. Westminster rule. Centralisation. Censorship. Power to the city. Bleed the rest of the country dry. Bolingbroke/Boadicea/Britannia was in the saddle. The 'rotten parchment bonds' of the fourteenth century were being drawn up again.<sup>124</sup>

The 'era of New Brutalism' is here characterised as cloaking itself in history, a metaphor which resounds through all seven productions. The 'return to Victorian values' is a guise for the 'true goal of greed, avarice, exploitation and self.' Bogdanov indicates his distrust of appeals to history as a way of

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<sup>124</sup> *The English Shakespeare Company*, pp. 23-4

legitimizing power and its desires. As the apparel of Victorian values disguises and endorses a new opportunism, mixing history and making it discontinuous in the theatre, especially in Shakespeare, has clear subversive possibilities in Bogdanov's mind, who sees the use of history in politics, especially in relation to imperialist objectives and the romanticisation of Britain's imperial past, as an activity that should be critiqued, demystified and exposed. The most interesting part of this passage is the 'Bolingbroke/Boadicea/Britannia' character, a gestalt which maintains an equivalency with Mrs. Thatcher in Bogdanov's mind and calls to mind Tillyard's 'unnamed protagonist' England. The line that is drawn through these characters places the issue of Britain at the centre of the *Henrys*, as the centralisation of power in the south ignores the demands of the regions and constructs an ideology of British sovereignty and identity with which to maintain that suppression. Henry V, above all, represents the equivocal figure of the British hero, who is, beneath his patriotic posturing, a protean character, an actor.<sup>125</sup> Isobel Armstrong argues that the productions were 'not so much a display of ideological containment as a study of the way a monarchy under strain maintains power and legitimates itself.'<sup>126</sup>

Bogdanov used an eclectic mix of historical periods to construct a stylised representation of history on the stage. The production specialised in startling anachronisms, juxtaposing a broadsword with modern combat gear, for example. The presentation of history was very different to either Hands' or Hall's productions: the costumes did not fit a particular period, but in fact flaunted its rejection of traditional periodisation of history, and there was also no attempt to represent history as an abstract or monolithic force shaping human tragedy.<sup>127</sup> History was neither a humanistic reality nor an abstract absolute, it was instead a menagerie of culturally familiar signs drawn from the popular memory of English history. Modern day punks interacted with Victorian generals, soldiers from the two world wars, nineteenth century

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<sup>125</sup> The relationship between Stephen Greenblatt's reading of Hal as player and the ESC's comparable reading is intelligently explored by Isobel Armstrong in 'Thatcher's Shakespeare?', *Textual Practice*, 3 (1989), pp. 1-14.

<sup>126</sup> 'Thatcher's Shakespeare', p. 10

<sup>127</sup> Bogdanov was then rejecting all established and recognisable conventions of playing Shakespeare's history plays. Hodgdon makes this point when contrasting the music score with the historically-orientated score of *The Plantagenets*: 'By contrast, Bogdanov's enterprise calls such historical music as well as the staging traditions that support it sharply into question.' (*The End Crowns All*, p.88).

peasants and medieval knights.<sup>128</sup> Images, icons and impressions of the last two hundred years of English history were marshalled in an apparent anarchy of representation. This created the ambience of history, but it deployed it in such a way as to suggest a crisis in history itself, as different period styles collided. There was no unified, historical 'present',<sup>129</sup> and no sense that the events on the stage were 'true' history. Rather, Bogdanov sought to alienate and parody history, so that his audiences might see beyond the myths of power to the deeper, folk histories that they elide. Hodgdon describes this as an attitude which sees theatre as making history and initiating a dialectic with it: 'By disrupting the traditional formulas for reproducing English history, it not only represents a very different history to the world but opens up that history to critique.'<sup>130</sup> An English cultural memory was tapped, to create a work which spoke to an ethnic and cultural consciousness rather than a historical one, which deployed traditional history signs subversively in essentially literary ways, to denote character rather than event. The signs of history were used to tell stories, so that literary 'fiction' was valued over the material reality of history:

Shakespeare's way with history was rather casual, to say the least. By compressing it, imagining it and twisting it around, he insisted on his right as a teller of stories to make an alternative version of events that would still be true to the spirit of the past. [...] Shakespeare created for his History plays an alternative narrative with its own emphases ... If there was an overall purpose, it was to use the past as a means to address the present; and four hundred years later the plays perform the same urgent purpose for us as they did for the Elizabethans.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> In 'The English History Play on Screen' Manheim gives a somewhat fanciful interpretation of Bogdanov's sartorial presentations: 'Paralleling the 1950s/60s existentialism of Hall/Barton and the 1970s post-Vietnam war humanism of Howell is the 1980s/90s Neo-Marxism of the Bogdanov/Pennington version. The shifts in military costume - from the Royal Dragoon of Talbot battling the French in Part 1, to the plainer first world war uniforms of the Lancastrians set against the spiffy RAF-style garb of the Yorkists in Parts 2 and 3, to the Falkland and Gulf war military fatigues of Richard III - suggest a progression paralleling the stages of Marxist historical determinism. Of the Royal Dragoon images of Part 1 may be said to stand for the fashions of English feudalism, then the successive progressions surely represent the changing fashions of bourgeois domination. While hardly precise, the parallels are clear and effective, accompanied as they are by similar shifts in background music - which progresses from fashionable Edwardian garden party music in Parts 1 and 2 to Gatsby-ish cocktail party jazz in Part 3.' (p.133).

<sup>129</sup> Simon Cherry, 'Princes and Paupers', *City Life*, 72, Feb 27th - March 13th 1987 pp. 42-3.

<sup>130</sup> *The End Crowns All*, pp. 88-89. Hodgdon compares this to the 'commemorative' RSC production, which she criticises as a containment and critical denial of history. The quote is from p. 98.

<sup>131</sup> Michael Pennington, 'Shakespeare and History- the Actor's View', in the ESC programme for *The Wars of the Roses*, 1987.

Bogdanov subverted traditional history, but he also sought to find a new form expression out its dismemberment, one which was popular and spoke to the ethnic mind of England. An English national identity was reappropriated from the deconstruction of traditional images of English history.

When Henry V's coffin was discovered at the beginning of *House of Lancaster*, it was draped with a Union Jack, but behind it, rising from the ground to the flies, was an English George Cross. A symbol of centralist authority was contrasted with a second, different national flag, which expressed different values: rather than the domination of nations implied by the combination of flags in the Union Jack, the George Cross was a symbol of English ethnicity, drawing upon one of the central myths of English cultural identity, that of St. George. The comparison expressed the difference between the two concepts of nation, one based upon metropolitan centralism, the other on regional inclusiveness. (The George Cross was also represented in the logo of the ESC, which showed two daubs of blood crossed on a white sheet, satirically exposing the reality that the English flag elides and mythologises). The second tetralogy allowed Bogdanov to explore his ideas of Britannia and its destructive effect on the various ethnic cultures of the British Isles. Gaelic scenes and songs were added to the *Henry IV* plays in order to emphasise their Celtic aspects. Hal, and later Henry V, emerged as a duplicitous character, exploiting the rich, diverse culture of the people for his own ascendancy, finally channelling the genuine communal spirit of the people into a vulgar patriotism, to lead them to a useless war and establish the hegemony of Britannia in his kingdom as ascendant over all other cultural forms. In the *Henry VI* plays, the consequences of such an appropriation of culture and power was explored, showing how Henry V's union ends in collapse and violent catastrophe. Whereas the *Henriad* had been a satire upon Mrs. Thatcher's use of popular culture to obtain power, the *Henry VI* plays provided the opportunity to show culture, embodied by the decentralised and rewritten performance of England, history and Shakespeare, fractured and dismembered following the domination of central power, and slowly falling into a bleak, violent world in which space is opened up for dictatorship. The final image of the cycle was of Richmond making a television address to his new people. This was staged to recall the alienating propaganda devices of East European dictatorships, and it was here that Bogdanov made the clearest link between the resurgent nationalisms of those cultures and the possibilities for the future resurgence of an English national culture emerging out of the collapse of dictatorial power, perhaps aided

by the ESC itself and its delivery of a Shakespeare performance composed of the dismembered signs of history, recycled as the vocabulary for new cultural myths and a new form of cultural expression which subverted the linear, authoritarian histories of centralised power. Cultural authority was found rather in the inauthentic expressions of power, which were in turn revealed to be the authentic expression of the folk national voice.

### III

The RSC responded to the challenge posed by the ESC in its most conservative and traditionalist production in years. *The Plantagenets* returned to *The Wars of the Roses* (of 1963) and instituted its strategies as a traditional role of the RSC in English culture.<sup>132</sup> However, it also rejected many of the previous production's innovations, instead looking back to the past that Hall and Barton had rejected and effectively shutting down the long revolution they had inaugurated. Terry Hands was officially in charge of the RSC in 1988 and would be for another two years, but he had already submitted his resignation that April, leaving effective control of artistic policy to the triumvirate of directors who took responsibility for the individual theatres. Hands invited Adrian Noble to take over the Stratford end of the company; Noble writes that he

decided to accept, and while seeking to create separate identities for the repertoire of each auditorium, I sought a large scale project for the main house which I would direct myself, something around which to form a company, something with sufficient challenge to really stretch the actors and something unusual enough to fire the imagination of the whole organisation. [...] The *Henry VI* plays seemed most appropriate for the 1988 Stratford season, with their vast gallery of characters, their high-octane theatricality, their simplistic but exhilarating metrical pulse - all ideal training for a new company.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> See *The End Crowns All* for further discussion of this. Hodgdon says that the production 'clearly positions itself as a direct and entirely legitimate, descendent of the Barton-Hall Wars: indeed, Bob Crowley's bare, steel-grid stage floor, its choice of period costume and its recurrent use of emblematic properties signify its specific homage to the earlier production' (p.87).

<sup>133</sup> This is from Adrian Noble's introduction to *The Plantagenets* 'by William Shakespeare', (Faber and Faber, 1989) pp. vii-xv, on pp. xi-xii.

The choice of the first tetralogy was a deliberately symbolic one. Although he had not seen it, Noble was well aware of the importance of 1963 *The Wars of the Roses*; he told Michael Romain that one of his ambitions was to repeat *The Wars of the Roses*' success and establish a new, 'young' company, rejuvenated by a new generation of classical actors, as Hall had done twenty-five years earlier.<sup>134</sup> Shaughnessy comments that 'The great adventure of a *Henry VI* cycle for the 1980s would be an invocation of former glories, a harbinger of the future, a training ground for a new company, and a reminder of what the RSC could do with, and to, Shakespeare.'<sup>135</sup> Although the budget for all three plays was equal to one normal play, Noble nevertheless placed it at the centre of the 1988-9 season, hoping that it would cultivate a traditionalist audience, perhaps one put off by the radicalism of the ESC's treatment of Shakespeare.<sup>136</sup> According to Stephen Rayne, 'Highly experimental work is rarely successful at the box office, and it was hoped the production would attract large audiences of people who have fixed ideas of the way Shakespeare should be performed, so a traditional approach was adopted.'<sup>137</sup> In other words, commercial considerations were driving artistic production.

Noble's comments are an appropriate kind of language for the Artistic Director of the RSC; however, Noble was not appointed to this post until 1990 (he took it up the following year). Noble's comments need to be put in to context then. As I previously mentioned, Hands resigned as Artistic Director in 1988; however, Hands continued to be the nominal head of the RSC for three years before his so-called retirement. Effective control of the RSC was devolved to a triumvirate of directors, including Noble. As the director of the Stratford theatre, Noble was well-placed to succeed Hands (with artistic control over the central productions of the RSC, Noble was in effective control of the artistic end of the company from 1988), and with *The Plantagenets* Noble not only proved his ability to produce 'big' Shakespeare, he also laid out a vision of the future of the RSC and its role in the cultural marketplace of 1980s England. Interestingly enough (though the reader should draw her/his own conclusions from this) *The Plantagenets*'

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<sup>134</sup> This is from an interview with Noble by Michael Romain, 'Shakespeare on the War-Path', *The Observer*, Sunday 23 October 1988.

<sup>135</sup> *Representing Shakespeare*, p.78

<sup>136</sup> Ironically - or perhaps typically - the RSC's production of *King John* that season, directed by Deborah Warner, used similar devices to the ESC in its presentation of English history.

<sup>137</sup> This is Brandow reporting a conversation with Rayne in 1988. 'History Royal or English', p.17.



original script by Charles Wood, which was both radical (in the extent of its textual interventions) and controversial (in being the work of a playwright best known for his Falklands Crisis teleplay *Tumbledown*), was scrapped at around the same time as Hands resigned, in favour of a more traditionalist adaptation. Whether the two events are connected I do not know, but it certainly seems reasonable to view *The Plantagenets* as in some sense an elaborate job application for the job that Noble eventually got. At the time, Noble spoke of the RSC as a 'young company', reborn as a privately sponsored, traditionalist theatre: 'Though we did have a subversive, left-wing image, the flag we fly is now quite reactionary: the need for a strongly articulated classical tradition in the midst of our culture ... I'm a classicist, a traditionalist.' This statement is interesting as a firm rejection of the RSC's radical past: it is also interesting in that it literally places the work of the RSC within culture and connects it with tradition. The RSC, Noble implies, is the articulator of tradition in English culture and bears that solemn purpose in its cultural gifts to the nation. The political posturing of the past is replaced with the authenticity of tradition. Noble invoked the authentic tradition of the RSC as a classical institution and rejected the inauthentic ideology that projected the RSC into the wider cultural domain in the first place.<sup>138</sup>

However, *The Plantagenets* was more of an imitation of tradition, a post-modern simulacrum of the classicist tradition which Noble referred to. The whole commercial apparatus of the production was designed to reinforce its traditionalist credentials in order to persuade both a hostile government and interested private sponsors that the RSC had reclaimed its traditional past and left its radical reputation behind. The programme cover was white and gold, so that it seemed to be a precious object. Inside the programme, Noble commissioned an essay on 'History and Power' from Alan Sinfield in order to offer a spurious academic authenticity to the work<sup>139</sup> and a comprehensive and largely accurate stage history, so that the production could be seen as working within a tradition of playing *Henry VI*. Both Hall and Hands had pursued the opposite line, that these were unusual plays, rediscovered and performed afresh. *The*

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<sup>138</sup> In 'Recycling the Early Histories' (p.180) Lois Potter writes that 'the expensive decor of the stage at Stratford and the Barbican was itself a statement about the kind of audience that might feel at home there. Not only was it easier on the eye and ear, it allowed spectators to ignore the meaning and enjoy the spectacle.'

<sup>139</sup> Although Sinfield's essay was extremely critical of an approach to the plays which the production subsequently adopted, making it a curiously subversive presence within the overall commercial and theatrical performance.

*Plantagenets*, on the contrary, promoted its relationship with the theatrical past. On this theme, Adrian Noble also rewrote Barton's play titles as *The Rise of Edward IV* and *Richard III, His Death*. These were deliberately anachronistic, medievalised titles,<sup>140</sup> designed to lend authenticity to Noble's inventions, a devious device which was bolstered by the published script which recorded the author of *The Plantagenets* as 'William Shakespeare.'<sup>141</sup>

The question of authorship was played down by Noble, who steered away from the kind of controversy which Hall encouraged in 1963. In an interview with Robert Gore-Langton, Noble distanced himself from the textual procedures of John Barton: 'Whereas there's probably one line in ours not written by Shakespeare there were hundreds of thousands not by Shakespeare in theirs. I'm left with more of the rough edges, the contradictions and the clumsiness that John Barton smoothed into a more homogenous piece.'<sup>142</sup> In fact, there was a considerable amount of added material and the original adaptation made by Charles Wood would have been substantially new material blended with Shakespeare's war scenes. Nevertheless, Noble insists upon the authenticity of the plays as Shakespeare's work, and continues to emphasise the rough-shod nature of the final plays, 'the rough edges, the contradictions and the clumsiness.' By stressing and even exaggerating the 'rough edges' in the adapted scripts, Noble was performing an operation that was no less artificial or interventionist than John Barton had been, yet Noble was careful to conceal his role as adapter, even crediting the adaptation to 'the company', bolstered by the respect and integrity lent by Charles Wood's name in the programme. The 'rough edges' probably had more to do with the chaotic development of the script, but Noble was able to use that as a selling point, as marks of authenticity of Shakespeare's early work, of archaic plays. The publication of the script was in its own way an attempt to register the authenticity of the production as a classic work. Robert Shaughnessy

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<sup>140</sup> As Shaughnessy points out, adding 'his death' to *Richard III* makes it sound like a rediscovered play. Whilst making up new titles for the adapted *Henry VI* plays, changing the title of *Richard III* is puzzling. *Representing Shakespeare*, p.79

<sup>141</sup> The 1970 publication of *The Wars of the Roses* was more accurately authored on the spine as by John Barton and Peter Hall.

<sup>142</sup> Quoted from 'The Plantagenets', an interview with Noble by Robert Gore-Langton, *Plays and Players* no. 421 (October 1988), pp. 8-10. Although published to coincide with the opening of *The Plantagenets*, the interview appears to have been conducted some time previously, as Noble several times makes reference to Charles Wood's work, as if he were style a principle player in the project.

described the adaptation as ‘market-led’: ‘upwardly mobile culturist aspirations seemed now to have been superseded by downwardly mobile populist ones.’<sup>143</sup>

Noble rejected any attempt to introduce use the process of adaptation as a means to introduce uniformity into the first tetralogy, arguing vigorously in interviews that ‘[w]e would not try to homogenise it or bend it to one view of history’<sup>144</sup>. The immaturity of the young Shakespeare was something to be preserved:

We ... had a strong sense of a changing, developing style in the plays and felt that this was to be embraced rather than eschewed .... This relish of contradictions and paradoxes in the world of the Plantagenets became central to the adaptation.<sup>145</sup>

This raises an interesting question: how does one adapt a work to express its own ambiguities - more clearly? more ambiguously? On one level, Noble’s statements seem designed to counter charges of anti-intellectualism, and to provide a rationale for the haphazard fashion in which the script was stitched together. The jumble of drafts, now held uncatalogued and largely in incomplete fragments by the Shakespeare Centre, show lines and scenes being crossed out, then replaced, then edited, then crossed out again, with a substantial number of additions by Charles Wood revised and then excised completely. Most of the actual work was done by Noble and his assistant Stephen Raine (who is not credited in the published script). Penny Downie (Margaret) gives a sense of the chaos of this writing process:

Actors demanding lines back were always reminded of the ‘three evenings of three hours’ project we were embarked on, but there were occasions when it had to be agreed that the coherence of the narrative or of a character meant that cut lines must be restored. There were some heated debates and at times some aggrieved actors, but the enterprise demanded an act of faith and the occasions when we would all get very excited about what we could see beginning to emerge in the rehearsal room gradually came to outweigh the problems. ... Scenes worked on the day before would come back the next morning with textual revisions worked out overnight by Adrian and Stephen, sometimes to universal groan, sometimes to great excitement ... Returning to *Henry VI* after *Edward IV* made it seem more simplistic than *Edward IV*, and moving from play to play meant that I and many others were having to make huge

<sup>143</sup> *Representing Shakespeare*, pp. 79-80.

<sup>144</sup> Noble, *The Plantagenets*, p. xiii.

<sup>145</sup> Noble, *The Plantagenets*, p. xiii.

emotional jumps all the time, and great age adjustments too. When we went back to scenes we'd worked on we would find that something had been lost from what had seemed solid, that the ground had shifted. But one had to allow it to be fluid and that, again, was an act of faith.<sup>146</sup>

Penny Downie's sense of the ground shifting, and the fluidity of the meaning of the production, was a feature which emerged as central to the production itself, staging the collapse of the stage world through a collapse of text. Even in the final scripts, there were some striking inconsistencies: Gloucester says farewell to Eleanor when he is meant to be under house arrest (bizarrely, Noble reversed the order of these scenes); York's 'Cade' soliloquy is relocated to the back-end of Jourdain's execution, when narratively he should already be in Ireland; the French treaty is cut, so that we never see the resolution of the Talbot-Joan story. The adaptation fragmented the narrative and then turned this fragmentation into a structural principle, into the 'contradictions and paradoxes' that Noble discusses.<sup>147</sup>

However, a view of the plays as disunified, inconsistent and ambiguous had a general currency in critical studies at the time, and it is perfectly possible that Noble was influenced by the general trend away from Tillyard's totalising, macro-narratives. In the 1960s and 1970s, J. P. Brockbank, Sigurd Burckhardt and G. K. Hunter had all argued against the Tillyardian reading, pointing to the many inconsistencies and discontinuities within the plays, especially when they were put together as if they were one play.<sup>148</sup>

Burckhardt argued that *Henry VI Part One* was deliberately plotted as a disintegrating structure, expressing stylistically the collapse of order and meaning which it narrated. Thus, the faults, corruptions

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<sup>146</sup> Downie, *Players of Shakespeare* 3, p. 117.

<sup>147</sup> This 'method' may have deep echoes with the text itself, if Sigurd Burckhardt's is to be believed. Burckhardt's imaginative reconstruction of how Shakespeare's 'war' with other playwrights led to his hitting upon a disintegrative structure may have an uncanny application to Noble's attempt to rationalise the eccentric way in which *The Plantagenets* was written in negotiation with the actors: 'The scene ... of my model shows Shakespeare sitting with other playwrights, arguing for a coherent and organic scheme for the *Henry VI* plays and more and more and more unhappily watching his collaborators tear the whole apart in a compulsive contention for the "finest" scenes and "noblest" speeches - in a "jarring discord of nobility." And suddenly the thought strikes him: Why shouldn't they? How could it be otherwise? Is this not exactly what the story is about? Are we not here *enacting* what we mean to represent? Would my idea of an integral dramatic whole not falsify the essence of the story we are supposed to tell? Is not the play we are here cutting into segments a perfect analogue of its true subject - England torn by civil war ... ? [...] And then a further thought strikes him: Do we not also enact, act in, the very style in which, as dramatists, we speak? ... Exit Shakespeare, pursued by troublesome doubts.' (*Shakespearean Meanings*, p.58)

<sup>148</sup> J. P. Brockbank, 'The Frame of Disorder'; Sigurd Burckhardt, *Shakespeare's Meanings*; Hunter, 'The Royal Shakespeare Company Plays *Henry VI*.'

and bad writing which a previous generation of scholars had been preoccupied with were turned round by Burckhardt into innovations, experiments and structural principles. Through the 1980s, critical attention was turned towards individual episodes, notably the play-within-plays of Joan la Pucelle and Jack Cade, justifying Noble's episodic approach.<sup>149</sup> The most prominent work to explore these ideas was *The Complete Works* (Wells and Taylor, Oxford, 1986) and its *Textual Companion*, which took the bold step of publishing the trilogy out of narrative order (with *Part One* last) and recovering the quarto titles for *Part 2 and 3*, making *Part 2* the *First Part of the Contention etc.* displacing a trilogy or tetralogy orientated reading. Of all the texts so far referred to, this is the one most likely to have been on Noble's shelf, and the coincidence of dates (1986, 1988) is interesting to reflect upon. However, it is not necessary to demand a link between the work of scholars and theatre practitioners in order to discern a common paradigm. The post-modern milieu of the 1980s was hostile to 'meta-narratives' and privileged disintegration, ambiguity and fluidity, not to mention the deconstruction of classic works through which previous certainties had been expressed. Even if Noble was, in the final event, trying to reassert the importance of national institutions in the post-modern, asocial, apolitical and self-seeking world of the 1980s, it was by way of a representation of collapse and discontinuity, of wounds to be healed, that this was to be achieved.

The presentation of England in *The Plantagenets* was associated with pomp and ceremony, recalling the ceremonials of English tradition, of royalty and of the traditional structures of power: 'the production was unashamedly patriotic and heroic.'<sup>150</sup> In contrast, foreign locations were invoked negatively, both in the presentation of France and in the referencing of other countries to construct Noble's sense of England's 'others.' Several reviewers, for example, compared the mists of the battlefields in France with the streets of New York: 'The gridded stage floor filters rising steam like the streets of New York'<sup>151</sup> and 'the punctured floor steams like the sidewalks of Manhattan.'<sup>152</sup> This connotation coincided with a sense of the battlefields as being hellish, suggesting a link between a contemporary battlefield and the borders of

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<sup>149</sup> In particular, Gabriele Bernhard Jackson, 'Topical Ideology: Witches, Amazons and Shakespeare's Joan of Arc' *English Literary Renaissance* 18 (1988), pp. 40-65 and Michael Hattaway, 'Rebellion, Class Consciousness, and Shakespeare's *2 Henry VI*', *Cahiers Elizabethans* 33 (1988), pp. 13-22.

<sup>150</sup> Hattaway, *The First Part*, p.54.

<sup>151</sup> 'The Plantagenets' by Michael Coveney, in *Financial Times*, 24th October 1988.

<sup>152</sup> 'New Broom with a Noble Sweep' by Michael Ratcliffe, *The Observer*, Sunday 30 October 1988.

hell. Germany too was invoked negatively, as a cultural stereotype of a war ravaged county. Penny Downie remembers that her initial scene as Margaret, scavenging about for food amidst the debris of France, was meant to recall Berlin and Dresden after their devastation at English hands in the second world war.<sup>153</sup> The American urbanity of Crowley's hellscapes suggests a complex view of a British society which was increasingly looking to America as its model, whilst the appropriation of Dresden for the French scenes implies a referencing of the British atrocities in Second World War which would have been unthinkably provocative in Bogdanov's hands. Crowley's thinking here, incidentally, may have been influenced by (British) film director Ridley Scott's stark and threatening vision of Los Angeles in *Bladerunner*, which used similar stylistic devices, utilising steam and light in particular, to create a dystopian vision of an American-based future where the nature of the real is also tested. That Scott is also a British director also suggest the affinities between his and Crowley's sense of the role of America in current British life. The brashness of the French characters, who display themselves in a crass overwash of gold, compared to the animalistic earthiness of the British, allowed a more developed sense of anti-Americanism to creep into the production. There may well have been a strong element of cultural protectionism on Noble's part, perhaps related to the cultural ascendancy of America since the Second World War, and his keenness to see France as a colony, the key move which Bogdanov also makes allowing both to use the French scenes as a way of studying Britain's post-colonial problems, also allows Noble to think about the relationship between a dying imperial power and the ascendant colonial order. This attitude may also have been fuelled by pique - the common criticism, after all, is that only students and American tourists go to Stratford these days.<sup>154</sup> This may well also be behind the critical attitude adopted towards the production by American scholars. Barbara Hodgdon, for example, complained that the production was a 'specifically English commodity' which focused in on the 'insular, anxious xenophobia'<sup>155</sup> of Shakespeare's time. As Hodgdon goes onto to praise the international inclusiveness of the ESC, the point seems directed at her own sense of being

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<sup>153</sup> Downie, 'Queen Margaret in *Henry VI* and *Richard III*', p.120.

<sup>154</sup> Neither of which are likely to buy insurance from Royal Insurance.

<sup>155</sup> Hodgdon, *The Ends Crown All*, p. 98. Hodgdon also writes that 'Noble's project [is] culturally specific in its references, as though reproduced for English eyes only.' (p. 88). The criticism is a fair one, but Hodgdon neglects to mention that the ESC productions were played all over the world whilst *The Plantagenets*, like the majority of RSC product, was only performed in England.

excluded, that the production's agenda was culturally narrow. Hodgdon appears to have been subconsciously sensitive to the anti-American feeling running through the production and its nostalgia for the pre-war years when the British king really was the centre of the universe.<sup>156</sup>

The production began with a ceremonial presentation of England. The funeral of Henry V was an occasion for national displays: blue fleurs-de-lis curtains hung down at the back of the stage, flags were hung, banners were put on long poles forming an aisle down the centre of the stage. A congregation of ordinary people gathered at the back to watch the ceremony, so that the real audience was faced with a stage audience, both watching the same display. The nobles filed in, accompanied by attendants and guards, to a heavy, pompous music, and occupied the stage, taking up ritualised positions and delivering their addresses as formal speeches. The scene was an unashamed display of nationhood rooted in the values of hierarchy and of centralised power - and a dramatic contrast to the sparseness of Hands' opening. The same kind of ceremony was revisited in Henry's coronation. Pictures of this scene, held in the Shakespeare Centre, were taken by the photographer from a diagonal angle from above the action, giving the impression (which balcony audiences would also have) of having photographed a real event, as the pictures recalled the style and the composition of photographs of Elizabeth I's coronation and other royal events in Westminster Abbey. The production values shouted the poor-theatre look of the ESC into the ground, and presented a truly big, spectacular Shakespeare to its audience, endorsing the pageant of authorised histories and rejecting the radical postures of previous stagings of Shakespearean history. This was English history, not just in its representation, but in its ceremonial explorations of its own traditions and customs. The varied accents of the ESC were exchanged for the mannered and homogenised accents of the RSC. Noble constructed an authenticated view of English history and returned Shakespeare to his classical self, to the Shakespeare whose belief in order and due proportion was appropriated by the Tories; to the popular Shakespeare who wowed nineteenth and early twentieth century audiences with historically-authentic costumes, grand pageants and spectacular tableaux; and to audiences looking for cinematic thrills and, crucially, who would fit the profile demanded by sponsors such as Royal Insurance. The end of the trilogy

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<sup>156</sup> However, one must balance this with Penny Downie's assertion that Noble 'was very keen to present the sense of English xenophobia in the production.' ('Queen Margaret in *Henry VI* and *Richard III*', p.115).

deliberately recalled the nationalistic triumphalism of Tory Party conferences in the 1980s, setting a seal of approval on the 1980s and the return to order.<sup>157</sup> The RSC staged the Thatcher view of modern history, in which the collapse of imperial authority resulted in the decline of Britain's influence and the spread of civil dissidence. Noble's Richmond was a classic Thatcherite, ready to redeploy the ideology and the symbology of English imperialism.

John Peter, reviewing the production in *The Sunday Times*, described *The Plantagenets* as

... a thrilling demonstration of the skills for which this company used to be celebrated: large-scale, superbly organised company work studded with strong performances; consistency of style where the visual elements are perfectly in tune with the acting; and a vigorous sense of authenticity which never sinks to the pettiness of archaeology.<sup>158</sup>

*The Plantagenets* marked a full circle for the RSC: it returned it to its founding productions and reasserted its role and its priority to stage national drama and to possess and perform Shakespeare's character England. However, it also plundered the history of the RSC, drawing upon devices and images that it had established over thirty years. The production was in a sense constructed out of its own past, drawing upon an already established vocabulary. By referencing its own past, the RSC now seemed to be calling into question its own creative future. Rather than seek to maintain cultural authority over Shakespeare, Noble wanted to exercise cultural authority on the institutions own past, its own heritage, against the encroachments and the innovations of the ESC in areas which had previously been the RSC's own. This form of self-referential authentication calls to mind the difference between historicity and nostalgia in the post-modern theories discussed in the opening section of this chapter. Whereas *The Wars of the Roses* had explored the nation within history, *The Plantagenets* rather evoked nostalgia by presenting a perfect, authentic rendering of the past, and it did this in two ways: first of all, by being faithful to the material realities of history, using costumes, props and sets which, if not actually historically accurate, nevertheless gave the appearance of being so; and secondly, by using references to its past as a vocabulary for expression, which Baudrillard calls 'retro fascination.' The authenticity and the authority of *The*

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<sup>157</sup> Shaughnessy vividly draws this comparison in *Representing Shakespeare*, p.87.

<sup>158</sup> John Peter, 'Outright Winners in the Game of Power Politics', *The Sunday Times*, 30<sup>th</sup> October 1988.



*Plantagenets* lay in the authentic rendering of the past but, as Jamson argues, this form of representation which seeks to render the past perfectly, even improved, bears no sense of one's relations within history, but seeks to reconstruct, rediscover and market the past. The production's circular movements, which saw the triumphant national displays returned to in the proto-Thatcherite Richmond's ascendancy, indicated a desire to return to the past and to a centrist, stable and imperial society. Paul Taylor wrote that, in contrast to the bleak ending of the ESC cycle, 'Noble's production ends on a heartening major chord. Simon Dormandy's Richmond seems genuinely to have inaugurated a new era.'<sup>159</sup>

Since 1944, the *Henry VI* plays have been performed as 'matter of England' plays. As we have seen, the imperative to create a Shakespearean national epic has had a tremendous influence on the way that this is achieved in the theatre and on the equivocal position of the *Henry VI* plays in the performance canon. Each one has emerged within the context of an institution claiming to be the 'true' National Theatre of England. However, all of these productions have in some way sought to problematise or call attention to their own political strategies. The most likely explanation for this duality of strategic coercion and artistic subversion is that theatre has been forced to respond to changing financial structures, so that the wider articulation of nation works as a prerequisite to playing 'big' or artistically worthwhile productions. The most significant change has been the transference of England from an interest in politics and its possibilities in the 1960s, to the disillusion with politics in the 1970s and, with the increasing need to turn to business for additional finance, to issues of authenticity and fidelity to the 'traditional' Shakespearean text. As we have seen, the striving for cultural authority in the 1960s depended upon the modernisation of Shakespeare, but in the 1970s the ground shifted to questions of authenticity, which emerged finally in the post-modern 1980s as the commodification of authenticity and tradition.

The performance of the *Henry VI* plays offered to theatrical practitioners a site of resistance to the market ideologies which were transforming theatrical productions: moreover, the plays provided an opportunity for the theatre to explore a world in which history, the nation and authority are all divided and

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<sup>159</sup> Paul Taylor, 'History in the Blood', *The Independent*, 24th October 1988.

contested concepts, in which hope resides in the nostalgia for a lost authenticity, and in which politics provides no solutions but operates to destroy and trample over ceremonies, symbols and other kinds of cultural institutions. The plays were extremely appropriate to the politics and the culture of the 1980s and perhaps this is one reason why there were more productions of the *Henry VI* plays between 1977 and 1990 than there had been for most of the century: it could be that their time had come. In the next chapter, I wish to explore in more detail the various ways in which these performances engaged with, intervened in, subverted or endorsed the various transformations, myths and experiences of the 1980s. It is my thesis that, even in conservative productions, the all of the performances of the *Henry VI* plays in the 1980s register a deep anxiety about social change.

### 3. 'Alarums and Defeats': *Henry VI* and the 1980s

#### The Thatcher Decade

In the last chapter, I endeavoured to show how the performance of the *Henry VI* plays as 'matter of England' plays was problematised by the changing circumstances of theatrical production in the latter half of this century, particularly in regard to the development of England's national theatres. In the 1960s and the 1970s, the cultural and political capital of being a national theatre was fought over by theatrical institutions which were struggling to survive in a funding climate which privileged public service and 'good works.' In the 1980s, this insistence upon serving the public or the nation to justify public funding diminished and, as we have seen, a new emphasis was put upon selling a service in a cultural market place in order to justify private funding. This new pressure to serve both the public and the market, together with a growth in Shakespearean companies and an increasing emphasis upon touring, helped to shape an institutional context for the performance of 'matter of England' plays which was divided and politicised, and hemmed in by the need to satisfy an increasingly divided constituency of patrons: the government, private sponsors, the education market and the audience. Shakespearean performance was under pressure

to be both traditional and innovative, and to satisfy both the public good and commercial demand. Where the national theatres should be reflecting the nation, repertoires in the national theatres of the 1980s reflected division and contradiction in these institutions own sense of who they were and who their audience was.

Consequently, any theatre company which had the ambition to perform plays as complex and as large as the *Henry VI* plays in the 1980s faced a situation in which both the economics and the politics of playing Shakespeare were more difficult to navigate than ever before. Even so, that three productions did dare to enter these turbulent cultural waters testifies to the extent that the *Henry VI* plays suited the times. The plays' discordant and problematic dramatisations of fragmentation and catastrophe in the history of the nation were peculiarly appropriate to a country which was experiencing rapid social and cultural changes. The way that the romantic idea of 'Shakespeare's England' is dismantled and interrogated by the plays' civil war narrative in particular focused attention on the way that political changes were challenging the hegemony of established institutions. England, History and even Shakespeare stopped being certain, stable categories and became instead sites of controversy and contestation. In this chapter, I wish to turn away from the production issues which have so far dominated my discussions in order to explore how the actual performance of these *Henry VIs* worked as performances of and about 'England' in the 1980s. To do this, I will examine how their performance choices, set designs and interpretations interacted politically and intertextually with the central 'myths' of authority and of history across these years.

The 1980s was the Thatcher decade, in which the political ascendancy of a right-wing libertarian politics, popularly personified by the figure of the then prime minister Margaret Thatcher, offered the national theatres a new social phenomena to explore and to compete with. Thatcherism promoted market ideology and put on a strong emphasis on self-determination and 'the resolute approach.' A characteristic strategy of Thatcherism was to see such virtues as inherent to the English character, so that this new politics was sold as a return by England to its 'true' self. Simon Barker suggests that events such as the Falklands Crisis in 1982 were interpreted by the government as a rediscovery of these values and, by strong implication, of the 'true' English spirit. The Falklands Crisis evoked memories of the 'Dunkirk spirit' and of Victorian values. In short, the policy of Thatcherism was to try and integrate itself into national identity

and into national history, to naturalise itself through a process of ideological nationalisation in which Thatcherism's (contingent) values were merely a heroic recovery of the past. When Mrs. Thatcher quoted from *King John* in a speech justifying the Falklands campaign, Thatcher's England became Shakespeare's England.

The early 1980s were also significant for royal spectacles which made a theatre out of the nation. The most notable of these were the funeral of Lord Mountbatten in 1980 and the Royal Wedding between the Prince and Princess of Wales the following year. These royal events were constructed to be national ones, in which the nation collectively mourned Mountbatten and subsequently celebrated the Wedding. These events offered a new challenge and a new problematic to the national theatres, particularly those, like the Royal Shakespeare Company, which had the Royal Family as their patrons. In a sense, Mrs. Thatcher and the Royal Family were the true 'national theatres' of the 1980s, as they made performances out of their lives which expressed and defined national values, and attracted a 'truly' national audience. In effect, they mythologised and appropriated English history and national identity in order to promote and consolidate a political position. By re-performing these myths and narratives, productions of the *Henry VI* plays had the opportunity to explore their mythic structures and to reject their version of history. Mrs. Thatcher's idea of Shakespearean history owed much to Tillyard, and the royal evocations of national history also work within the same mindset. The Tillyardian position now underpinned establishment readings of culture and history and consequently any production which played against the Tillyardian thesis was making a political statement.

However, there was another kind of 'national theatre' which occupied English society in the 1980s which also bore upon performances of the *Henry VI* plays: this was the unscripted theatre of England's inner cities, in which a series of riots (beginning in 1980) became in their media representations a spectacle of national disunity to contrast with the spectacles of unity constructed by the government and the Royal Family. The riots engendered a deep anxiety about social fragmentation which were evident in the sometimes hysterical debate about the causes and the meaning of the riots in the press. This sense of internal division was compounded by a worsening situation in Northern Ireland, and by a protracted dispute between the government and the coal miners (which itself took on the heroic proportions of the Falklands

Crisis in the government's eyes). Consequently, the rediscovered imperial values of heroism, resolution and self-determination which constructed the Mrs. Thatcher/Royal Family national theatre were ironically juxtaposed with this growing anxiety about social collapse. These two images of the nation in the 1980s were stark and antithetical in their contrasts: one told the tale of England's rediscovery of her own worth, character and destiny; the other told a tale of a worsening crisis, of the political alienation of large parts of the population, and of the disintegration of the nation. The national theatres, which were already beginning to exhibit the wounds of the country in its own divisions, approached a national identity which was apparently collapsing. So, the performance of the *Henry VI* plays not only engaged with the myths of unity and the continuance of tradition promoted by those in power, they also engaged with this anxiety about society and social changes.

In fact, the *Henry VI* plays offered peculiarly apt analogies and metaphors for these central myths of the 1980s. One notable example was the Falklands Crisis, which coincided with the pyrrhic victory of the English in France in *Part One*. Shakespeare's cynical and bleak portrait of England's last imperial victory in France afforded theatre practitioners an opportunity to explore the cultural implications of the victory in the Falklands. By presenting a victory as a defeat, the nature of the English identity supposedly rediscovered by the campaign was called into question. Moreover, the positioning of this defeat as a prologue to the internal collapse of the nation rewrote the Falklands as the prologue to disaster rather than, as Mrs. Thatcher would have it, the triumphal return to national greatness. In fact, Mrs. Thatcher based her own myth of power upon that victory, so the productions which explored the Falklands most closely (Bogdanov's and Noble's) were attacking the Thatcher myth at its origin. Also, the increasingly absurd use of violence in the plays was an opportunity to explore in performance the moral nature of a nation which has defined itself through a violent and aggressive act of territorialism. However, it was the way in which Shakespeare introduced the sub-plot of the commoners (beginning with the soldiers in *Part One*, the commoners in *Part Two* (climaxing with the Kent insurrection) and climaxing in the vignettes of *Part Three*) that most afforded theatre practitioners an opportunity to break open and explore divisions in the nation. The Cade scenes were particularly significant because this was the first time since the war that the scenes had been staged in the context of public debate and anxiety about the figure of the rioter. The way in

which they were staged, the kind of myths and narratives of power which they interacted with, and the way in which they were positioned in regard to the stories of the other commoners in the plays, were important indicators of the complex mix of classical conservatism and utopian radicalism in British theatre.

The *Henry VI* plays were also timely for the 1980s in that their emphasis on narrative and displays over character and interior dramas rhymed with a new fashion for narrative drama. A recurring comment made by commentators in the 1980s was that the *Henry VI* plays were comparable to 'soap operas' - television serials which placed a high priority on narrative rather than political content. This genre had been a key feature of television schedules since the 1950s; however, the 1980s saw a significant increase in interest in the genre. Jane Howell, for example, compared the plays to a medieval 'Dallas'; Michael Bogdanov also compared the plays to *Dynasty*, then a rival soap opera, vying for the new market in narratives. Adrian Noble put these general comments into more perspective, suggesting that there had been a general resurgence in the importance of narrative, particularly of an epic kind, into which the *Henry VI* plays took on a new relevance. The success of the RSC's *Nicholas Nickleby* indicated to Noble the new value being placed upon large, multi-layered narrative presentations, as against the previous interest in content, politics and experimentation with form. In the history of narrative in the twentieth century, the return to popular narratives seemed to be a statement of rejection of the modernist interest in form, whilst the open-ended, non-teleological structure of soap operas seemed more in tune with the post-modern rejection of grand designs. The emphasis on soap opera style narrative also led to an increased interest in the plays' fictionality. The perceived flaws and incoherencies of the historical material was seized on by Noble and Bogdanov as evidence of Shakespeare's own irreverent attitude towards historical truth. By exploring the fictionality of history, these directors asserted the fictionality of modern history such as the Royal Wedding and the Falklands and in doing so made an implicit criticism of the Conservative's appropriation of Shakespeare and English history.

All three productions used the *Henry VI* plays' central narrative themes as a way of approaching the main narratives of the 1980s: the key events, the topical issues and above all, the sense that the 1980s marked a significant break with the past and foreshadowed a disturbing future. The theme of change, of transition to a yet undisclosed future, of anxiety and apprehension about that future even in productions

which officially endorsed such changes as a necessary evil, was a consistent one across these years. These *Henry VI*s performed an unexpected and challenging vision of England, exploring the 'national character' critically, whilst in crisis, and testing its values of unity, heroism and military strength against the realities of the battlefield and the truth of war and politics. In the following sections, I wish to explore the various ways in which productions of *Henry VI* in these years engaged with and performed the narratives of the 1980s. I will be paying particular attention to the way that the presentation of national identity was problematised by the exploration of the heroic ideal of the English character in the French war scenes and by the presentation of the commoners' sub-plot. In particular, I wish to situate these performances in relationship to a perception and an anxiety about massive social and cultural changes, in which ideological gods such as 'England', 'History' and even 'Shakespeare' were opened up to dispute, contestation and appropriation. I also hope to bring out some of the complex ways in which these performances were cross-currents of coercions and subversions, as these theatres navigated the political and economic tides of the 1980s.

### **1981-3 - The BBC Shakespeare's *Henry VI-Richard III* (dir. Jane Howell)**

Work began on the BBC's *Henry VI-Richard III* series in September 1981 - just two months after the Royal Wedding between the Prince and Princess of Wales; the final recording was made on 6th April 1982 - just four days after Argentina had invaded one of the remaining colonies of the British Empire, the Falklands Islands.<sup>1</sup> The cultural context of the BBC's *Henry VI*s was then extremely rich in issues and representations of the English nation and its history.<sup>2</sup> Their performance of disunity and division in English history was conducted in the aftermath of an occasion during which (according to the media and the

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<sup>1</sup> The dates are based on information obtained from the BBC scripts and from Susan Willis' *The BBC Shakespeare Plays*. My discussions of the Royal Wedding and the Falklands Crisis are based largely upon accounts in *The Falklands War: The Full Story* by The Sunday Times Insight Team (London: Sphere Books, 1982) and Tom Nairn's *The Enchanted Glass: Britain and its Monarchy* (London: Radius, 1988).

<sup>2</sup> My principle source for performance information regarding these productions are the BBC videos which are available for educational use. This has been supplemented with reference to reviews and critical studies, which are cited when appropriate.



establishment) the nation had been jubilantly brought together. Moreover, the performance concluded with bleak images of English history just as the British empire was facing a new threat to its territories and its imperial identity. The year was also notable for a sharpening anxiety about the extent and the meaning of a series of riots across the country, which the national spectacles of the Royal Wedding and the Falklands Campaign signally failed to address. The BBC *Henry V*s boldly engaged with these national events, exploring the way in which such events were ideologically constructed and dramatising both the way that such events 'script' audiences and the way that way that audiences challenge and even subvert such occasions through unscripted violations of their representational structures.

Some explanation of the royal context will be helpful in placing the national aspects of the BBC *Henry V*s. The Silver Jubilee parades in 1977 had rediscovered the British appetite for royal spectacles. According to Nairn, the establishment had initially expected a lack of enthusiasm for the celebrations, but the final event proved that the country was hungry for a return to the stable certainties expressed in the solemnity of a royal occasion. The funeral of Earl Mountbatten in 1980 turned the death of an obscure royal into a State funeral which similarly ploughed a romantic idea of the nation collectively mourning the death of a hero. Mountbatten's death was made heroic by the British press because of the tragic manner of his death in an IRA explosion. That subversive elements in the United Kingdom had targeted a figure of the old empire made it seem all the more important to demonstrate national unity in the face of such an encroachment upon national identity by anti-monarchist terrorists. The BBC series played upon the Mountbatten funeral in its staging of Henry V's funeral, in which a large crowd representing national culture obscured the set in order to honour the fallen hero. When they cleared, the artificial nature of the set was revealed to the audience, indicating the constructed and ideological nature of such national rituals. The following skirmishes in France, which Howell chose to represent as a battle between old men (the English) and young boys (the French), hinted at the way in which this rediscovery of a heroic ideal in the heart of England's national identity led to a squalid attempt to 'prove' that heroism in a disastrous and wasteful conflict.

The Royal Wedding in 1981 was the inevitable sequel to Mountbatten's funeral; it became the occasion for the most elaborate royal occasion since the coronation of the Queen in 1952. Like the

coronation, the wedding ‘projected history as the great prop of performance’ (Nairn, 124). Through the use of props, costumes, parades, pomp and circumstance, the royal wedding was connected with a thousand years of English history and allowed the crowds that attended the event and the viewers who watched it at home the sense that they were participating in a national event which reclaimed the ancient history of the monarchy to the heart of a beleaguered national identity. However, as Hobsbawm would remind us, this elaborate theatre of national spectacle articulated a tradition that it is actually little more than a century old and looks back to a period of imperial greatness. The Royal Wedding, then, was an artfully constructed piece of national theatre which performed a neo-romantic, heroic view of British history. The Prince of Wales was constructed as a heroic Prince Charming: he was the nephew of Mountbatten and in this ritual assumed the place that Mountbatten had vacated as the symbol of imperial heroism. The spectacle was witnessed by a world-wide audience of 750 million, making it not just a national spectacle, but a projection to the world of English values and English unity in common cultural symbols such as the union jack, the monarchy and marriage.

The whole of the *Henry VI-Richard III* series played with and against this heroic type and its location within national identity and history: it performed ‘a disclosure of the contradictions of chivalric values’<sup>3</sup> in order to expose the hegemonic processes underlying the event. In this context, the series’ interest in the collapse of a heroic order embodied by Henry V and Talbot might be said to reflect critically upon the heroic values expressed both by the Royal Wedding and the kind of history that the Royal Wedding wrote itself (and the nation) into. This might also shed some light upon a performance of Talbot which (as Bingham notes) was remarkably unsympathetic. However, the performance went beyond such issues in order to explore such events as political spectacles in which real social problems were occluded by romantic references to the stable (but as we have seen, invented) traditions of the past. Here, Jane Howell capitalised upon the way that her own theatre, BBC television, was implicated in the construction of such a ‘national’ spectacle. The BBC had earned its reputation for televising royal events thanks to Dimbleby’s famous commentary of the Coronation of Elizabeth I - an event which also established television as a

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<sup>3</sup> Holderness, ‘Radical Potentiality’, p. 221.

national medium. As I discussed in the previous chapter, cultural studies of the BBC productions have identified the adept way in which Howell navigated the constraints placed by the BBC upon the BBC Shakespeare Series. However, I believe it is possible to see Howell moving beyond this local struggle and exploring the way that television works to promote such identification. By rejecting the naturalistic and romantic ideas of history promoted by BBC Costume Dramas (and in one sense the Royal Wedding was little more than an extremely elaborate BBC Costume Drama), the BBC *Henry VIs* subverted expectations of a royal history pageant and foregrounded the political issues which such pageants attempt to contain. In doing so, the series called attention to the BBC's own complicity as 'witness' of the Royal Wedding, and invited the audience to watch television with a critical eye.

In the *Henry VI-Richard III* series, the subtle exploration of the theatricality of the television form gave rise to a refocusing of the relationship between television and history. By re-performing events such as Mountbatten's funeral (Henry V's funeral), the Royal Wedding (Henry and Margaret's wedding) and inner city rioting (the Cade riots) as Shakespearean history, the production called attention to the artificial structures of televisual history and the process of ideological encoding involved in the selective transmission and interpretation of 'events.' The coverage of the Royal Wedding displaced reports of riots in Toxteth and across the country in the news headlines, thereby substituting a very real social crisis with a romantic fiction of the nation's past. According to cultural theorists Dayan and Katz, even the actual broadcasting of the Wedding elided much of the utopian behaviour of the crowds at the procession. Dayan and Katz make an intriguing distinction between the behaviour of the crowds and the procession which I believe will illuminate Howell's directorial strategies

The carnival ambience which could be observed along the procession route led many observers ... to comment on the contrast between what they perceived as English playfulness (that of the crowd) versus British arrogance (the procession), and between Elizabethan jocularly (street behaviour) and Victorian etiquette (behaviour of the principles). Only the Victorian or British in tone survived the broadcast, leaving little place for the ironic dimension of many a patriotic gesture.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz, *Media Events: the Live Broadcasting of History* (Cambridge, Mass. And London: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 82.

So, the 'real' event of the Wedding was quite different to the televised, 'historical' event, which overlooked the deviations of both the performers and the crowd from the scripted performance of nation. The national audience was effectively edited, adapted and scripted to perform in certain ways, limiting the broadcast vision of national identity to a proscribed, imperial and royal one which defined rather than included the crowds. In the BBC *Henry VIs*, the crowds who welcomed Margaret to the English court would later become Jack Cade's mob: Howell was thus able to draw a suggestive line between this cultural manipulation of crowd behaviour and the unscripted rioting in Britain's inner cities. Here, television emerges as a duplicitous medium which constructs theatrical performances by editing the broadcast of real events: instead of relating history directly, television works against the idea of history as a 'process', instead affirming the romantic ideas of history and tradition displayed by the Wedding. Theoretical and cultural studies of television bear this thesis out. For example, Robert Silverstone argues that 'Television, like myth, is both structure and structuring ... When we watch television we are watching a series of messages that both order our experience and define its categories, but which do so in ways which transcend the historical condition of that experience.'<sup>5</sup>

Dayan and Katz explain the contradiction between the behaviour of the crowds and the 'Victorian' character of the procession and its broadcast by situating the Royal Wedding as a ritualised performance of national identity which actually steps outside of normal social routine and interrupts it. As the normal workings of culture and society are suspended, society could be said to enter temporarily into a 'liminal' phase, which is ambiguously outside cultural identity. The public exit the normal, everyday world and 'experience a shattering of perceptions and certainties.'<sup>6</sup> They then return to the normal world with a renewed commitment to the nation and a sense of being incorporated in a ritualised version of history. Dayan and Katz are perhaps over ambitious in this analysis, but nevertheless I think that the idea is useful to keep in mind in exploring the way that national culture is articulated and deconstructed in the BBC

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<sup>5</sup> The quote is from Robert Silverstone, *The Message of Television* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1981) p. 17: 'Television, like myth, is both structure and structuring ... When we watch television we are watching a series of messages that both order our experience and define its categories, but which do so in ways which transcend the historical condition of that experience.'

<sup>6</sup> Dayan and Katz, *Media Events*: The first quote is from p. 5, the second from p. 9, the third from p. 20.

*Henry VI* plays. The term 'liminal' is drawn from Victor Turner's anthropological studies of the structure of performance in ritualised societies. However, in this context I believe it would be more useful to use a word which Turner suggests as an alternative description of the same process, which is 'threshold' (Turner also uses both terms interchangeably with 'margin.'). 'Threshold' better expresses the ambiguity of these 'rituals of incorporation' in that they are both the limit of cultural expression and the boundary at the edge of the ideological idea of society. The importance of Turner's theories is that they recognise that cultures move into these thresholds of cultural experience at times of change. They are, in fact, rites of passage.<sup>7</sup>

The 1981 Royal Wedding was constructed formally about the rite of passage of Lady Diana Spencer to the exalted social status of becoming the Princess of Wales. (In fact, much was made at the time of Diana being a commoner, which added to the scale of her rise in social status).<sup>8</sup> The BBC Shakespeare's production of *Part Two* followed this structure by turning its opening scene into a wedding scene and making the formal incorporation of Margaret into the Royal circle the focus of the scene. Both rituals were ritual performances of social changes which sprung from anxiety about the transition: the rituals marked a moment 'when the past is momentarily negated, suspended, or abrogated, and the future has not yet begun, an instant of pure potentiality when everything, as it were, trembles in the balance.'<sup>9</sup> Speaking at the beginning of the 1980s, director Jane Howell said

What interests me is that I think we are today in that sort of state, in a time of change. Society is changing, there is in England, I think, a very quiet revolution. Everything is changing, people are not certain of what is coming. The danger I see is that it could swing extremely left or extremely right, which is where the circle of politics meet. It is *why* someone like Richard emerges that interests me greatly. It's a long process in the plays: finding out how one gets to that. It's like one great wave, and within that there are many colours and changes.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1982), especially pp. 20-30.

<sup>8</sup> Dayan and Katz, *Media Events*, p. 85.

<sup>9</sup> Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre*, p. 44.

<sup>10</sup> Fenwick, *Part One*, p. 21.

The performance of *Henry VI* followed from a sense of change in English society and of uncertainty about that change and, as Howell describes the 'long process' which the plays perform, the conflicts within the *Henry VI* plays provided a theatrical language for the performance of change and of instability within the transforming concept of England. This quote is particularly anxious about the dangers of extremity, of an excessive turn either to left-wing or right-wing politics and the figure of Richard seems to represent a product of that anxiety, an extreme figure. The shift of values over the course of the Wars of the Roses,' writes Susan Willis, 'seemed very contemporary to Howell.'<sup>11</sup> The BBC *Henry VIs* took anxiety as a key mood, stressing that emotion in its construction of characters and, later, of situations.<sup>12</sup>

## II

The passage in social status, writes Turner, is often accompanied by a passage in space, such as a literal crossing of the threshold.<sup>13</sup> In the *Henry VI-Richard III* series, the ceremonial or violent act of crossing a threshold was integral to the structure of the performances. Each episode began with such an action, and their variations denoted different inflections of the same process, until the ceremonial crossing of the threshold became a violent and illegal act, in which the proper process rehearsed and delineated by ceremonial history was subverted and rewritten in blood. *Part One* began with Henry V's coffin being brought through two large doors, the procession of nobles following it onto the main stage; *Part Two* began with a huge procession filing through the same doors, this time attendant upon Margaret's wedding; and *Part Three* opened with York's army breaking down the same doors, an image which ironically recalled and rewrote the earlier images.<sup>14</sup> Within the production, doors were important in the construction of sets and in the construction of different types of theatre. Fast exits and sudden scene changes in *Part One*

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<sup>11</sup> Willis, *The BBC Shakespeare Plays*, p. 171.

<sup>12</sup> Howell's sense of anxiety was also the theme of Caryl Churchill's play *Top Girls* (London: Methuen, 1982), which adopted a similar posture of unease and uncertainty at the opening of the 1980s: it dramatised a sense that rapid social change was both imminent and uncertain in its effect and its consequence. That play too began with a return to a semi-fictional past and a stylised presentation of it, with fictional and historical figures from different periods sat around a restaurant table with a modern day business woman as their host.

<sup>13</sup> Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre*, pp. 24-25.

<sup>14</sup> In *The BBC Shakespeare Plays*, Willis points out that an initial shot of soldiers rolling a red carpet to the doors leads us to expect another procession to open the episode. The violent smashing of the doors was not only a deviation from the previous episodes but a subversion of audience expectations. (p. 179).

through several doors on the stage used 'theatre gags' to construct a fluid, artificial world where, for example, York could walk straight from Mortimer's cell into the parliament. In *Part Two*, two doors represented a divided nation and in *Part Three* and *Richard III* a single door and a darker set represented a world shutting down, ready to be dominated by a single, tyrannical ego. The final image of *Part Three* was of Richard vanishing into a dark space behind the door. The repetition of these forms of spatial crossings, from the ceremonial use of thresholds to their violations, created a sense in the performance of a continual existence on the threshold of cultural identity, which was opening up to various kinds of extremities and subversions. The specific ceremonies fixed and ordered social space: the act of crossing the threshold affirmed the transition from ambiguity to incorporation. However, the continual and repetitive reordering of that space turned the ordered world of the spectacle into one of continual ambiguity, in which the structures of social order were perpetually open to appropriation. The funeral in *Part One*, the royal wedding in *Part Two*, and the 'trial' of kings in *Part Three*, all opened the performances with displays of power whose structure, representation of order and contradictions were explored in the rest of the performance. In each case, the ensuing disorder was traced back to contradictions within the initial display of order/power. The production examined the early 1980s' representations of order, and found instead a society on the brink of disorder, moving between extremes of order and disorder.

I would like now to explore this structure in the series' performance of *Part Two*. This is the most interesting of the three parts to apply this reading to, because its opening scene (which narrates the arrival of Margaret to the English court) drew upon the cultural experience of the Royal Wedding. The *mise-en-scene* replicated the contradictions in that event: on the floor, an arena space was created by arranging the sets in a circle, and the procession of the nobility through the doors, to the king and his councillors sat on a dais, marked off the sacred, royal space from the common space above stage. Crowds of people were gathered on the gantries above. However, their presence had to be inferred, as they were out of shot. Howell repeated the editorialising of the television broadcasts of the Royal Wedding by eliminating the visual presence of the crowds. Even so, they made their presence felt by throwing banners over the walls and showering Margaret with confetti as she entered, symbolically crowning her and also subverting the solemnity of the occasion.. In contrast to the emblematic regalia of the nobles (whose standard bearers

ringed the courtyard), Margaret wore a simple white dress with a leafy branch printed on it: this connected her with the more earthy and simple costumes of the crowds. The scene showed the contrast between the 'Elizabethan' (to borrow Dayan and Katz' terminology) behaviour of the crowds above stage - which was jubilantly disordered - and the 'Victorian' behaviour of the procession - which was stately and highly formal.

Like the televising of the Royal Wedding, this was a theatrical occasion which both represented the structure of society and structured it.' The ritual delineated, in visual and ceremonial terms, the order of society which it in fact constructed in the process of affirmation. Although the tone was festive rather than solemn, the *mise-en-scene* for the processional was nevertheless a display of socio-political order, marking territories, relationships and centres of power. In particular, the scene set up a formal division between the autocrats and the commoners, using the theatrical structure of audience and players to define the commoners' function in this world. The aftermath of the wedding allowed for a more critical look at the ceremony, as the nobles deconstructed and derided the meaning of the spectacle. Gloucester's initial, angry response in particular underlined the anti-historical nature of the spectacle:

Fatal this marriage, cancelling your fame,  
Blotting your names from the book of memory,  
Razing the characters of your renown,  
Defacing the monuments of conquered France,  
Undoing all, as all had never been!<sup>15</sup>

This alternative reading of the marriage spectacle rubbed against its celebratory images of national unity and suggested instead that the event was an effacement of history rather than an evocation of tradition. The historical achievements of the nobles in France have been blotted out from the 'book of memory' i.e. the history books. Hattaway glosses 'razing the characters' as 'erasing the written records', which resonates with Cade's later injunction to 'burn all the records of the realm.'<sup>16</sup> *Part Two* holds the erasure of written history as a deep thematic, and in this performance that theme reread and questioned the appropriation of

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<sup>15</sup> Quoted from Hattaway, ed., *The Second Part of King Henry VI*, The New Cambridge Shakespeare (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), Act I Scene i, l. 1.96-100.

<sup>16</sup> Hattaway, *The Second Part*, p. 185.



history by the Royal Wedding. Gloucester's lines took on a specific connotation in relation to that event, not only denying it as history, but constructing it as the agency for the destruction of history.

The rest of the performance, up to the Cade scenes at least, was concerned with unpacking this spectacle and exploring the politics behind it. In particular, the scene in which Lady Eleanor visits the witch Jourdain established some ironic contrasts with Margaret's wedding. The performance of this scene stylistically inverted the pattern of the wedding, as it placed the commoners in the centre of the stage, with the aristocrat, Eleanor, watching from above. However, in contrast to the earlier scene, Howell's direction drew attention to the theatrical strategies used by Bolingbrook, Jourdain and Hume to trick Eleanor. Jourdain was seen at a dressing table, locating her 'magic' as performance, whilst Bolingbroke was played as a Barnum-style showman, who made extravagant gestures in order to play up the showmanship of the event. Eleanor stood on a balcony which obscured from her view a special effects man, who used a variety of devices to make eerie and supernatural noises, and also used a megaphone to intone the Spirit's prophecy. The actor's played up on the humour of the scene (Bolingbroke gave the effects man an angry stare when he deviated from the script) but the scene also made a very serious point about the nature of spectacle and performance. Eleanor believed that she was an audience to a display of supernatural powers, when in fact she was being manipulated by theatrical spectacle. The whole thing was a scripted event. This theatre also centred upon a woman with ambiguous powers and this reflected back upon Margaret's role in the spectacle, as the lure with which Suffolk planned to trap Henry and obtain power. Jourdain was seen applying make-up to her face in order to make herself look repulsive, which was the opposite of the 'innocent' beauty suggested by Margaret's white dress.<sup>17</sup> Both events were performances and kinds of theatre with scripts, players, costumes and audiences. However, they were theatres which did not disclose themselves as such, but set out to deceive their audience into confusing spectacle with reality. The only

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<sup>17</sup> It is interesting to note that one of the advantages of playing the plays in full is that the connections between the major and minor female characters is brought out. Characters like the Countess of Auvergne, Eleanor and Jourdain tend to be marginalised or deleted in adaptation. However, they are crucial to locating the two major female characters, Joan and Margaret. Hands' 1977 productions were the first to really discover this, as Steven J. Phillips describes: 'Joan, the Countess and Margaret all possessed a dangerous sexuality which threatened the men they encountered ... woman [sic] became another territory that men will fight over and which may destabilise a society.' (*History in Men's Lives*, p. 197).

difference between the marriage scene and this scene was that here, Howell allowed the viewers to look behind the scenes whereas in the earlier scene, the viewer's watched from the point of view of an audience watching a live broadcast of a royal ceremony.

Susan Willis discusses this scene in some depth in *The BBC Shakespeare Plays*, where she argues that the self-conscious artifice of the scene, in which we actually see Jourdain at her make-up table and Bolingbrook setting up the special effects before Eleanor arrives, was part of Howell's celebration of performance and popular theatre.<sup>18</sup> As a scripted theatrical event, the scene contrasts with the Cade episode, where similar theatrical images were marshalled without a script to control them: on the contrary, scripts, in the form of books, were burnt in a pile in the frenzied climax to the riots. However, Willis does not see beyond the relish of the performance to the political and cultural connotations the scene had, especially in relation to the politically constructed national spectacles of the 1980s. The importance of the scene for the overall performance was that it showed a scripted manipulation of performance in order to deceive its audience - Eleanor - into thinking it is part of a 'real' event, through which it has access to history (the future in this case). Within that performance transaction there exists a form of power, a type of authority residing in the undisclosed practice of theatre. This reread the previous spectacle of the wedding, and highlighted that spectacle as a scripted, constructed one in which, again, the audience is scripted in its response, constructed by the spectacle rather than observing it or spontaneously taking part of it. Together, the two scenes worked as a critique of the Royal Wedding and similar events, particularly in the way that they coercively construct the crowds and television audiences in relation to social hierarchies and do not disclose the interests of power in the affirmation of a social order constellated around the monarchy.

The weddings' audience emerged in the various sub-plots involving the commoners, in which the playful, festive spirit that they greeted Margaret with was repeatedly oppressed by the ruling classes, until these energies finally burst in the riot scenes. The BBC company staged this as a profound rejection of structures of authority, as the people ran riot over the stage, and comically dislocated and parodied the symbols and rituals of the ruling classes. To underline the point, images from the wedding were recycled in

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<sup>18</sup> *The BBC Shakespeare Plays*, p. 176.

the various commoners scenes. The confetti which had showered down on Margaret down was a repeated image; it was next seen when Simpcox was showered with confetti by the townsmen of St. Albans. Later, the rioters also showered Cade with confetti, and this recurring image reached a muted climax when shreds of burning paper from books thrown onto a bonfire created a spontaneous confetti which blew across an empty stage.<sup>19</sup> The Simpcox episode in particular identified confetti as a cultural ritual specifically associated with the crowds, it was one of their means of cultural, political and religious expression. The showers of confetti were suggestive images: they were festive and playful, yet the disorder nature of their tumble to the ground was a spectacular subversion of the ordered and stately symbols of the nobles.

In the riot, the representational structures of the production were attacked, broken and burnt in a carnivalesque frenzy. The way in which the event was constructed was very interesting from a structural point of view, as montages of different episodes created a sense of an expansive, unrolling scenario, whilst pictures of Cade's laughing face and of pages of books burning in the fire were superimposed upon the action, as if both inhabited every aspect of the event. Towards the end of the riots, the people congregated around a bonfire and through books into it in an ecstatic ritual in which history (like the set) was literally burnt, in which the cultural script which had placed them in previous scenes was torn up and destroyed. The episode began as a disordered dance but as it reached a frenzy, and became the focus of the scene, the rioter's movements became more ritualised and controlled. In effect, they were creating a new script. Although one critic praised Shakespeare's prescient powers for conjuring up an image which is so resonant with modern history,<sup>20</sup> the episode was an addition made by Howell based upon Cade's diatribe against literacy.

Although Britain has often seen violent demonstrations, the years between 1945 and 1980 saw a remarkably low level of rioting, with no large scale rioting. This situation altered dramatically following the election of the Thatcher administration in 1979, after which there were major city riots every year up to the

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<sup>19</sup> Willis also discusses the repetition of the confetti in the Cade scenes, arguing that the act is a part of the patterning of the play - the confetti is blood red. *The BBC Shakespeare Plays*, p. 179.

<sup>20</sup> In 'The History of the Whole Contention,' Stanley Wells praises the book-burning scenes which 'have so timeless an impetus and vitality that they might belong to a modern play conceived entirely in televisual terms.'

mid-1980s.<sup>21</sup> The consciousness of these riots was unusually high due both to historical amnesia and to the large amount of media interest in the riots, particularly on television. Television coverage led some commentators to describe the riots as wars, and the sense that Britain was at war with itself was rife through the media in the months preceding the Falklands Crisis. A public, unfamiliar with its own traditions of rioting, regarded these new riots as serious, 'a modern problem, requiring diagnosis.'<sup>22</sup> They were ongoing rather than one-off events, and they were media events too, relaying a constant diet of doorstep disorder to a worried nation, in what Tumber termed a 'Coronation Street of violence' - a daily serial, a media event as well as a historical event:

The riots which took place on the streets of England during the summer of 1981 have been labelled a media event by commentators, journalists, researchers and politicians. For the majority of the population the events were observed through television. Each day people saw petrol bombs being thrown, fires raging, buildings damaged, and police and youths seriously injured. It was a crisis, and the box in the corner of the room seemed to be bringing the message that civilisation was breaking down and social order was disintegrating.<sup>23</sup>

The race riots and their representations in the media provided a whole new vocabulary for disorder. In the media, this disorder was a dramatisation of the relationship between the government and its people. This drama was the other side of the media cavalcade of the Falklands Crisis. Both media events highlighted the question of the nation, the question of the legitimacy of governmental powers and actions.

The book-burning scene's historical references to Nazi Germany and the flames which fanned Cade's maniacally laughing face suggested a demonic and offensive portrait of civil dissidence. In the light of the inner city riots which were contemporary with the performance, this struck some critics as a questionable performance of civil dissidence. For example, Michael Hattaway was disappointed that Howell did not take a more sympathetic view of the revolution. Hattaway points out that Cade was set up

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<sup>21</sup> For a good general account of the riots and reactions to them, see Howard Tumber, *Television and the Riots: A Report for the Broadcasting Research Unit of the British Film Institute* (London: BFI, 1982), and John Benyon and John Solomos, 'The Simmering Cities: Urban Unrest during the Thatcher Years' *Parliamentary Affairs* vol. 3 no. 41 (1988), pp. 402-22.

<sup>22</sup> Benyon and Solomos, 'The Simmering Cities', p. 413.

<sup>23</sup> Tumber, *Television and the Riots*, p. 43.

as a comic figure, whilst his followers were completely demonised by their actions and by the references to fascism.<sup>24</sup> This was certainly true, but the general formula of the production was to produce comic figures and then problematise them. This was true of all the characters in all three plays, so finding the absurdity and the theatricality of Cade was consistent with the general logic of the series. The decision to adopt a critical attitude towards the riots is more difficult to account for, particularly as earlier scenes had always managed to tease out the reality of the commoners' experience. For example, in *St. Albans*, Howell played against the comedy of the scene by highlighting Simpcox's wife's line, 'we did it for pure need', thereby turning the comedy into a deeper questioning of social politics. The presentation of Cade and his men was not balanced with any social points, however. In her defence, Howell points out that it was important to recognise the distinction between socialist revolutions, which erect new social structures, and fascism, which manipulates disaffection into the purest expressions of abolition:

We are trapped within our own political view and you have to get out of it, otherwise you start seeing this rebellion as a socialist rebellion. Cade does have communist lines but the very real grievances of the workers at that time are not expressed in the play. The way Trevor and I tried to do it is that Cade is a Lord of Misrule: it's like some sort of devillishness that is in all of us. I don't like anarchy, I really don't like it, and I think Shakespeare's great fear was anarchy ... I think Cade is a bit of a lunatic but the people did respond to him. They did have cause, the men of Kent, and Cade came and picked it up as it was fermenting. That still happens: look at the riots in this country now [late 1981]. The National Front is a very Cade-like thing - tending to pick up the thickest, daftest people who feel totally unwanted. Someone says "March with us and bash people" - Pakistanis or, in Cade's case, the nobility - and they do.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Hattaway, *The Second Part*, p. 57

<sup>25</sup> Fenwick, 'The Production', in *The BBC-TV Shakespeare: Henry VI Part Two*, pp. 18-29, p. 27 This is conversational and I would not take too seriously the apparent equivalency which Howell appears to make between the nobility in her production and the ethnic communities who were (and are) victimised by fascist groups. However, this throw-away comment does belie a certain amount of ignorance on Howell's part, as it seems her knowledge of modern events was largely constructed by the media. This of course is the basic point of my thesis, that Howell approaches contemporary events critically through popular, media representations. It is a shame that more research could not have yielded a deeper and more thorough reflection on these issues, and the lack of such research was, I felt, reflected in the tendency to enjoy the theatre of Cade's riot and to go over the top at the expense of some of its more troubling and dangerous aspects within the contemporary scene. Even so, Howell's attention to the structure of the play allows her to see the Cade scenes in context, which is helpful in approaching Shakespeare's own attitudes. As we shall see in the next two productions, these build-up scenes are often cut, condensed and disconnected from Cade, so that the riots seem to spring spontaneously from the inner violence and worthlessness of the rioters, which is a deeply concerning view for theatre to take and what is a very complex and far from spontaneous social problem.

Howell's fear of anarchy again registered her sense that the mood of the country was characterised by anxiety about the future, of which the resort to the stable world of the past in royal processions was only a symptom. Howell found in Cade a proto-fascist, a street fighter whose mixture of festive misrule, violence for violence sake and revolution rhymed with the rise in the late seventies of a new wave of fascism in England. Even so, this does not answer Hattaway's basic criticism, that the people themselves are shown to be 'the thickest, daftest people' and, on the face of it, the statement that 'the very real grievances of the worker at that time are not expressed in the play' does not seem very likely. What saved the production from a liberal authoritarian attitude towards the people was that it was very careful to establish the narrative of the people as a continuous sub-plot, in which the eruption of proto-fascism is the final stage of a transition from sanctioned patriotism to an ugly and anti-authoritarian nationalism.

The people were constructed as the 'thickest, daftest' people from the very beginning, when the structure of the wedding scene set them apart from history and fixed them socially. The petitioners scene was used to mark the beginning of the transformation of the crowd into a mob. The rejection of their appeals and the mocking attitude of Suffolk and Margaret dramatised a violation of the rules of social hierarchy. Also, Margaret's rejection of the people in this unrehearsed situation played badly against her previous endorsement by those same people in the ritual space of the wedding. This scene introduced Peter, who was played by ... as a clown who stumbles into the power struggle between Suffolk and York. His character was important in this performance because he represented the underclass of this world and, in his victory over his master, he sounded the first note of revolution. Bogdanov and Noble both cut this character, but Howell was sensitive to the social importance of the scene, in that it illustrated the structures of power in this society. The Peter-Horner fight was, the first 'battle' scene of the play and it revealed the hidden depths of frustration and the capacity for violence underneath the comic stereotypes of the 'thickest, daftest people.' Like the wedding and the witches scene, this was also constructed as a theatre, as soldiers made an arena out of their spears for the contestants, whilst the king and his court looked on. Horner was played as a drunk who was egged on by his followers as he taunted his servant. To begin with, this was a performance centred around the ritual humiliation of Peter for daring to make a stand against his master,

which was watched with amusement by the stage audience. However, when Horner spat beer in Peter's face, Peter's expression changed from a comic expression to an expression of violent rage. Peter beat Horner to the ground until he was dead. The violent act silenced the court - it was a radical and unsettling departure from the script. Only Peter's followers cheered him. The sudden expression of violence in response to humiliation was a shocking moment which completely subverted the viewer's expectations. What had been a comic show between a stumbling drunkard and a witless fool had turned into an unpleasant and frenzied murder. The mix between Peter's hysterical rage and his comic stereotyping was the template for the Cade scenes, which were a cultural expression of Peter's anger.

Other scenes dramatised both an increasing repression of the people by the nobles and their discovery of the liberating feeling of turning the tables on their masters. In particular, the crowds who taunted Eleanor from the upper levels during her public, the pirates who coolly murder Suffolk and the supporters of Peter after his unexpected victory showed the commoners discovering how to turn the game round, reverse positions and renege on their masters. However, the attempt to escape from the boundaries set by those in power was short-lived. The emergence of new structures and organisations of people which had started to generate during the dance about the fire was interrupted by the capture of the rioters by the Cliffords, who put them in chains. The images of their exit from the production imprisoned and beaten was a direct reversal of their original entrance as part of the wedding festivities. As they were led away, the camera panned across from them to the main part of the stage, where Henry stood alone, amidst the debris of the riot, with articles of fine clothing, cushions and jewellery scattered all around him. The riots left the set in ruins. Its walls were burnt so much that all of its colours had drained away, so that the stage world was now a desolate, blackened and scarred environment. As Balydon put it, vandals had broken into the playground.<sup>26</sup> The spectacular world of Henry's world was gone: authority had defeated the anarchists, but in the process the nature of authority had itself changed. In the following actions, the politics of spectacle was replaced with the politics of war, which was brutal in its constructions, and unconcerned with either rules or with audiences, or with heroic ideals.

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<sup>26</sup>Fenwick quotes Balydon as saying that 'vandals have come into the play-park and burned it over night. It's still a play-park but it's not a place for playing games anymore' in 'The Production', *Part Two*, p. 20.

### III

Hardy Cook observes that the royal/national festivals in the productions were explicitly constructed from martial imagery and displays and by the presence of soldiers, enforcing the representational order.<sup>27</sup> The processions which opened *Part One* and *Part Two* were both military in character, whilst *Part Three*, which parodied the previous openings, introduced its play with soldiers literally taking over the parliament. This adds another dimension to the series' engagement with these kinds of political spectacles. By stressing the use of soldiers in the ceremonial evocation of national identity, the company reminded its audience that these events look back to a past which stresses military glory: the subsequent military actions, from the squalid victories in France to the ascendancy of a militaristic order, played upon this irony. *Part One* staged a world in which war had a central but not exclusive place in their society; in *Part Two*, the soldiers were reduced to memorialising themselves in processions and ceremonies. However, in *Part Three* the soldiers' took over: the final scene saw Edward join in with his men in a militaristic, macho dance which underlined the transformation of England from a diverse culture to what was, in effect, a military dictatorship. This reading of the plays' through-narrative rubbed against the romantic evocation of the heroic ideal as the basis for English national identity in Mountbatten's funeral and the Royal Wedding: it suggested that the chivalric idea of war was a romantic idealisation of the past which has little connection with the violent realities of battle.

So far I have based my analysis on the proximity of the performance to the Royal Wedding. However, though they were taped in the latter part of 1981, the *Henry VI-Richard III* season was not actually broadcast until January 1983. The audience, then, approached the performance from a slightly altered cultural context. Nonetheless, the themes of the performance were still extremely relevant. However, the most pressing national event was not the constructed parade of the Royal Wedding, but the war in the Falklands Islands. The gap between the recording of the performance and its broadcast date had the unavoidable effect of changing the cultural context of its reception. When the company performed the

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<sup>27</sup> Hardy Cook, 'Theatrical and Televisual Manipulation', p. 237. For example, the Peter-Horner fight was stage-managed by soldiers, who created an arena of spears for the contest.



plays, the Royal Wedding was very much a topical issue, its memory and the issues that it raised still fresh in the minds of the company as they explored the nature of national celebration in a collapsing social structure. Over a year later, the images of Queen Margaret being paid homage to by a parade of soldiers and cheered by a crowd of patriots was more likely to recall the Falklands victory parade as it saluted Mrs. Thatcher. Through the Falklands Crisis and its aftermath, Mrs. Thatcher promoted herself as the heroic victor over the invaders. The Falklands citizens were not technically British citizens: nevertheless, they became so in Mrs. Thatcher's Churchillian rhetoric. The Argentineans were attacking 'our' people, the invaders had to be repelled. The Falklands Victory parade presented to the country another national spectacle: this time, however, its nature was different. The military was emphatically at the centre of this national pageant and when they saluted to Mrs. Thatcher (rather than, as they should have done, the Queen), the Prime Minister was acknowledged as the symbolic head of the nation, displacing the Royal family from its traditional position. Hugo Young described this moment as 'the pinnacle of Thatcher's self-glorification'<sup>28</sup> and it was to have a significant influence on later productions of *Henry VI*. The parade re-read the BBC's wedding scene: as well as a Royal Wedding, this scene was also the triumphal return of the English army from its squalid victories in France, and marked a rare moment of celebration of English success in the plays. For a 1983 audience, then, a different but related set of meanings was potentially invested in these images and their critique, which was no less than the ceremonial affirmation and rediscovery of the distinct values and characteristics of the English people. As the taping of *Richard III* concluded a few days after the conflict broke out, Howell was able to introduce a last minute topical image: the production concluded with a picture of the mad Queen Margaret sat on top a 'throne' of dead bodies. The image satirised Mrs. Thatcher's use of a violent conflict to fashion an heroic identity for herself and it retroactively interpreted the character of Margaret, and the relationship between war and power. The 1983 audiences had no way of knowing that the series largely predated the Falklands Crisis and its aftermath. The exploration of military power through the series rhymed with a renewed interest in England's military history - and new concerns about the changing relationship between history, politics and representation.

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<sup>28</sup> Hugo Young, *One of Us*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, (London: Pan Books, 1990; 1st edition, London: Macmillan, 1989), p. 282.

At the same time, a symbolic recovery of the past helped to lock the Falklands into Tudor history. The Falklands victory march coincided with the recovery of the *Mary* in Portsmouth harbour, which was watched by millions. According to Simon Barker, the way that the event was related in the media and the press saw the raising of the ship as a symbolical return to and restoration of the past. The warship had sunk before it could leave the harbour, but in the spirit of the early 1980s, a past imperial defeat was transformed into a modern day victory. Both the parade and the raising of the *Rose* dramatised the rediscovery of characteristic English values such as resolve, steadfastness, courage and loyalty. This worked well for Mrs. Thatcher, who constructed her whole politics upon the idea of the 'resolute approach': in these ceremonies, this new approach in politics was seen to emerge from the essential values of the English national character.<sup>29</sup> Howell's set, which was made of gash timber, coincidentally resembled the timbers of the hulk that was drawn out of Portsmouth harbour, whilst the soldiers marching through it brought together the two images into one: the Falklands victory parade staged upon the wreck of English military hopes.

This was a fortuitous image, but it reflected upon the concerns about the investment in heroic spectacle in national pageants. Jane Howell's agenda in the performance was to re-situate Shakespeare's presentation of war away from the heroic and celebratory mode of (for example) Olivier's film of *Henry V* and to tease out the ironic presentation of heroism in the *Henry VI* plays. In order to stress this, a second company was formed which was dedicated to realising the battle scenes, so we had a second level of dramatic action punctuating and eventually overriding the main historical narrative with scenes of conflict and of violence. Each battle challenged the company to find new ways of presenting violence and war, keeping the issues fresh rather than let each battle segue into the next in the minds of the audience. In fact, Howell actually described the series as a 'history of war.'

At the centre of Howell's vision was the notion that Shakespeare dramatises the collapse of a chivalric order in the plays. Through the course of the performance, the presentation of war by the second

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<sup>29</sup> Simon Barker, 'Images of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries As a History of the Present', in Francis Barker et al, eds., *Confronting the Crisis: War, Politics and Culture in the Eighties* (Colchester: University of Essex, 1984), pp. 17-19.

company became more and more graphic, and less and less heroic. The first battles were extremely theatrical and played to the humour of the scenes. Howell used the fast paced narrative of the French wars to tease out its ironic presentation of honour through its use of 'theatre gags.' For example, the French soldiers who charged confidently in Act One and then returned fleeing moments later staged a 'theatre gag' which connected the plays' 'rough' style with the popular theatres of pantomime and vaudeville. Here, the viewers were invited to laugh at history and to reduce the solemnity of national spectacles to the level of popular theatre. The use of comic imagery to portray war was a deliberately ironic comment on the fictions of war. It drew the audience in through the use of lightweight humour and subverted expectations of a patriotic parade of imperialist history.

The use of 'theatre gags' like this was a deliberate attempt to draw the viewers' attention away from the reality of the battle. However, that reality became increasingly intrusive. Apart from Joan, the best staging of this dichotomy was the Fastolfe scene (often cut in performance). Howell made full use of the character to turn a battle scene into a slapstick routine, and showed here as elsewhere that her best contribution to the performance history of the Henries was her rediscovery of the dramatic vitality of some of the most obscure scenes and characters in the sequence. In this scene, the battle surrounded the stage. Fastolfe, the reluctant soldier, entered looking for a place to eat his lunch and trying to avoid the battle. He side-stepped a duel onstage, tripped over a dead body, and stumbled into another corpse hanging off the stairs, which dropped down with perfect comic timing. Having finally found somewhere to sit down, he was pushed aside by Talbot charging after the French. Fastolfe stared into the camera wide-eyed with fear and astonishment. Although a very minor scene, Howell turns the story of the French and English fighting into the story of a man trying, and failing, to find somewhere to eat his lunch. Fastolfe comically reread the violence, recoded it and made into a slapstick routine. However, even at this early point in the production, the corpses that confound Fastolfe are realistically wounded, turning his routine into black comedy<sup>30</sup>.

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<sup>30</sup> The Countess of Auvergne was an opportunity to develop this strategy of seeing war through the forms and clichés of comedy. The Countess was cast as a tall women, wearing a tall hat, so that she looked comically absurd standing against Talbot. When the plot was sprung, Talbot was backed into a corner by Auvergne, her servant and her porter, who advanced on Talbot with their swords outstretched. Again, Auvergne was taller than her servants, and the slow step of their advance was a juvenile attempt at being threatening. Talbot broke into laughter and pushed past them, and with a snap the doors explode and his men have invaded the stage and surrounded the

However, this send-up of chivalry then changed gear with the death of Talbot. With Talbot's death, the romantic, heroic order projected into national identity in national celebrations such as the Royal Wedding was brutally shattered by a mixture of tragic absurdity (the death of young Talbot) and political cynicism (the failure of York and Somerset to help him). Howell considered Talbot's story to be the story that the production wanted to tell, of an unreconstructed man in a changing society:

What I think I'm concerned about, basically - and what I was certainly concerned about in the first play - was that the code of the people had been for a long time a belief in chivalry; in the first lay, with the death of Talbot - and the death of Joan in some ways - one starts to see the death of chivalry, which was epitomised in Henry V: the strong leader, the sun king, the god king, whatever you call him. When times change and codes vanish people don't realise it for an awfully long time, and so one still has the remnants of chivalry in many ways in Part 2 ...<sup>31</sup>

Talbot's story was not just the marker of a change in society however, it was Talbot's own realisation of the collapse of this value system:

When Talbot finally comes face to face with his own son who will not leave the battle although he knows he is going to get killed, then Talbot has to come face to face with his own values; because if the values of chivalry mean you have to sacrifice your son ... From that point on, from his death, the play slides into another, slightly more serious gear.<sup>32</sup>

Talbot was the embodiment of a stable cultural value which was both mourned and interrogated. As Dennis Bingham points out Talbot - 'the militaristic hope of England' - was not played sympathetically. Bingham thought that Peacock's Talbot was a 'ludicrous figure', 'Everything seems too big for him - his sword, his armour which pads him out like a full-back, his heavy gait, and the deep gravelly voice that the hearer would know was put on.'<sup>33</sup>

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astounded Countess in a circle, their daggers pointed at her throat. The sudden turn around was another one of Howell's theatre gags.

<sup>31</sup> Quoted by Fenwick, *Part One*, p. 23.

<sup>32</sup> Quoted by Fenwick, *Part One*, p. 31.

<sup>33</sup> Bingham, 'Jane Howell's First Tetralogy: Brechtian Break-Out or Just Good Television?', p. 224.

Talbot's death and the battle scene which led up to it were a direct contrast to all the battles and deaths prior to it. The battle began with the sandwiched scenes of York and Somerset denying Talbot the aid he so desperately needed. This impasse was realised metaphorically by a suspended shot of Talbot lunging forward surrounded by his men, but frozen in movement. In the next shot of Talbot, he and his army were shown against a black background with a light shining above them and spreading out around them; then the soldiers charged in slow motion.<sup>34</sup> The stylisation of these shots was extremely televisual, rubbing against the theatricalism of earlier battle scenes. The light which bathed the men worked as a metaphor for Talbot suddenly being the focus of history. The tight focus contrasted with the panoramic displays of previous scenes. The camera now concentrated on the soldiers and on the detail of war: there was no attempt to divert the narrative or to explore its absurdity. The battle itself was a montage of violent scenes, of soldiers being maimed and killed. Early on, young Talbot was caught by Orleans: Orleans drew his sword across the boy's face, and this drew the first real blood of the production. It was an important moment, signalling the shift into a darker register. Through the montage, Talbot was seen calling for his son: his cries were a deliberate inversion of the earlier battle cries of 'A Talbot' - now the same cry was signifying desperation and defeat. As Howell said in the above quote, the importance was not so much Talbot's own death but the death of his son. The performance turned on this scene: here, the codes of Talbot's heroic order were finally exhausted and the performance turned to a more psychological portrayal of war.

Trevor Peacock played both Talbot and Jack Cade in the following play. The patterning was extremely astute: both characters have their key scenes in the fourth act, and both represent an important shift in the historical reality of the playworld. The doubling had some interesting effects: Jack Cade re-read Talbot, so that Cade's parody of an English hero is a parody of Talbot and his values. Cade mimicked the rhetoric and the violence of Talbot, but this time the audience saw it from another point of view, one which

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<sup>34</sup> Compare Roland Barthes description of a wrestling match: 'wrestling is an open-air spectacle, for what makes the circus or the arena what they are is not the sky ... it is the drenching and vertical quality of the flood of light. Even hidden in the most squalid Parisian halls, wrestling partakes of the nature of the great solar spectacles, Greek drama and bull-fights: in both, a light without shadow generates an emotion without reserve.' This quote is from *Mythologies*, trans. by Annette Lavers (London: Jonathan Cape, 1972), p.15.

emphasised its absurdity and its violence. The romantic idea of the hero was transposed with an anti-romantic idea of the hero and of heroic action. The subversion of this trope, within the post-Falklands context, brought together national festivals, civil violence and the Falklands victory parade together, suggesting common processes underlying each event and its ideological investment in ideas of heroic violence against ideas of unheroic violence.

The battles which followed the Cade riots signalled the absolute death of heroism in war. The fight between Clifford and York at St. Albans, which worked as the dramatic climax of *Part Two*, in particular dramatised the final eclipse of a romantic idea of heroism. Unlike previous skirmishes, this was staged as a long, drawn out battle. The battle of St. Albans itself was staged as a series of duels ranging across the set, so that the fighting was a metaphor for division in the nation: the nation was, literally and figuratively, fighting itself. This set up the basic structure for York and Clifford's fight, which was presented as an epic one, catching in its sweep the brutal division in the nation between extremities of order and disorder, and between two different versions of nation and history. Howell used fast edits and slow motion intermittently in order to give the impression of a long battle, underscoring the weariness and the effort of the conflict. As they struggled, they damaged the set repeatedly so that viewers were given a plain metaphor of the effects of the struggle over the nation: the erosion of all the colour and even the structure which defined and delimited its identity. Ominous drums beat during their fight, scoring it and suggesting a ritual dimension to the conflict: in the slow motion shots, the drums were also slowed, skewing the viewers' sense of the fight's reality and introducing a discordant pitch to the familiar heroic struggle: 'we see a turn, a grimace, a violent slash, or an exchange of blows that seems much more powerful at this slower speed. The drum beat also slows, sounding more like a heart beat or a death knell.'<sup>35</sup> At one point, the fight became a fist-fight, underlying the physical and brutal nature of the contest: 'What we now see are montages of the false glory of battle (represented by trumpets and drums), followed by the very graphic examples of hand-to-hand combat which are quite free from any glory.'<sup>36</sup> Each time one of the combatants was wounded, a distressing

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<sup>35</sup> *The BBC Shakespeare Plays*, p.178.

<sup>36</sup> Michael Manheim, 'The Shakespeare Plays on TV', *Shakespeare on Film Newsletter*, 8:2 Apr. 1984, pp. 294-5, p. 295.

cymbal sounded, which linked the fight to earlier moments in the performance. Bolingbroke had used cymbals as part of the demonic atmosphere of his theatre and the effect was used once again in the fight between Peter and his master. When the camera returned to the battle itself, the representation of violence was more extreme, and called to mind the anarchy of the previous act. One soldier's throat was cut, other soldiers were stabbed in the back, cornered and butchered and the final soldier was stabbed in the back over a canon. This recalled an earlier episode, in *Part One*, when Salisbury had died a heroic death when he was killed by a canon shot. The canons of *Part One* became now silent and still props for the brutal execution of combatants. There was no honour in their deaths: both the heroic ideal and the glory of war were evacuated by the frankness of the staging. At this point, Henry entered and stood transfixed by the body by the canon. As he was dragged away by Clifford and Margaret, the camera passed over them to a shot of the body in close-up. The final shots of the performance also focused upon this body. The York party were celebrating their victory but, as they left, a limping Salisbury turned back and surveyed the bodies on the battlefield. The camera panned across the bodies and closed on a shot of a naked body, with its arms stretched back in a crucifixion pose, blood running across his arms and chest. These closing shots looked back to the wedding with which the performance had begun: its representation of order and unity had become now disorder and disunity. The elements of that wedding were now ironically materialised in dead bodies: the living, creative body of Margaret, which had been at the centre of the opening, was exchanged for dead bodies, the confetti which rained down on her became the blood across the dead soldier's chest.

*Part Three* (which Howell considered to be her major achievement) dramatised a martial world which was entirely devoid of the pageantry of chivalric heroism: it worked both as an uncovering of the naked truth of the kind of imperial war images which were marshalled in the royal spectacles of the 1980s and as an intervention in the heroic presentation of war during the Falklands. Howell and her company used a mixture of theatrical and televisual devices in order to find a way of representing war and violence in history which was true to the reality of the experience. *Part Three* was innovative in the ways it could bend television to staging battle scenes, using mirrors, special camera effects and imaginative groupings to not only show battle but also to show distinctive differences between the battles and to register changes in the psychology of war. Wakefield and Towton both used mirrors as a special effect which had practical,

stylistic and metaphoric functions, in that Howell was bending television to stage in a studio a battle whose size it could only encompass within stylised forms of representation. The Battle of Wakefield was represented by shots of drummers and canons in a neutral black space which were alternated with symmetrical shots of the other side. The exact doubling of the two armies (they were even the same actors) dramatised civil war as a war against the self: the use of mirrors emphasised the psychological aspects of war. This stylistic use of television rubbed against conventional media representations of war, which shows controlled segments of battle as if they represented the real thing.<sup>37</sup> In Wakefield, again against traditions of war reporting, the camera passed over shots of legs and bodies fighting, whilst the soundtrack was full of drummers beating the same beat, soldiers making the same cries. The lack of detail and the avoidance of showing soldiers' faces allowed us to see the mess of the battle as its defining feature: war was no longer the easy clash of opposites that it was in *Part One*, but a messy, bloody and impersonal affair. Wakefield's conclusion was also staged figuratively. A soldier emerged from the melee waving a white flag, which was taken from him by another soldier who threw it to the ground. The camera panned across it as it was trampled on by the feet of the victors; then the shot dissolved to one of a red flag billowing in the wind, signifying the Lancastrian victory. It was a brutal image of seizure which undercut any sense of honour in the victory.

The self-reflexivity of these mirror images was suggestive of the self-reflexivity of televisual history. The use of mirrors was even more explicit for the battle of Towton, in which infinitely receding reflections of one soldier represented an entire army: streaking back diagonally leftwards for one side, rightwards for the other, again against a background of black space. An added sense of unreality was created by a shot of soldiers marching through their own images. The individual episodes of the battle stressed the abuse of the environment. Richard's fight with Clarence was a sequence of one throwing the other against the set, cutting into its already eroded frame. In addition, Howell staged a sequence of killings

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<sup>37</sup> Because, as one study observed, if the media were to ever show a true representation of war, a liberal democracy would never be able to go to war again: "There are some who seriously doubt whether a democracy could conduct even a "just" war, if the public were receiving full colour television coverage, because war is so bloody and causes such obvious and immediate suffering ... For television news to bring real violence on that scale into the home could be too disturbing for most people to accept." Patrick Barwise and Andrew Ehrenberg, *Television and its Audience* (London: Sage Publications, 1988) p. 142.



which were characteristic of her approach to battle, showing not just the vistas but the close-up reality of battle, of Warwick cutting a man's throat from behind and similar acts, which undercut any sense of heroism in battle. The last shot of the battle was of a man pushing his way through the army on his knees, making a path through the melee of legs which echoed Joan's trial scene, and screaming madly, not apparently wounded but collapsing inside, unable to cope with the battle or to distinguish sides. The shot of his scream was superimposed with Henry's horrified face, as if the two faces were images of each other.

The final battle, Tewkesbury, borrowed from the 1963 Hall-Barton productions the dramatic image of a snow-storm. The storm impressed Michael Manheim, who praised the 'marvellous, balletic montages of bloody winter battle which perhaps better than anything else in these productions suggest the cold absurdity of men killing each other for vaguely conceived ambition and senseless revenge.'<sup>38</sup> The overlaying of snow on the battle turned the screen into white noise, the zero degree of television, its pure uncoded state. For Howell, Tewkesbury was the major battle of the sequence, which brought to a close the long development of battle scenes from games played on hobby-horses to this virtual apocalypse. 'It's like a History of War,' she told Michele Willems, 'I suppose the snow was an image of what the last battle would be.'<sup>39</sup> She wanted to impress the audience with '... the weight and weariness of it all. That's why we used it in the snow scene for the last battle. The world came to an end there.'<sup>40</sup> Howell describes this battle as 'stupid': 'Even the actors doing it came back and said "it's mad." It was insane.'<sup>41</sup>

The battle used elemental images, such as a snowstorm and the sound of a howling wind, to show the battle as pointless and wasteful in a world which was literally disappearing from history. The snow covered the playground set completely, obscuring its structures and situating the combatants instead in a world which had been emptied of any being beyond violence. The snow and the wind (whose noise increasingly dominated the soundtrack) were reminiscent of television 'snow' - that is, the condition of television when it has no message and no signal to broadcast. One soldier, fatally wounded, staggered into

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<sup>38</sup> Wells, 'The Shakespeare Plays on TV', p. 295.

<sup>39</sup> Willems, 'Entretien avec Jane Howell', p.86.

<sup>40</sup> 'Entretien avec Jane Howell', p.85.

<sup>41</sup> 'Entretien avec Jane Howell', p.81. In 'Brechtian Break-Out or Just Good Television?' Bingham describes the use of blood in the production as 'the tetralogy's controlling motif' (p. 227).

the frame, his mouth gaping. He was pushed to the ground, where his blood mixed with the snow. The screen then dissolved to a shot of bodies all over the stage, with other soldiers picking over them; then there was another dissolve: now we could see no bodies, the stage and the screen were totally obscured by white snow, whilst the music gave way totally to the howling winds. The camera paused here, before settling on the snow-covered stage setting for Prince Edward's death. The snow laying against the blackened frames of the set was a stark and simple image of black and white which was reflected in the simple black costumes of the main characters and in the reductive morality of this world.

Howell used the unegotiability of the two sides to build up tragic intensity so that, as the atmosphere and the decor became more modern, the actions of the characters became correspondingly more grandiloquent, more theatrical. It was as if the poverty of the theatre game they now played was compensated for by an internalisation of performance, as if each character was their own theatre, their own play. This would be consistent with Howell's general strategy of using theatre as a metaphor for value systems. Matching the rhythms of chronicle structure to television, Howell presented a series of televisual 'arias' in between scenes of confrontation and battle. Each episode was complete in itself, and flowed into a segmented sequence of such episodes. These acted as a counterpoint to the main narrative of battles, making a powerful contrast with the extreme exteriority of the wars, and thereby raising the intensity of the production. Most of these scenes were death scenes: York at Tewkesbury, Clifford at Towton, Warwick at Barnet, whilst addresses to the camera by Margaret, Henry and Richard also contributed to the raised pitch of the production. Each one related the intensity of experience and the isolation of life and death in the world that they had created, building up Howell's personal sense of the poverty of a society determined by extremes.

The presentation of battle scenes and the contrast with national spectacles in the performance of these plays brought together a powerful analysis of early 1980s national culture and its investment in televisual representations of itself. The ancient chronicle form was rediscovered in the modern structure of television, and its event-orientated approach to history was contrasted with an abstract idea of history as a structure or an environment which is eroded and blackened by division, to the blackness of Richard's fascist regime. The productions performed the plays as the dramatisation of transition, in which the

threshold or margins of corporate identity were repeatedly tested, until the cultural world was reduced to two extremes, Henry and Richard. This dialectical historical process contrasted with the static, structuring images of society suggested by national media events, and suggested that the apparently innocent celebration of national culture in the Royal Wedding was in fact a hegemonic practice designed to occlude historical process and, as Dayan and Katz remind us, draw attention away from the real problems in society and the real dangers it was facing. By relocating the plays to an ambiguously fictional fifteenth century world, and highlighting the artificiality of its construction, Howell and her company recovered a tetralogy which was profoundly modern, and extremely aware of the interrelationships and processes of power, theatre and history.

**1987-9 - The ESC's *Henry VI: House of Lancaster* and *Henry VI: House of York* (dir. Michael Bogdanov)**

The ESC's *Henry VI: House of Lancaster* and *Henry VI: House of York*<sup>42</sup> were self-consciously constructed as performances of England in the 1980s which explored the political, social and cultural consequences of Thatcherism.<sup>43</sup> Pennington pointed out that the history plays 'anatomise the nation with a quite extraordinary variety and richness, reflecting both its schisms (uncannily like those of the 1980s) and its glories.' (*The English Shakespeare Company*, p. 5). In their book about the ESC's history plays, Bogdanov and Pennington proudly quote an Australian review which they clearly felt made a definitive statement about the company's approach: 'This is no updated staging of a series of antique texts, but a

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<sup>42</sup> For convenience I will refer to them by their subtitles i.e. *House of Lancaster* and *House of York*.

<sup>43</sup> My principle source for these performances has been the videos which were published in 1994 of *The Wars of the Roses* cycle. They were shot in Swansea, 1989, at the close of the tour: however, rather than representing the climax of the production's performances, the video shows a cast that is exhausted and their performance suffers from this. Bogdanov tried to make the performance into a film, using multiple camera shots to give different perspectives. However, as they were recorded live, and Bogdanov is clearly an inept film director, this had unfortunate effects: for example, close-up shots of a character's face obscured important action out of shot. Some scenes had to be dropped entirely for this reason - the important scene with Mortimer, for example, ended up on the cutting room floor. This is embarrassingly obvious on the tape, as the music suddenly switches jarringly from one scene to the next. Consequently, I have regarded these tapes as a starting point for my study and I have supplemented them with critical studies and reviews, which are cited where appropriate. Another problem with these touring productions is that they changed a lot over two years and different countries and different theatres would have inevitably changed them also. Documenting all of the variations would be both tedious and probably impossible to do within the scope of this kind of study. Unfortunately, this means that my discussions of the performance tend towards generalisations.

reaching into the past in search of images of the present ... The great struggle between the forces of national unity and cultural autonomy that has characterised English history continues still ....' (pp. 180-1). The conflicts that the plays describe, then, could be directly located in the conflicts of the present day. In particular, the tension between 'national identity' and 'cultural autonomy' which the Australian reviewer identifies were central to the ESC directors' readings of the plays. As we have seen, the ESC rejected the centralising tendencies of 'national identity' (which, in their view, tends to efface regional identity) and privileged the recognition of ethnic and regional difference in national culture. The ESC's main agenda was to redefine the whole idea of the 'national theatre' to take into account and reflect the cultural autonomy of the varied regions of the country. The ESC's first season in 1986, which performed the *Henriad* as a cycle, had been specifically directed at 1980s culture. In that season's production of *Henry V*, Agincourt was constructed as the political manipulation of a genuine patriotic impulse, in which the desire to serve one's country was cruelly exploited by a centralising, national power. The 'cultural autonomy' of the Boar's Head crowd was stripped away by the Falklands-style uniforms that they were made to wear, whilst the variety of their cultural self-expression was deadened by the incitement to 'Fuck the frogs' - the slogan which the soldiers chanted as they went off to France. The motto invoked the language and level of cultural expression of tabloid newspapers such as *The Sun*, which flourished in Mrs. Thatcher's Britain, and satirically pointed to the 'Bash the Argies' mentality that that section of the press promoted during the Falklands Crisis.<sup>44</sup> This performance was, then, clearly meant to be a satire of the Falklands Crisis couched in the unfamiliar presentation of a familiar, patriotic text. The ESC's directors recognised that the experience of the Falklands, particularly in the light of the political manipulation of its aftermath, changed the context for the range of connotations that Agincourt would have for a modern audience: 'We were now the wrong side of the Falklands conflict, so Henry's self-justifying foreign invasion, drowning discontent at home in patriotic clamour, looked uneasily different.' (p. 6). The three plays which followed in 1987 were darker in tone, and staged the full, apocalyptic consequences of Henry V's form of authority upon English

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<sup>44</sup> Isobel Armstrong described this as a 'jubilantly challenging "contestable reading"' which was in 'splendid reminiscence of the Falklands war, to suggest that foreign wars distract attention from trouble at home. Union Jacks were waved by thugs. Black leather and Mohican haircuts suggested the National Front' in 'Thatcher's Shakespeare?' pp. 9-10.

culture. Whereas the *Henriad* appeared to reserve some hope of a different kind of cultural expression for a new form of cultural belonging, the civil war plays painted a distressing portrait of the death of culture, and used *Richard III* to imagine a tyrannical future. Bogdanov described this as a history of warfare: 'From where territorial aggression starts with a one-to-one combat for the ruling of a country, to where it is currently at, with the media recording events as they occur in Eastern Europe.' (p. 103).

As this quote implies, the full cycle expanded upon the localised, satirical points being directed at Mrs. Thatcher and placed the conflicts, tensions and myths of power in the 1980s in an epic context. Rather than simply creating its own version of history, the plays in the sequence now recycled imagery drawn from specific periods, whilst still remaining true to the eclectic spirit of the original productions. The *Henry VI* plays were roughly placed in the two World Wars; the war in France used a First World War vocabulary as a way of articulating a reading of the scenes which focused upon the death of a heroic but corrupt order. The First World War provided a richer vocabulary of images for the death of a heroic order and the birth of a metallic, inhuman one than the Falklands; this relocation of imperial war in history simultaneously deepened the critique of Mrs. Thatcher's project and elevated that critique to an epic level. The First World War was also used as a way to interrogate Mrs. Thatcher's rhetoric in the BBC's *The Monocled Mutineer* in 1986 and the controversy surrounding this series may have influenced the ESC.<sup>45</sup> The series was influential in that it took an apparently familiar moment in British military history (The First World War) and exposed its hidden conflicts between the aristocracy and the working class: in doing so, the expression of national remembrance in the annual memorialising of the war was called into question. Another influential aspect of the series was that its portrayal of a distant and inhumane aristocracy tore in to the nostalgic desire for the certainties of the Victorian era which underpinned Mrs. Thatcher's Churchillian rhetoric. The ESC's *House of Lancaster*, which was staged a year after the controversy, recycled images, situations and costumes culled from the First World War to make very similar points. Talbot was a bluff Victorian soldier, but he was let down by the indifference of the aristocracy. The great

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<sup>45</sup> Alan Bleasdale, *The Monocled Mutineer* (London: Hutchinson, 1986). The power of this series was that it highlighted the mundanity of violence and adopted a cynical pose towards glory and heroism - it avoided the American emphasis on the 'horrors of war' e.g. execution scene. The series was also notable for its vivid reminders of the poverty experienced by the working classes after the war.

symbol of the Victorian British empire, the union jack which was proudly displayed in the first scene, became the stretcher that carried the body of Talbot's son.

The series caused a huge controversy about the 'responsibility' of historical drama to historical accuracy which ended up as a row between the government and the BBC.<sup>46</sup> The fictional presentation of historical events on television was a contentious issue, particularly at this time. Lord Carrington, remarking on the *Death of a Princess* scandal in 1980, called 'the new formula of mixing fact with fiction ... dangerous and misleading.'<sup>47</sup> However, as Bleasdale pointed out in his defence, Shakespeare was also creative in his approach to history. In fact, Paul Kerr suggests that the modern genre of the drama documentary may be traced back to Shakespeare's history plays.<sup>48</sup> The ESC highlighted this in their productions: not only was the lack of consistent periodisation a subversion of established ways of playing the Shakespearean history, it was also a way of pointing to the inherent fictionality of Shakespeare's version of English history. In the programme to *Wars of the Roses*, Pennington wrote 'Shakespeare's way with history was rather casual, to say the least. By compressing it, imagining it and twisting it around, he insisted on his right as a teller of stories to make an alternative version of events that would still be true to the spirit of the past.' The ESC approached history as a heterogeneous source of narratives and cultural images, in which the conventional structures of history were ignored. To Bogdanov, the conventional approach to Shakespeare's history plays was redundant and discredited, because it served political orthodoxies rather than using history as a way of challenging the status quo. The manner of this staging

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<sup>46</sup> The debate allowed Thatcher to exercise revenge for what she considered to be the BBC's unpatriotic coverage of the Falklands Crisis. Following *The Monocled Mutineer* and Charles Wood's frank play about the Falklands, *Tumbledown*, the BBC came under increasing pressure from government to avoid political controversy. The First World War was also the setting for the comedy series *Blackadder Goes Forth* in 1989, which also played against the heroic idealisation of the Victorian era.

<sup>47</sup> Quoted by Paul Kerr, in 'F for Fake? Friction over Faction' in *Understanding Television*, edited by Goodwin and Whannel (London and New York: Routledge, 1990) pp. 74-87, p. 75. The whole drama documentary debate was peculiar to the 1980s, partly because the BBC has been under increasing pressure to moderate its tone. Productions such as *The Monocled Mutineer* and *Tumbledown* challenged television to define itself and its responsibility to the truth. Those who made the fiercest criticisms, in the tabloids and in parliament, did not make the same points about Shakespearean theatre. Nevertheless, both this production and *The Plantagenets* responded to this climate of Puritanism in historical representation, as the debate effectively called into question the relationship between drama, history and society. For further reading on this issue, see also A. Goodwin, P. Kerr and I. Macdonald, eds, *Drama-Documentary*, BFI Dossier no. 19 (London: British Film Institute, 1983).

<sup>48</sup> Kerr, 'F for Fake?', p. 77.

was both a playful subversion of these conventions and an attempt to recover a different kind of history and a different kind of Shakespeare from the works, which would be available for appropriation by a specifically English cultural expression, in which the identity of the subject/audience defined meaning, rather than an abstract idea of historical truth which, this approach argues, is in fact an ideologically constructed truth. In the final event, Bogdanov's radicalism may have been no more than a gesture against the received orthodoxies about playing Shakespeare. In his television series *Shakespeare Lives!* (Channel 4/Quintet Films, 1983) Bogdanov argued that to straitjacket Shakespeare as an Elizabethan playwright was to make him irrelevant to modern society: a truly contemporary performance of Shakespeare must not only make him 'relevant' to topical issues, the whole performance should be modernised. The ESC's *Henriad* was notable for the way that it used vivid and recognisable images to convey the narrative. The use of Falklands imagery in *Henry V* not only worked as a subversive commentary on that event, it also provided the audience with a cultural vocabulary which they were immediately familiar with, through which to understand the archaic interest in Agincourt.

The marshalling of a contemporary vocabulary rewrote the traditional representations of power and its operations in Shakespeare's history plays. The production diverted from traditional representations of medieval power by playing down symbols such as the throne and the crown, which appeared infrequently and unexpectedly through the course of the evening. Instead, flags and military dress were the fundamental expressions of power in this political order. In *House of Lancaster*, Henry wore military dress to signify his status in the court, whilst the other nobles varied between morning coats and battle fatigues. Flags were used emblematically in *House of Lancaster*, first of all to denote division between nations and then to signify the division between different factions at court. In *House of York*, flags were used subversively by the rebels: Cade, for example, wore a union jack T-shirt and the entire Cade episode drew upon the patriotic spirit of the early 1980s, but in a way that parodied the violence latent in it. In the last chapter, I briefly discussed the use of national flags in the opening scene of *House of Lancaster*, in which a visual debate was established between two flags, the one the flag of a nation, the other the flag of an empire. This is also a relevant point in this discussion: the imperial union jack spoke of Henry V's contribution to the political order but it was also wrapped about a dead body so that, like the George Cross, there was an

ironic juxtaposition between the rhetoric of the flags and the reality which they claimed to represent. The two flags foreshadowed the main themes of *House of Lancaster* and *House of York*, which were the collapse of empire and the progressive collapse of the nation in the wake of this catastrophe. The centralised political order inaugurated by Henry V, which Bogdanov explicitly associated with Thatcherism, was shown not only to be thoroughly impotent and doomed to fall apart, but to have devastating consequences for the nation. The display of the union jack on Henry's coffin made the funeral ceremonies not only a funeral for a man but a funeral for empire, a point which the text supports by turning the scene into a dramatic representation of division rooted in the disasters in France. This played into the director's hands, who was able to contrast the flags' expressions of unity and power with the noble's fierce bickering and their apparent inability to control events. This made the point that an exercise of power which is rooted in imperial aggression, nationalist rhetoric and undisclosed agendas - of the kind which Bogdanov identified in his polemical critique of the 1980s British Government - is actually (paradoxically) dangerously impotent.

This paradox, that imperial, authoritarian power is impotent, was central to the production's reading of the play. The performance made analogies between characters' own sexual inadequacies and the wider inadequacies of the value-system which they supported. Characters such as Henry and Talbot - who were played as the living embodiment of imperial power - were shown to be essentially rootless and lacking in real power, whilst other characters who sought not only to express power but to wield it - including Suffolk, Gloucester and at times Talbot - were represented by figurative images of castration which revisited their impotency and the nature of the power they sought from a different perspective. Against this critique of imperial nationalism, the French were shown as a people struggling between the imperial system that had been forced upon them and the returning spirit of cultural belonging which was represented by Joan and Burgundy. In these ways, impotency was presented to audiences as endemic to the centralised power structures of imperialism, whilst true power - in both the sexual and the cultural sense - was rooted in ethnicity and cultural belonging.

The idea that power can actually be impotent has been a characteristic preoccupation of post-structuralism, particularly in the theories of power and desire outlined by philosophers Michel Foucault and



Gilles Deleuze in the 1970s. This would place Bogdanov in an intellectual context which he would not always be able to live up to, but in a certain way the dominant paradigm of post-modernism had an inevitable shaping influence upon Bogdanov's ideas. The moment of post-structuralist thought finds its definition in the attempt to converge the two dominant but contradictory schools of structuralist thought, Freudian psychoanalysis and Marxist political theory. Hence the description of politics in terms of psycho-physical processes, it seems to me, has its roots in the conceptual language pioneered by post-structuralism. The 'impotency of power' converges ideas of political power and sexual power in order to open out the continuities between psyche and history. This metaphor was concretised in the production by recurrent images of sexual inadequacy in characters such as Henry and Talbot who were supposed to be the personifications of power, by the representation Henry V's and Suffolk's deaths as figurative castrations, and by the representation of one battle by a suggested rape. All of these aspects of the production were meant to construct a discourse on power which related the collapse of empire with the internal inadequacies of those in power. Michel Foucault, Felix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze have argued that power is often frustrated by its inability to control the complex processes of social, historical and psychological fields and only has power to regulate and define in its own image the multiplicity of flows of social existence:

Far from being opposites, power and impotence complement and reinforce each other in a kind of fascinating satisfaction that is found above all in the most mediocre Statesmen, and defines their 'glory.' For they extract glory from their short-sightedness, and power from their impotence, because it confirms there is no choice.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> This quote is from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. By Brian Massumi (London: The Athlone Press, 1988), p. 225. For further details about Foucault's ideas about 'naked power' see in particular his study of the operation of power in the penal system, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Allen Lane, 1977). A useful summary of both philosophers' exploration of power can be found in a published discussion between them in 'Intellectuals and Power', trans. By Donald Bouchard, in Michel Foucault's *Language, Counter-memory, Practice*, edited by Bouchard (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1977), pp. 205-17. The association of desire and politics in post-structuralist theory is usefully put into its context of developments in French thought by Iain Hamilton Grant in his introduction to Jean-François Lyotard's *Libidinal Economy*, trans. by Grant (London: The Athlone Press, 1993), pp. xvii-xxix.

Bogdanov shares with this theory the theme of glory as a pale definition of power which both obscures and exposes its true impotency. Talbot was presented as the very spirit of British glory; he wore an absurd amount of medals on his chest, sending up his 'death and glory' mentality, whilst the adaptation highlighted Joan's 'glory is like a circle in the water' speech in her first scene (in which much of Joan's part was cut). Consequently, Talbot's status as the stereotypical English hero was held against Joan's deeper sense that glory is a transitory and insubstantial property which exerts no power in itself: Talbot's medals did not save him from being killed on the battlefield. Joan, in contrast, wore no medals. These ideas linked back to Bogdanov's criticism of the Falklands Campaign, which he described as a needless war designed to prop up an unrepresentative government. In the epic framework of the *Henry VI* plays, the critique extended to England in the 1980s and tested its investment in heroic figures like Mrs. Thatcher.

At the centre of the ESC's *Henry VI*s interest in the nature of power was the inevitable figure of Mrs. Thatcher who (as should already have been made clear in Bogdanov's diatribe against the 1980s) figured largely in the mindset of the production as the personification of power and ambition in the 1980s. This in some ways makes Bogdanov's approach problematic, especially for those academics such as Barbara Hodgdon and Lois Potter who claim that the performances are feminist. In satirising Mrs. Thatcher's hegemony over national identity, Bogdanov referred to 'Boadecia-Bolingbroke-Brittania': in this triumvirate, the male Bolingbroke (in the plays, Henry VI's grandfather and the source of his legitimacy) is caught between two feminine archetypes of imperial national identity. What is difficult about this criticism is that it fixes Bogdanov's objections to Thatcherism in a gendered critique: all of the national figures with which the director constructs the intellectual idea of Henry IV are women. By effeminizing the persona of Britain - that is, associating Henry V with Boadecia-Thatcher-Britannia - Bogdanov suggested a metaphoric emasculation of his authority figures: the male posturing of Britannia disclosed the endemic impotency of formalised power. By gendering these images of impotency, Bogdanov appeared to be undermining Mrs. Thatcher's ability through reference to her gender.

In the ESC's *Henry VI*, the ironic impotency of power was personified by the king, who was played as an emasculated Henry V. Elizabeth Brandow noted that, in comparison to the RSC production of

the following year, there was very little focus on the king as a central or defining character.<sup>50</sup> In groupings and even in ceremonial scenes, Henry was ignored by his own nobles, which underlined his basic lack of power and authority. Henry's first scene onstage was dominated by Gloucester and Winchester's furious arguments. Henry was sat at the head of a desk which was placed perpendicular to a large George Cross. This rhymed with the position of the coffin in the opening scene and, like the coffin, this arrangement gave a phallic thrust to the main symbol of power. However, Henry was not elevated in such a way that he could always be kept in view (as he would have been if he was on a throne) so he was effectively pushed to the back of the stage; this made Henry remote from the audience and prevented him from intervening in the fights that ranged across the forestage and even, frequently, across the desk itself. Again, the ghost of the coffin allowed this image of power to be read as a phallus enclosing a redundant form, an emasculation of phallic power. In this scene and its sequels, Henry was rarely addressed in person: the other characters' were shown as isolating Henry from the reality of politics by presenting him with a ceremonial illusion of power. This illusion deferred power to its managers, and Bogdanov made this point again and again through the production: for example, the peace made between Winchester and Gloucester was a forgery, but Henry was left convinced of his personal success. The court promptly flattered Henry as a great peace-maker, even though their wry expressions to each other told a different story. The performance stressed how stage-managed Henry's whole life was: often, the general response of the court would be directed by Gloucester (and later Suffolk), who acted as a kind of stage-manager. He prompted the court to laugh and clap knowingly at Henry's feeble jokes, applaud his naïve wisdom and pay reverence to his limited stock of personal presence. In the coronation scene, the nobles filed on from two entrances in pomp and circumstance with tremendous gravitas, whilst Henry appeared from behind a fleur-de-lis flag looking sheepish, as if he had turned up late, and scurried onto the throne with no sense of ceremony. The nobles, led by Gloucester, nevertheless bowed as if he had made an auspicious and commanding entrance. The artifice of Henry's power had a double function. It indicated that behind public displays of power, there was a reality which was often very different, that the representation of power in imperial terms was a

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<sup>50</sup> Brandow, 'History, Royal or English', p. 19.

manufactured and fake one. Secondly, it showed that the real power in this system lay with the managers and manipulators of illusion rather than its subject. This illusion was not straightforwardly cynical: it was a con, a dupe on Henry, who thoroughly believed in his own power and internalised the fake values of this illusory power. Henry's play in *House of Lancaster* was the story of his gradual and terrible realisation of his lack of power; the closing image of the performance showed Henry sitting anguished and alone on a throne that was far too big for him.

In the next play, Henry was played as a character who reflected upon his experience of power and philosophised about its implications. *House of York* presented an exemplary reading of Henry's molchill scene, in which his pastoral fantasies were contrasted with the vivid experience of two soldiers on the edge of the battlefield, one of whom discovers that he has killed his father, the other his son. Sir Barry Jackson rediscovered this long-neglected scene's powerful theatricality in the 1950s Birmingham Rep productions, and since then this scene has been a consistent highlight of *Henry VI*'s post-war performances.<sup>51</sup> Bogdanov and Brennan brought out a different dimension to the scene by stressing Henry's failures rather than his moral insight. They avoided presenting Henry as a religious, spiritual figure in the previous play: in fact, at this point in the production, Henry wore a military uniform and coat. The scene was set with a white sheet spread across the stage upon which a soft, green light was shone, creating the impression that the stage was in some way spiritual, unusual and pastoral - an ironic evocation, perhaps, of the pastoral idea of England which the civil war ranged across. Henry walked onto this stage with heavy, weary footsteps and stood, looking out into the audience as he commentated upon the battle, as if the elemental divisions of the war could also be applied to the audience. Henry then sat down and began to disappear into his shepherd fantasy. Brennan presented this in a critical fashion, dropping the morbid war-weary expressions for the naïve wonder of his performance in *House of Lancaster*, so that his fantasy of isolation was not endorsed but criticised as the desire to abrogate responsibility. As the speech reached a climax, Brennan closed his eyes and imagined the security of such a lifestyle, and his voice rose with passion. However, he was also

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<sup>51</sup> See Sir Barry Jackson's 'On Producing *Henry VI*' in which he discusses how he nearly cut the scene entirely. However, in performance, the scene had a powerful resonance especially, it seemed to Jackson, in the light of the Second World War: 'we know that family cleavages of such a tragic nature occurred in Germany during our own lifetime.' (p. 51).

closing his eyes to the battle he had been watching, both literally and metaphorically, and Bogdanov chose to subvert this idyll with the soldiers interrupting Henry's reverie. Bogdanov was sensitive to the rupture between the first part of the scene, Henry's soliloquy, and its sequel, so that the sight of the soldiers' rebutted Henry's daydreaming and revealed his irresponsibility into failing to confront the realities of his reign. The soldiers were both former rebels now fighting in the wars. Both were presented in a critical way, emphasising their mercenary interest in their victim. This had the effect that not only were the soldiers' emblematically representing the suicide of civil war, but they were also coming face to face, for the first time, with the reality of their behaviour on the battlefield. The second soldier kicked the body of his victim, so that it rolled over to reveal its truths to him. The pathos of this action devastated Henry, who struggled to speak and looked upwards pleadingly. When the soldiers left the stage, Henry was left sagging in the centre, a broken man. The staging of this scene was remarkable for not being overly formal in its presentation and allowing both the pathos and the emblems to breath. There was a collapsing structure, not a perfect pyramid but one which was twisted and perverted, and which criticised Henry. We saw Henry move from the non-involved detachment of his war commentary, in which the movement of battle was described in terms of elemental, non-human, and uncontrollable natural forces such as the wind and the sea, to his naïve fantasies about being one with nature, to a shocking and painful confrontation with the unnaturalness of the war and the emptiness of his metaphors of war. By the end of *House of York*, Henry wore only a white sheet. He presented an image of purity which contrasted with the robes and uniforms he had previously worn: this unadorned figure, who now had no power, seemed suddenly to achieve a commanding presence.

## II

Bogdanov suggested a strong link between Henry and Talbot, who both lived their lives in a 'boy's own' fantasy world of heroic masculinity. Rather than play Henry as a spiritual figure, Paul Brennan played him as a boy who imagined himself to be a great military hero like his father. Henry wore a military uniform throughout *House of Lancaster* and when he met Talbot after his coronation, Brennan made much of his character's admiration for the soldier, who was literally Henry's hero.

Talbot repaid in kind by making grandiose but sincere gestures of deference to his king: both characters fulfilled the other's fantasies. When news of Burgundy's defection from the English army broke, Henry became excited and animated: with an obvious relish, he immediately began plotting the army's response with Talbot. Between them, the two characters managed to whip up enough masculine posturing to make Burgundy's defection seem not only a certainty, but a reflection upon Burgundy's own manliness. Bogdanov drew a line between Talbot and Henry, to make the point that both characters had a naïve purchase on their own actions. They both believed in the heroic fantasy of war and the masculine bravado of the soldier; they embodied the values of imperial order, whose values they fully believed in and they both became victims of those same values.

Talbot's knowing derogation of Burgundy's sexuality referred to an earlier scene, when Talbot and Burgundy celebrated the recapture of Orleans. Burgundy greeted Talbot by slapping his arms, embracing him (Talbot frozen and unresponsive) and then kissing him on both cheeks. Talbot stood shocked and embarrassed by this unexpected display of sensuality and this raised a laugh from the audience, as it was intended to do. Talbot struggled to ignore what had just occurred but, when Burgundy stepped forward to embrace him once again to say farewell, Talbot drew back sharply and hurriedly left the stage, putting up a curt hand to Burgundy as he left which said both 'goodbye' and 'back off.' The scene played upon the English stereotypes of the bluff soldier who is deeply anxious about his own sexuality and the reserved Englishman unable to cope with a continental style greeting. The audience's laugh was not just at Talbot, but at the English. In the case of English performances (which the productions were aimed at) the audience were laughing at themselves. This recalls Simon Barker's analysis exploration of the rediscovery of English character traits in the myths of the Falklands Crisis: only here, the national effect of self-recognition was used by the performance to draw the audience to the other side of the national character. These camp moments exposed Talbot's excessive masculinity as a mask for deep-seated sexual anxieties.

The contrast between Talbot's over-the-top masculinity and his deep sense of impotency was established in his first scene, which in this production was when Talbot met Joan on the battlefield. Talbot entered shouting, dressed in a red uniform with an absurd amount of medals pinned to his breast. This was a camp, kitsch performance of Talbot, which did not play him as a serious character but as a laughable,

redundant stereotype. Fenner injected Talbot's performance with a tremendous relish, suggesting that the character was enjoying the chaos and the carnage that he surrounded himself with. An eye-patch and a Victorian handle-bar moustache and beard made Talbot out to be a pastiche of Victorian soldier-heroes: the eye-patch seemed to be testimony to battle-scars that he was proud of. This Talbot was a comic, over-the-top expression of masculine bravado which found its ironic nemesis in Joan's magical powers. The rapid alteration of events around Talbot suddenly stopped, leaving him alone on the stage. Talbot turned round sharply to see Joan emerging out of the mist, wearing medieval chain mail and wielding a sword defensively, as if ready to pounce. Talbot's first response was to mock Joan and patronise her, channelling his male ego into hatred. At this point, Peruvian pipe music filled the auditorium, which indicated the presence of magic. Joan raised her sword and then lowered it slowly. As she did so, Talbot was forced to the ground, his body paralysed. Joan then took his sword from his hand. Talbot was literally disarmed, then, but the action was also a figurative castration which deflated Talbot's boisterousness. During the fight, Talbot had directed the point of his sword towards Joan in an obviously phallic way, so that his physical deflation and the loss of his weapon was an indication of his impotency. Bogdanov underlined this point by re-contextualising some of Talbot's lines so that expressions of disempowerment and fear referred directly to his own experience rather than being a comment on his army. When Joan left the stage, Talbot was released from the spell and collapsed to the floor, moaning, 'Where is my strength, my valour and my force!' In Shakespeare's play, this line opens the scene and it is a reference to the retreating English army who were Talbot's strength, force and valour. Placed here, however, Talbot was making a statement about his own shameful sense of failure. Talbot's voice was self-pitying, which was an obvious contrast to the barking tone before. He ended his speech almost in tears, running off the stage saying 'the shame whereof ....' Again, this was a rewriting of Talbot's character. In Shakespeare's play, Talbot is ashamed of his retreating army, but here, Talbot was ashamed of his own defeat by a woman, and it was a deep sense of shame too.

Joan and Burgundy represented a resurgent cultural power within the corrupt and imperialised French camp which they both momentarily invigorated and propelled to success. This was another kind of power, which connects with Bogdanov and Pennington's desire to rediscover an authentic, popular national

identity to hold against the inadequacies of imperial power and identity. First Joan, and then later Burgundy, were shown to be key figures in the French story. Bogdanov reversed traditional interpretations of Joan's relationship with the other French characters: whereas both Howell and Noble suggested that Joan was sleeping with the Dauphin (and possibly the other French characters as well) this Joan was portrayed as a committed and good character in a world which was lazy and decadent. Although the Dauphin's lust for Joan was accentuated, any implication that she returned that lust was abolished from the performance. When the French were driven out of Orleans, the French nobles hid behind sand-bags sipping champagne and wiping their brows with bras, trophies of their personal decadence. Joan joined them, but she was not accompanied the Dauphin, nor was she in her night clothes (as is usually the case in performances of this scene). Instead, Joan wore full armour, so that the audience was given the impression that the French lost the battle in spite of Joan, not because of her. The decadent irony of sipping wine amidst catastrophe was a common characteristic of both armies. Later, York and Warwick drank wine at a table whilst Joan burned to death behind them. The contrast between civility and brutality was a caustic one, and here the point was to underline Joan's moral superiority, not her promiscuity. The French had already been imperialised, they already embodied the values and the politics of their oppressors: even their uniforms were blue-dyed versions of the English uniforms. Joan, on the other hand, wore country clothes and medieval armour, which connected her to the silenced, ethnic history of France which the Dauphin and his men elided in their costumes.

This was an aspect of Bogdanov's general overhauling and cleaning up of the Joan character as he saw it. Bogdanov was very clear that he did not want to play Shakespeare's Joan, or at least Shakespeare's Joan as he understood it, which was 'English patriotic propaganda' (*The English Shakespeare Company*, p. 100) of the very kind which the ESC was setting itself up against. Instead of a demonic, promiscuous and deceitful Joan, Bogdanov wrote a divine and chaste Joan. Elizabeth Brandow helpfully detailed some of the alterations made to the play in order to accomplish this. For example, Brandow Joan's invocation to the devils in V.3 was altered so that it was a prayer to heaven:

The Regent conquers and the Frenchmen fly



Help, my gracious Lady, and appear to me [added]  
 Give sign and help me in my enterprise [added]  
 ...  
 ...  
 See, *she* forsakes me  
 ....  
 My *holy supplications* are too weak<sup>52</sup>

Words in italics indicate words which have been changed in order to shift the context of Shakespeare's words, so that they support 'holy supplications' rather than 'ancient incantations.' Lois Potter points out that Joan's line 'Done like a Frenchman, turn and turn again' was also cut, leaving the more dignified 'Done like a Frenchman', in order to endorse Burgundy's defection, rather than to send it up.<sup>53</sup> However, making Joan a divine figure was hardly more credible than making her a devil. The presence of genuine divine intervention rubbed against Bogdanov's otherwise political view of history and upset the audience's sense of the production's reality. 'Believing in the divinity of Joan of Arc,' he wrote, 'was proving a problem.' (*The English Shakespeare Company*, p. 109). Bogdanov and the original actress Margaret Rutherford worked on a 'mysterious ethereal aspect' that would transform Shakespeare's devil into Bogdanov's saint. Bogdanov also refers embarrassingly to the Peruvian pipes which 'loaded down her supernatural powers': this was a response to Lois Potter's disarming critique of Joan's performance.<sup>54</sup> In defence, Bogdanov protests, 'It *was* kitsch,' then he adds, 'though not liked by many.' (p. 110).

Barbara Hodgdon reads Bogdanov's presentation of Joan's narrative as a feminist recuperation of history. Hodgdon focuses on the confrontation between York and Joan, in which Joan 'speaks her genealogy as though insisting on her own history.' Hodgdon reads this performance as the voicing of a different history, which York represses through his brutal action of execution. The speaking of an alternative history made York's negotiated 'solemn peace' doubly ironic, says Hodgdon:

... rather than rewriting this end point, as Barton-Hall did, to presage York's rise and establish Warwick as kingmaker, *Roses* privileges what Shakespeare's playtext

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<sup>52</sup> Brandow, 'History, Royal or English', p. 56.

<sup>53</sup> Lois Potter, 'Modern histories' *TLS* 1<sup>st</sup> April 1988. See also Potter's article 'Recycling the Early Histories: *The Wars of the Roses* and *The Plantagenets*.'

<sup>54</sup> Potter, 'Modern histories.'

does not represent, foregrounds the silenced voiced it represses, and so destabilises closure. In the final image, flames rise behind the upstage grid as Joan's silhouetted necklaced figure, her arms raised toward the sky, burns, evoking the incited violence of Elizabethan ritual burning as well as present day events in Ireland and South Africa; now, the Andean flute music (taken from Peter Weir's *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, 1975), the reified sign of another disenfranchised voice, returns [this represents Henry's marriage as engendering the] 'inextinguishable fire of oppressive imperialism. It is Joan (and, by association, all equally alien presences), not England, who burns in sacrificial embers. As a rhyme with the performance text's opening on Henry V's state funeral, where four red-jacketed military honour guardsmen stand at attention around a union Jack-draped coffin topped with a spray of red roses, waiting for the figures of power to assemble, this final image privileges not those with automatic franchise but rather those whose voices are appropriated, silenced, or absorbed by power's self-reproducing dialogue.<sup>55</sup>

Hodgdon is sensitive to Bogdanov's staging of a struggle between the centralising, destructive forces of power and the 'alien presences' of deep cultural forces.<sup>56</sup> Lois Potter provides a different perspective on this Joan by pointing out that the performance eradicated Joan's responsibility for all the things that are attributed to her: Joan's lines were altered so that she neither condemned her country nor appealed to the devil, whilst Burgundy was seen (in an added speech) to be already having doubts about fighting against his own country. The rewriting of Joan could be seen as a feminist attempt to recover a much maligned woman: on the other hand, it could also be seen as a lack of engagement with Joan as a strong character.

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<sup>55</sup> *The End Crowns All*, pp. 91-2.

<sup>56</sup> However, much of Joan's performance, it seems to me, is problematic as a feminist reading. If, on one level, the pipe music made Joan mysterious, alien and 'other', on another level, as Potter pointed out, it was a ham-fisted piece of kitsch staging which tended to reduce Joan's presence in the production. In her first scene, Joan fought the Dauphin with fencing swords, so that her victory was down to her fencing skills rather than her strength. The audience was left wondering whether Joan would have had the same result with heavy broadswords. By disarming Joan's physical and demonic power, Bogdanov muted a potentially dangerous and subversive construction of woman in history. Bogdanov accepted too readily the convention that Joan was a patriotic construction. If he had researched deeper, he would have learnt that Joan was a unique and far from conservative character on the early modern English stages. See for example Gabrielle Bernhard Jackson's article 'Topical Ideology: Witches, Amazons, and Shakespeare's Joan of Arc' which refutes the easy reading of Shakespeare's portrait of Joan of Arc as a 'regrettable sign of the times.' Jackson studies Joan's 'ideological ambiguity' in relation to Elizabethan fascination with various female figures. See also Leah Marcus' *Puzzling Shakespeare: Local Reading and its Discontents* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988) who suggests that Joan reflected Elizabethan anxieties about the 'paradox' of female power. More recently, in *Engendering a Nation* Jean Howard and Phyllis Rackin have explored Joan and the other women in the play as characters who subvert the patrilineal structure of chronicle history: 'The necessary medium for the transmission of patrilineal authority, women were also the only custodians of the dangerous knowledge that always threatened to dishonour the fathers and disinherit the sons and in so doing, subvert the entire project of patriarchal history' (p. 64). See also Phyllis Rackin's *Stages of History: Shakespeare's English Chronicles* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990).

Bogdanov certainly privileged Joan's narrative, but it is questionable that he ever arrived at a feminist account of Joan. Rather, Bogdanov was anxious to avoid playing the caricature of Joan in English history. The performance did play against Shakespeare's text, but it exchanged a demonised Joan for an idealised one: moreover, it stripped away the ambiguity in Shakespeare's character, and instead presented a Joan who was entirely dependent on her magic. Joan's victories in battles, including her fight with the Dauphin, were shown to be down to enchantment. Bogdanov made nothing of the suggestive patterning between Joan, Margaret, Eleanor and Jourdain so the female presence in this presentation of history was lost after the first interval.

Joan's magic was signified by Peruvian pipe music which was multi-faceted in its effect. The earthy music of pipes expressed the earthiness of her power and lent it an ethnic exoticism, whose mystery and enigma contrasted with the stiff and laboured choral music of the imperialists' religion.<sup>57</sup> Where the choir controlled voices in harmony, pipes suggested the pure expression of a single voice. The music was lifted from Peter Weir's 1975 film *Picnic at Hanging Rock*. Like a later reference to *Platoon* in *Richard III*,<sup>58</sup> this music had an extra range of associations for those sharp enough to recognise the cultural source of the music. *Hanging Rock* is a film about the mysterious and unexplained disappearance of three girls at the turn of the century, whilst on an outing to Hanging Rock. The constrained, civilised young girls was contrasted with the sensual and primitive sexuality of the landscape, and their disappearance was linked

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<sup>57</sup> For more details about the use of music in the ESC *Henry VI*s, see Elizabeth Brandow's 'History, Royal or English', p. 27. Bogdanov and Pennington obviously read Brandow's thesis (which is available for consultation at the Shakespeare Institute in Stratford-upon-Avon). For example, this is from Brandow: 'Jagged atonal bars from Berg's Violin Concerto introduced the Temple Garden Scene, an indication of future disintegration, and Jarre's electronic *Rendezvous* helped decapitate Suffolk.' Compare this with a passage from *The English Shakespeare Company*: 'Harsh, atonal bars from Berg's Violin Concerto introduced the rose-picking Temple Garden scene in the *House of Lancaster*, an indication of future disintegration; a jagged electronic theme from an unknown horror movie helped to decapitate Suffolk.' (p. 109). This book was published in 1990, one year after Brandow's thesis was submitted for examination.

<sup>58</sup> Barber's 'Adagio for Strings' scored Richard's final battle with Richmond. In 'The Wars of the Roses: The English Shakespeare Company on Tour' *Shakespeare Quarterly* vol. 40 1989, pp. 208-211, MACD. P. Jackson associates the music with the 'death of kings' because it was played so much after the assassination of President Kennedy in 1963. However, audiences would have been more likely to have recalled the Vietnam war film *Platoon* (dir. Oliver Stone, 1986) which made the music famous in 1986. As Stone later directed a film about Kennedy's assassination, it is quite possible that the association that Jackson makes comes via *Platoon*. However, 'the death of kings' becomes in Stone's critical examination of American national values in Vietnam a theme for the death of a nation's culture and it is this association (rather than one between Kennedy and Richard III) which Bogdanov seemed to be reaching for.

with the girls' awakening sexuality. The rest of the film developed the character of the headmistress as an unpleasant and repressed character, a structure similar to the Joan-Margaret line in Bogdanov's production. The more important association, though, is with the contrast between a rigid, 'civilised' and repressed society coming in to contact with libidinous energy. Joan's power was an equivalent force, a libidinal power which transformed the sterile and impotent battles of imperialism. Like the school girls, Joan too was punished for breaking taboo. In this context, it is regrettable that Bogdanov did not leave Joan some 'ancient incantations' as 'holy supplications' surely struck the wrong note in a production which was otherwise anti-clerical. A similar force was represented by Burgundy. Bogdanov developed Burgundy's character by giving him a soliloquy in which he expressed his deep-seated doubts about fighting against his own people. This followed the semi-farcical scene with Talbot discussed earlier, which also had the effect of establishing the cultural differences between the stout but repressed Talbot and the sensuous but masculine Burgundy. By giving us this extra speech, Bogdanov threw light upon Burgundy's defection so that Joan's 'magic' was no enchantment but a stirring of his deeper, cultural self which had already manifested itself in his conscience. Burgundy's defection was endorsed as a return to his native cultural values, even in the face of defeat.

The difference between the two forms of power, the cultural and the imperio-historical, was most vividly drawn in the contrast between Talbot's death and Joan's death at the end of the first act of *House of Lancaster*. Talbot's death was characterised by its sterility and unproductiveness, whereas Joan's death was staged to emphasise her as a source of hope and romantic longing, a vibrant pulse which would continue beyond the collapsing world of authority. The important image for both characters was children. Talbot died with his dead son in his arms. As previously noted, Young Talbot was wrapped in a union jack flag which suggested that it was not just Young Talbot but the entire value system of the British empire (represented by the blood-stained union jack) which was dying in Talbot's arms. Talbot, the great hero of the empire, died childless: the image completed the theme that had been established when Joan disarmed Talbot in their first scene and it worked well as a metaphor for the impotency of imperial power, which is able to oppress others but lacks the cultural power of creativity. The failure of Talbot's issue was contrasted with Joan's claim of pregnancy to York. Although this claim is usually treated as evidence of

Joan's deceit, desperation or promiscuity (or all of these things), Bogdanov made judicious cuts to skirt over the ambiguity of her claim. Consequently, the audience was left simply to grasp the fact that she was pregnant and that this was meaningful in terms of the representation of the character and the values she stood for. Because Bogdanov had led us to believe both in her divinity and her chastity, there was never any question that Joan was pregnant by immaculate methods, which she was desperately trying to account for to her captors. The figurative pregnancy established the fecundity of the character, and posited her cultural ethnicity as a fertile and productive energy in contrast to the tragic sterility of the Talbot family.

The manner of Talbot and Joan's deaths was also set up to establish this contrast. Talbot was shot in the back on the battlefield, having successfully fought off the entire French army with his sword. In the 1980s, this death would have called to mind the death of Colonel 'H' Jones, a modern-day English hero. Colonel Jones led the charge on Goose Green, which provoked the bloodiest battle of the Falklands Crisis and cost Jones his life. Like Talbot, Jones was shot in the back. The unheroic manner of his death attracted the interest of the tabloid newspapers, who seized upon the image of the great soldier killed in a cowardly way as a definitive image of the military experience during the Falklands. Talbot's performance owed much to the character of Jones: *The Sunday Times* described Jones as 'a soldier dedicated to the point of obsession' who 'even spent his spare time playing war-games.'<sup>59</sup> The tabloid's interpretation of Jones' death was that the imperial heroic spirit was still alive in the English army, but it confronted a cowardly and unheroic enemy. The ESC's staging of Talbot's death recalled and reread Jones' death in order to challenge the nostalgia implicit in the tabloid's rediscovery of English heroism. Talbot's death did not signify the death of heroism, it signified its vacuity and absurdness in an imperial context. In contrast, Joan was executed behind a translucent screen. English soldiers made a pyre out of car wheels and then poured petrol over her and set it alight: to the ambient music of Peruvian pipes, the audience saw Joan's silhouette writhe in slow motion as soft, fiery lights flickered around her, whilst York and Warwick sipped wine at a table at the front of the stage. This staging registered the failure of the English soldiers to entirely quench

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<sup>59</sup> The Sunday Times Insight Team, *The Falklands War: The Full Story*, p. 220.

Joan's fertile cultural spirit. Unlike Talbot's lonely, sterile death, Joan's death suggested that the libidinous forces that she represented would continue to live.

Although Bogdanov called the cycles a 'history of warfare' the performances did not stage ensemble battle scenes as both Howell and Noble did in their productions. Instead, battles were represented by scenes of single combat, so that 'war' became the location for the exploration of different kinds of conflict.<sup>60</sup> This subverted audience expectations of a big battle scene which would provide a climax to the Talbot and Joan story. Bogdanov chose rather to represent this battle in a different way, using the interpolated story of a peasant girl who is raped by a gang of English soldiers as a frame for Suffolk's 'seduction' of Margaret. Following Joan's capture, a peasant girl (perhaps recalling Joan's first appearance in ordinary, peasant's clothing) ran across the stage pursued by a group of soldiers, who surrounded her and trapped her onstage. The soldiers grabbed the girl and tried to assault her but when they started arguing amongst themselves, the girl managed to escape and ran offstage, the soldiers following her. As they left the stage, Margaret ran onto it (passing them as she did so), pursued by Suffolk (the girl's screams could be heard as he entered). At the end of this scene, Suffolk passed the girl on his way off the stage. Her clothing was in disarray and she stooped, holding her stomach. They looked at each other briefly, then Suffolk left and the girl hurried over the stage. This image of war presented a contrast to the heroic, masculine idea of war which Talbot had stood for and, more than anything, it showed what a fiction that ideal was. This war was instead about men fighting over women. Hodgdon points out that the peasant girl's story drew a line between Joan's capture and Margaret's capture, so that their stories are conditioned and interpreted by the acts of the soldiers.<sup>61</sup> This was also another image of the impotency of imperial power. The suggestion was that Suffolk originally intended to rape Margaret - he was chasing after her with his sword pointed suggestively at her, and Suffolk continued to use his sword in a suggestive and obviously phallic way. Where the previous scene began to work itself into the subtext of this scene was in the strategies of

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<sup>60</sup> There was one exception in *House of York*: however, this too was cut after the tour returned from Australia (*The English Shakespeare Company*, p, 109).

<sup>61</sup> 'It is this female figure, rather than Joan, whom Margaret replaces, and her ensuing encounter with Suffolk reprises just such a rape' (*The End Crowns All*, pp. 90-1). Hodgdon writes that, as they dragged Joan offstage, one of the soldiers started unbuttoning his trousers. This had been cut by the time of the Swansea performances (which are the basis of the published video recordings).

entrapment which Suffolk employed after the scene had moved from an intended rape to an attempt to woo Margaret. On the surface, it was a romantic and even erotically charged scene. Suffolk was dressed as a dashing 30s movie star, an Errol Flynn or Douglas Fairbanks jnr, with a thin moustache marking him as a fashionable man. When he kissed Margaret, in this scene and later, it was with an epic passion deliberately evocative of Hollywood movies of the period. In fact, Suffolk's whole presentation was modelled on the melodramatic types of the 30s movie scene, shifting from dashing soldier to moustache-twirling villain at different points. However, the recurring images of entrapment from the previous scene read a darker and more problematic situation into these pastiched references. Suffolk let Margaret go but then prevented her exit with his sword, which was a deliberate echo of soldier's blocking of the girl (the sword's phallic resonance being also increased). When he kissed her, the choreography of the kiss was identical to the forced kiss in the preceding scene. The function of these similarities went beyond the suggestion that Suffolk's political bartering over Margaret's body was a metaphoric rape and spoke to the deep sense of impotency at the heart of this new form of power. In the 1988-9 tour, Suffolk was played by Michael Pennington, who also played Henry V, so that Henry V's heroic character was revisited and reread by the doubling.<sup>62</sup> The doubling of the two characters Bogdanov never let his audience forget that this scene is about power and its ascendancy, or that it begins with a frustrated attempt at sex. In a sequence of images, from Joan's capture to Margaret's, the activity of power was represented as men exerting physical power over women's bodies. These images replaced the usual image of power and victory - there were no scenes of battle to represent the English victory in France, no scenes of men fighting men, only of men abusing women.

Against these formations of the impotency of power, Bogdanov staged a whole series of figurative castrations which underlined the deterioration of imperial power. The production had begun with a phallic symbol: Henry's coffin, which jutted out towards the audience, represented the cultural phallus of the warrior-king society. This image read Henry VI as an emasculated version of Henry V. Gloucester's loss of power was read through a metaphor set up by the Simpcox episode. Simpcox came onto the stage on a pair

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<sup>62</sup> Suffolk was originally played by Chris Hunter. See *The English Shakespeare Company*, p. 267.

of crutches. Gloucester took the crutches from Simpcox angrily, and then at the end of the scene found that he too was being discarded: Henry was throwing away his crutches. Talbot was not only disarmed by Joan, but later passed his trademark sword to his son, leaving himself exposed on the battlefield and, as we have seen, the death of Talbot with the body of his son in his limp arms was read as a metaphor for the failed issue of the British empire whose values Talbot embodied. The most vivid castration image was reserved for Suffolk, however. His execution was used as the dramatic climax of the production. Although commentators have generally remarked on the similarities between Barton, Noble and Bogdanov's restructuring of the first half of the trilogy, in this respect Bogdanov was unique in making a minor scene, which has often been cut or drastically reshaped, into a climax. Although Suffolk only appeared at the end of the first act of the production, he was the major player of the second, which told his story. Suffolk was dressed in rags, so that he had already lost the trappings of power. The pirate captain was transformed into an aristocratic admiral, in order to reconstitute the class rebellion as the viscous act of British power upon a former favourite. Suffolk was dragged to the back of the stage and the top half of his body was obscured by a rabble of murderers who cut his head off with obvious difficulty. The decapitation symbolised Suffolk's loss of power.

The impact of this image was strengthened by the closing scene of the production, which based itself upon Act IV scenes 2 and 4 of *Part 2*. In the adaptation, the scene was reduced to two soliloquies by Henry and Margaret. Henry sat reading in his throne, sombre and reflective. Margaret appeared from the right rear of the stage and walked extremely slowly across the stage. She held Suffolk's head in her arms, which was wrapped in a bloody sheet, as if it were her child so that the dismemberment of Suffolk had now been transformed into the metaphoric miscarriage of his and Margaret's ambitions. Henry tried to talk to Margaret, but she did not acknowledge him, and carried on crying until she left the stage. Bogdanov closed the production on this harrowing and psychological moment, leaving his audience with the image of Henry impotent in his throne.

### III



The ESC's *The Wars of the Roses* staged the dichotomy between imperial history and cultural history in national identity. Bogdanov and Pennington were sensitive to the gap between the homogenising discourses of British imperialist rhetoric and the cultural history of Britain. The 1980s saw a flowering of independence movements across the UK: political parties such as the Scottish National Party in Scotland gained ground in part thanks to opposition to Mrs. Thatcher's administration. Bogdanov stressed the fact that Mrs. Thatcher did not command a mandate in either of these countries, nor in the North of England. In this light, the imposition of Mrs. Thatcher's policies upon unwilling communities seemed like the actions of an imperial dictatorship. Moreover, Mrs. Thatcher's attempt to appropriate national identity and culture to her own project was offensive to those who did not share her politics. The independence parties in Scotland and Wales created division in Mrs. Thatcher's vision of national unity, whilst the Miner's Strike in 1984 and the widespread incidents of riots in England's inner cities introduced division into the imperialising concept of England which Mrs. Thatcher appropriated. Bogdanov associated the Kentish uprising with the Miner's Strike: 'In 1985 the Kent miners, all six thousand of them, were the last to capitulate.' (*The English Shakespeare Company*, p. 111).

In the ESC's history plays, these tensions and divisions were represented by the common people, who first appeared in the Boar's Head scenes in *Henry IV, Part One*; the fall of Falstaff in *Henry IV, Part Two* was seen as symbolic of Hall's rejection of English culture and in the subsequent play, we saw the cultural vitality of the people exploited for Henry V's own political gain.<sup>63</sup> This showed English culture being abused and oppressed by an imperial, authoritarian force and this reading worked well as a satirical critique of the politics of Thatcherism. However, we must keep in mind that the original intention of the ESC was to in some way recover and redefine 'England' in a way which would recover a regional, autonomous identity with which England, like Scotland and Wales, could mobilise its opposition to the Conservative government. This whole way of thinking lay behind the style of the production: for example, Gadshill (who had a distinctive green mohican hair-cut) was the unofficial mascot of the ESC so that a

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<sup>63</sup> For further discussion of these productions, see Barbara Hodgdon's *Shakespeare in Performance: Henry IV, Part One* and Scott McMillin's *Shakespeare in Performance: Henry IV, Part One* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1991).

modern-day punk became the symbol of a national Shakespeare company. These incongruities continued into the *Henry VI* plays but here, Bogdanov and Pennington's whole project became more questionable. The cycle appeared to shift ground and stress instead the impossibility of recovering a genuine national expression in the wake of Mrs. Thatcher's convincing victory in the 1987 General Election.

The Cade scenes were presented as the viscous climax of a cycle narrative which had begun with the Boar's Head. This narrative arc related the way that the people's varied and rich cultural expression was transformed by the oppressive strategies of Henry V into the viscous and restricted world of Jack Cade. The idea of a common ethnically based nationalism was located within the world of the Boar's Head but if, to begin with, this was a structured and polemical ideal which Bogdanov wished to promote positively, at this point in the cycle his ideas had clearly shifted to a more complex view of the interaction of politics and culture at the popular level. The main support for this observation is the clear differences between his directorial attitude towards these characters. In the *Henries*, the Tavern characters were celebrated for their diversity and even for their duplicity and violence.<sup>64</sup> The measure of Bogdanov's endorsement was the costumes that these characters wore: they were distinctive not only for their anarchic, punkish non-conformity, but also for being the only contemporary costumes in the cycle up to *Richard III*.<sup>65</sup> The significance of this was to establish a different set of interpretative priorities for this group against the historical narrative of authority told by the stories of kings. The modernism of the Tavern set was contrasted with the medievalisms of authority and its development through changing forms of expression across the cycle. By the Cade scenes this situation had become very different. Bogdanov adapted the scenes in order to put added stress on the violence and brutality of Cade's rebellion, whilst at the same time the adaptation made historical characters such as Henry and York more sympathetic and

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<sup>64</sup> After all, in his comments on Irish and East European cultures, Bogdanov had praised their confrontation with the darker aspects of human existence, which positioned certain rooted forms of cultural expression beyond critique. It was the authenticity of these cultures rather than the rights and wrongs of their practices that Bogdanov hankered after and sought to recover for English culture. See p. 102 in this thesis.

<sup>65</sup> *Richard III* was styled after the 1980s style Wall Street fashions. Bogdanov described the production's style as 'computer': it was located within the viscous and dehumanising world of entrepreneurial capitalism in the 1980s. (*The English Shakespeare Company*, p. 103).

visionary than they had hitherto been. The festive menagerie of the Tavern turned into a distorted and threatening presence on Bogdanov's stage.

The idea behind the modernistic costumes of the Tavern was to bring onto the stage the kind of audience Bogdanov envisaged for his company - not a bizarre gathering of skinheads, new wavers and punks perhaps, but a younger audience who would identify more with these characters than anyone else on the stage. Bogdanov exploited them as a way to make the plays more accessible to a modern audience, to give them the sense that his productions were speaking directly to them, not through the dusty words of an obsolete text. However, though stylistically similar, the Cade characters were presented in such a way that it is hard to imagine that Bogdanov ever felt it likely that these characters would also be his audience. The cultural references made in the Cade scenes to football hooliganism, miners' strikes, and inner city rioting, seemed to presume the exclusion of hooligans, strikers and rioters from Shakespeare, and from the discourse Bogdanov was setting up.

The question has particular pertinence in Bogdanov's case since his staging of the Cade rebellion was the first theatrical Cade since the war to be presented in the context of a genuine anxiety about rioting which pervaded English cultural life in the 1980s. Cade was no longer a cartoon irrelevancy and directors no longer had to look abroad or to the past to find appropriate ways to represent him. Cade was dressed in a union-jack T-shirt, immediately asserting both his nationality and his contemporaneity. In fact, Cade's whole costume was a specific reference to the punk archetype established by Johnny Rotten of the Sex Pistols.<sup>66</sup> However, if recent events gave Cade a contemporary edge, it also placed him in a contemporary event which makes Bogdanov's choices extremely problematic, as he portrayed a negative view of the rioter at a time when such views were characteristic of right wing elements in social discourse. Bogdanov used Shakespeare to effectively endorse what social analysts have termed the 'conservative' position on inner

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<sup>66</sup> A character which, according to its creator and performer John Lydon, was based upon Shakespeare's Richard III: 'I saw it [Olivier's film *Richard III*] a long time before I conceived Rotten. No redeeming qualities. Hunchback, nasty, evil, conniving, selfish. The worst of everything to excess. Olivier made Richard III riveting in his excessive disgust. Having seen it aeons ago, I took influences from Olivier's performance. I had never seen a pop singer present himself quite that way. It wasn't the norm. You're supposed to be a nice pretty boy, sing lovely songs, and coo at the girlies. Richard III would have none of that. He got the girls in other ways.' *Rotten: No Irish, No Blacks, No Dogs* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1994), p.178.

city rioting and other forms of dissident and anti-authoritarian protest and violence. According to Benyon and Solomos,<sup>67</sup> the conservative view of the riots rejects social problems as the basis for the rioting and instead sees the problem as a collapse of moral values:

The *conservative* view assumes that existing social and political structures are adequate, and there can therefore be no justification or need for violent agitation. Disorder is seen as an aberration perpetuated by irresponsible and criminal elements, who may be motivated by greed and excitement, who maybe the dupes of political extremists, or who may be imitating the behaviour of others.

Of course, certain of these elements are already a part of the Cade story as Shakespeare wrote it but when these scenes are dislocated from the first three acts of *Part Two* (in which the story of the people's frustration is given a substantial context) the acts of violence become both excessive and pointless. In addition, Bogdanov wrote in new material (included in York's return from Ireland) which accentuated York's involvement in and ambitions for the rebellion, so that its background in conspiracy and wider political agitation was made explicit. So, these rioters were indeed 'the dupes of political extremists', reinforcing a widespread view that there was a conspiracy behind the apparently disorder expression of the inner city riots. Their actions were seen to be motivated by 'greed and excitement' and Bogdanov showed the group working as a pack, blindly copying the actions of their leader. Although Bogdanov might not subscribe to the view that existing social structures are adequate, the staging of these scenes nevertheless showed a distinct distaste for the rioters and their crimes. The production frowned upon rioting as a reductive and violent form of cultural expression: even if Bogdanov was showing how centralising, imperial politics eventually deprives the people of any other form of cultural expression, there was nevertheless a worrying sense that the company did not expect punks, skinheads etc. to be in their audience, which reflects badly on the ESC's inclusive approach to 'national' theatre.

The Cade rebellion was preceded by York's return from Ireland. This made a departure from previous productions, which have performed York's return as a triumphal one. Bogdanov's York returned to England covertly in a scene rich with a conspiratorial atmosphere. The grand court scenes of the previous

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<sup>67</sup> Benyon and Solomos, 'The Simmering Cities', p. 407.

play had been superseded by a new kind of politics, which played at the margins, on the pre-battlefield of the docks where York's supporters huddled round, dressed incognito in raincoats. The image was constructed out of a pastiche of forties film styles, mixing film noir and war movies, like Humphrey Bogart in a British wartime spy film. The secretive style of the opening reflected the structural development of the production towards ever increasing and violent encroachment upon the private, hidden spaces to the media images that close both *House of York* and *Richard III*. York, however, was boldly dressed in a second world war uniform, which, according to the developed custom of modern battle dress denotes rank rather than class. The open display of a new kind of aggressive aesthetic contrasted with the secrecy of his followers: in contrast to the opening scene of *House of Lancaster*, which was defined by an enclosed coffin, this first scene was about an unveiling of new forces. This was an induction, a prologue to the main action, and its main structural purposes was to set the scene for the Cade rebellion, and to add stress to the otherwise ambiguous relations between York and Cade. Using lines culled from the Sea Captain's lines to Suffolk, York explained to his followers that the rebellion had been politically engineered by an agent provocateur, in terms which were both more vivid and unnegotiable than Shakespeare's York.

As with all productions of *Henry VI*, Cade brought to the stage a verve and excitement, a certain theatrical, even circus like, excitement to the plays. Pennington's Cade was a circus freak - acrobatic, clownish, at turns frightening then funny, both *agent provocateur* and *enfant terrible*: it was hard not to think that, even in this two-dimensional scripting of Cade, the actual performance shows a man who relishes his subversive role and enters fully into the utopian topsy-turvy spirit of the revolution. The scene was cast somewhere between the Nuremberg rallies and a fringe political hustings, on a set of wooden seats and tables, that looks like a deserted school (it was in fact the ramshackle headquarters of the military from the first play). The rioters were mostly in first world war uniform, in various states of decay: the introduction of York's new, forties uniform in the previous scene had already alerted us to the military redundancy of their clothing. This made an interesting social point about the crowd: they were deserters from the wars of the previous two plays, outcasts, disillusioned and disaffected. They were the debris from Henry V's missionary rhetoric and Talbot's fated heroism: and Cade was, as a consequence, the negative image of Henry V, issuing a revolutionary version of that rhetoric, offering to the people a utopia founded

upon a revolutionary collective anarchy rather than a glorification of existing political order. In fact, Cade and Henry V were both played by Michael Pennington, suggesting the link to audiences who saw the whole cycle. Across the back of the stage, behind Cade, was a large Union Jack, with the logo, 'From a Jack to a King' scrawled beneath it in bold, comic lettering. The phrase recalled the 'Fuck the Frogs' banner unfurled by the same social group in Bogdanov's *Henry V* which was hung in a similar position. The phrase, punning on card games, Cade's name and, of course, the Union Jack, not only mischievously appropriated the flag under whose sign the people placed themselves under in *Henry V*, it also inscribed the demon Cade into the Union Jack. The flag, which was thoroughly discredited as an image in *House of Lancaster*, was reinvigorated with the desire of the disaffected to seize for themselves the symbols that had enslaved them. The weaponry of the rabble also set up a contrast with previous images of warfare: whereas the previous production had equipped soldiers with elegant swords and muskets, Cade's followers killed with axes, strangled with football scarves and, most strikingly of all, Cade wielded a large, serrated knife: this was a grotesque recasting of the elegant, heroic sword, it was like a sword which has exceeded itself. The defunct heroism of previous battles was now recast as a new kind of comic viciousness.

Much of Shakespeare's material was compressed into one scene, with Lord Say and the Staffords being the violent offerings that provoke the mob into further revolt. Their murder was placed as the climax of Cade's own rhetoric in order to stress the tensions between political rhetoric and mob violence. Cade stood above his followers at the head of the desk (already established in the previous play as a prime symbol of power). For Bogdanov, there was no distinction between the development of this scene from rhetoric to violence and the development of *Henry V* from rhetoric to warfare. Cade was, consequently, simply the most outrageous example of a recurring pattern of political manipulations and civil violence which cumulated in the national and human travesties which follow York/Cade's most irresponsible manoeuvres. The scene ended with a charge led by Cade. The battle was represented by the silhouette man waving a large flag behind a screen: however, it was not clear which side the flag waver belonged to. This was not war, it was a riot, a football terrace battle; this image was cemented by the returning crowd, who

sang 'You're going get your fucking heads kicked in.' Later, the crowd chanted a drunken version of Cock 'o the North: folk culture had been obliterated and reduced to football chants.<sup>68</sup>

Given his socialist background, one would expect Bogdanov to have adopted a liberal perspective on dissident violence. To a certain extent, the place of the Cade riots in the wider narrative of the sequence bore this out, as the people who were 'unified' by Henry V's triumphant war, were left excluded in *House of Lancaster* and then rioted in *House of York*. The riots were consequently seen in the light of the narrative of the collapse of national unity. However, this was a certain kind of national unity based on the superficial illusion of patriotism, a consequence of Churchillian rhetoric or Thatcherite posturing that decimates past cultural unity and leads inevitably to violent collapse. However, the actual staging of the riots left little sympathy for the rioters, and little space for a liberal perspective, let alone a radical perspective, on class relations and civil disorder. Instead, Bogdanov paid deference to the 'riffraff' theory, which sees rioters as basically criminal, who do it for the thrill of it: 'Rioting is thus seen as another manifestation of football hooliganism' ('The Simmering Cities, 410). Bogdanov also demonstrated the 'crowd theory' of riots: 'If a group of people gather together, their behaviour may degenerate into mob or "mindless" violence. This is most likely to happen ... if there is social disorganisation as a result of community disruption.' (p. 410). Bogdanov also adopted a conservative attitude by developing and foregrounding York's role as a political manipulators:

The conspiracy theory, that agitators are fostering discontent, appears to have been advanced to explain almost all the disorders that have occurred in Britain since the Gordon Riots of 1780. The main shortcoming of this theory is that there is rarely, if ever, any plausible evidence to support it. (p. 411).

All of these theories can be detected in Bogdanov's staging of insurgent uprising. Bogdanov's staging of the Cade rebellion relied upon images of rioting and dissent which were immediately to hand: football hooliganism, the miners' strike and the race riots, all events which marked a turning point in relations

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<sup>68</sup> See *The English Shakespeare Company*, p. 111: 'The chant of "you're gonna get your fuckin' 'eads kicked in" rang out weekly on stage as pitched battles raged on sea ferries to the same cries and the Heysel stadium went up in flames.'

between the people and the state, and raised the question of national identity generally. In the context of the nationalist movements in Scotland and Wales and the rising debate on proportional representation raised by the SDP and Liberal parties, the emergence of a multi-ethnic, regionally diverse state hit hard against the rocks of the new government's Churchillian rhetoric and its imperial sense of national identity unified under a single flag.

#### IV

*House of York* staged the death of English culture at all levels and represented the final unravelling of the paradigmatic changes in power and identity initiated by Bolingbroke and his son. Edward IV was shown to usurp not only the king but the representational forms of Henry's power. His court constituted a rejection of the traditional signs of power and of monarchy to which Henry had been subjected in the previous play. The throne which York seized momentarily after the defeat of Cade did not have a place in Edward's court, and neither did ceremonial robes or traditional props of power such as crowns, sceptres, and so on.

Edward's court was presented as an endless cocktail party, with Edward playing the host to a gathering of inter-war years aristocracy, listening to a mellow jazz soundtrack. Edward's only symbol of power, as Elizabeth Brandow pointed out, was a little black book which he produced when Clarence complained that he did not have a wife. This cast Edward as a procurer and identified his power with the ability to command sex for himself and for his favoured company. Richard was disgusted by the sexual politics of Edward's power and became its main critic, using his soliloquies to commentate upon the hypocrisies of Edward's court, thereby becoming the audience's voice and confident in a world which had apparently abolished interiority and its representation.

The representational choices made here used the cocktail parties of the thirties and forties as a metaphor for the increasing isolation of the aristocracy from the lives of their subjects. Following on directly from the brutality of the rebellion and the Battle of Towton, the cocktail party was a conceit which denied those actions and set up a congenial atmosphere in which national identity was no longer displayed and represented by the court. Instead, power was to have its own identity, a point which was repeated at the end both of this production and its sequel, when modern forms of media manipulation and propaganda were



highlighted. *Richard III* ended with a television broadcast, *House of York* ended with a photographer taking a shot of Edward and his family. As the productions had focused so much on families, even displacing Henry VI in the titles, with the familial subtitles of *House of York* and *House of Lancaster* the use of the royal family as a political image was a parting shot by the director at the nature of politics rooted in media representations rather than ceremonial representations.<sup>69</sup> If *House of Lancaster* had taken pains to show the painful inadequacies of traditional representations of power, *House of York* showed the equally dangerous construction of authority in manipulated images which separate ruled from rulers.

The first real scene of this kind was Edward's celebrations after his victory and its key event was the seduction of Lady Grey. Grey was introduced to Edward as a party guest by Richard. As they talked, Richard tried to insinuate himself between them but was pushed away.<sup>70</sup> The men were dressed in dinner jackets, the women in evening dresses. Like Suffolk's wooing of Margaret, the seduction of Lady Grey was performed using the clichés of 1940s romantic movies. With the piano player playing Louis Armstrong chords in the background, it was almost a direct steal from *Casablanca*. This was a consistent use of cultural reference points rather than historical reference points with which to create the audience's own sense of a cultural history moving behind conventional history. The audience recognised the forties because they recognised the clichés and the representations of the time. As they talked, the two drew closer and closer until they were dancing. The 1940s romantic clichés diffused the underlying criticism and politics of the scene, so that it became instead a coy seduction, a game. The real theatre of the scene resided in the study of Richard and his sneering reactions to the melodrama.

The dangerous dishonesty of the cocktail party was also indicated by the piano soundtrack, which was used to establish different levels of engagement with the scene, as it moved from an ensemble scene to Richard's soliloquy and then back once more to the court. When Richard came to the front of the stage to give us his opinions about Edward's court, the piano became instead the soundtrack to his bitter humour. As Richard returned to the party the music changed abruptly to an up-tempo jazz trumpet. This reflected the extent to which Bogdanov saw Edward's story as mainly a way to develop Richard, his character and

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<sup>69</sup> *The End Crowns All*, p. 90.

<sup>70</sup> *The End Crowns All*, p. 94.

his story. The scoring of the soundtrack around Richard's movements made it ambiguously his soundtrack more than Edward's, a music about his inner desires and about the conflict between two tempos, as well as the decadent and drunken victory party within which Edward was establishing his rule. This was a consistent ambiguity: when the camera flashed at the end of the production, the flash caught not only the royal family but Richard's psychotic smile, again turning around a feature of Edward's power to highlight the dangerous force which was emerging to destroy it. Jazz seemed to be an authentic soundtrack for the period of Edward's power but it was also an ironic and interesting choice in the light of Bogdanov's approach to culture and its voices. The music represented the appropriation of an oppressed voice by an increasingly remote aristocracy, who had taken the voice but denied the vocalist.

The ESC productions were notable for their timely critique of 1980s culture. However, they were also in many respects implicated within it. At this remove, it is hard to see the radical gestures made by the company as anything more than gestures. The cynicism of their *Richard III* perhaps pointed to the company's self-awareness of their failure to properly explore the alternative of a cultural autonomy born in the appropriation of culture and the recuperation of a lost, culturally authentic history and literature for the modern expression of cultural belonging. In his book, Bogdanov signalled the emerging cultures of Eastern Europe as one of his inspirations for the company's agenda. However, the cycle ended with a different image culled from Eastern Europe, of Richmond using television in order to exercise political control of culture and of public thought. The political control of the media was perhaps a reflection of the government's attempts to manipulate television and its relation of the present to the public. The company never repeated the success of *The Wars of the Roses* and has since scaled down its operations and put more of a focus on education. In its time, the ESC produced the definitive Shakespeare for the 1980s: post-modern in style, relying heavily on pastiche and clearly drawn images, drawn from a contemporary vocabulary. Bogdanov and Pennington published an outraged letter in their book from a lady who wrote to the Minister for Arts and Libraries (Richard Luce) appalled at the 'subversive and indecent ... obscene and degrading' performance of English history: 'I do believe Mrs. Thatcher's aim is to uphold our cultural values, and so I do hope that better control can be exercised over what is funded by taxpayer's money.'

**1988-1990: The RSC's *Henry VI* and *The Rise of Edward IV* (1988-9, dir. Adrian Noble)**

Against the narratives of power and authority in the 1980s, *The Plantagenets* seemed to many to be a repugnantly reactionary production, in which the RSC resituated itself firmly away from its radical past in order to establish its credentials as a right-wing, royalist institution.<sup>71</sup> For example, the manner in which Adrian Noble chose to end *The Plantagenets* has been criticised for its triumphal affirmation of right-wing politics. The production returned to the RSC's past by mixing the epic theatre of *The Wars of the Roses* with the romantic representation of English history - in lavish, period costumes, set amongst banners and flags - that was more typical of the 1950s Stratford and Old Vic productions. To many, it seemed as if Noble were reclaiming - and indeed, rewriting - the RSC's past by emptying Hall and Barton's works both of its politics and its modernity. As Russell Jackson points out, memories of the romanticised versions of English history in the 1950s are now regarded as traditional and authentic: by returning the RSC to this world, Noble ended the RSC's investment in politics and instead turned towards an exploration of tradition in terms of the RSC's own heritage.<sup>72</sup> A key moment in *The Plantagenets* was at the very end, when Richard (played by Anton Lesser) was defeated by Richmond (played by Simon Dormandy): the ghosts of the past emerged from the back of the stage as they fought and distracted Richard. Richmond seized his chance and plunged his sword into Richard's hunch, from which gushed blood and matter representing all the deformity and evil which Richard had brought to his society, 'the nation's sickness cured.'<sup>73</sup> Richard represented the egocentric, self-seeking individualism of the 1980s, his political ascendancy matching the social ascendancy of his philosophical offspring through the Thatcher years. However, like Cade in an earlier scene (cut from this production), this Richard is entitled to claim that it was no human force

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<sup>71</sup> My main source for the performance details of *The Plantagenets* has been video recordings archived by the Shakespeare Centre in Stratford. These are not good quality recordings, as they were made by a fixed-position ordinary video camera. However, the performance was a live one and probably represents a typical performance. It has been necessary even so, to supplement my study with photographs, prompt books, reviews and critical studies, which have been cited where appropriate.

<sup>72</sup> Russell Jackson, 'Shakespeare in Opposition: from the 1950s to the 1990s' in *Shakespeare: An Illustrated Stage History*, pp. 211-230, p. 213: "'Traditional' often indicates a vague sense of the Stratford or Old Vic stagings of the 1950s, rather than any vividly remembered experience of this supposedly authentic style.' (p. 213).

<sup>73</sup> Michael Ratcliffe, 'New Broom with a Noble Sweep' *The Observer* 30 October 1988.

conquered him - rather it was the pressure of tradition emerging as spectres on the battlefield which finally subjected him to history. Richard's ascent to power was represented by the destruction of tradition, embodied in the production by King Henry (played by Ralph Fiennes). Lesser explains that the key to his performance was locating Richard's fear of history, of both the past and the future:

The scene of the killing of Henry VI is a moment of truth for Richard. He listens to Henry going on at length about his past; it is when he turns to the future that Richard silences him. 'And if the rest be true which I have heard,/Thou camest ...' (v.vi.55). Richard decides he has had enough at the prospect of being told the significance of his own presence in the world. This is something that must not be uttered - like having the future read, even having one's fortune told. To know one's future destroys the sanctity of unknown destiny and for Richard (certainly the way I played him) his running condition depends upon experiencing the eternal now: every minute is fresh and full of possibilities. Prophecy always panics him - as with Queen Margaret in the next play. He suffers from the fear that someone who has vision, by uttering what that vision is, can make it happen - and of course, it does. Henry's switch from past to future triggers that reaction. Richard kills him and utters one of his most remarkable statements of self-awareness and of present-tense self-assertion: [here, Lesser quotes *Part 3*, v.vi.80-3] Richard's fear of the future, observed here and his fear of children, seen in his response to Edward's marriage, come together in the final scene of *Henry VI* when Edward has picked up his new baby. 'Young Ned' he calls him, and shows him to Richard. 'Ah lovely', is supposed to be his reaction, but it's a wonderful juxtaposition, because we know what is going on in him, that he knows that the little bundle, that little baby, focuses all Richard's fears, everything that could obstruct what he wants. And so to see him cooing over it, kissing it, is to be aware of the huge space between the public and the private Richard.<sup>74</sup>

This interpretation of Richard places him firmly within the 'now': his fear of the past proved justified, as it was the ghosts of the past that finally caused his death. Henry's world had been characterised by the duties and the spectacles of tradition and of a shared cultural identity founded upon the symbolic importance of the King. When Edward became king, the stage-world transformed from one dominated by the pageants of tradition to a stage dominated by the manifestations of Edward's own character: in particular, a giant sun hung over the stage emblematised Edward's political ascendancy. This was not power attained through tradition and heritage, but through ambition and power. When Richard became King, the sun was eclipsed,

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<sup>74</sup> Anton Lesser, 'Richard of Gloucester in *Henry VI* and *Richard III*' in *Players of Shakespeare 3*, edited by Smallwood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 140-157, p. 147.

shifting reality from the bright sun of York to the dark and twisted world of Richard's ego. After killing Richard, Richmond then ascended in triumph to the throne in a spectacular, medieval tableaux which returned the production to the world it had inaugurated, and then taken apart, in the first processional scene of *Henry VI*. 'As Richmond ... steps towards the throne, the cycle closes with majestic symmetry, triumphantly vindicating this cavalcade of carnage, genealogical vendetta, and grand dynastic designs.'<sup>75</sup>

Robert Shaughnessy was contemptuous of the 'braying triumphalism of the Conservative party conference'<sup>76</sup> of the last scene; Lyn Gardner despaired at it, as did Barbara Hodgdon. Robert Smallwood regretted the lack of radicalism (but could not find fault with Richmond, 'a genuinely courageous and politically blameless young man'<sup>77</sup> with god on his side). Noble had confirmed Alan Sinfield's analysis that it would be hard to make a 'positive' (i.e. progressive, not conservative) performance of the *Henry VI* plays<sup>78</sup>, by producing an event which 'was unashamedly patriotic and heroic.'<sup>79</sup> Rather than rejecting the values which Richard stood for, Richmond redeemed them, and reintegrated them into tradition and culture: the plagues and the violence of the previous acts now made sense as the painful but necessary transition from an old order to a new order, on the way encountering the limits and the passions of social experience at its most raw, peering through the gaps formed by a progressive social fragmentation to the dark, forbidding, supernatural world of the uncivilised human reality. This resolution spoke to the overall aim of the production: the idea of 'curing' the nation, of Richard as a 'sickness' and Noble's interesting statement that his overall memory of the production was one of 'peace.' The last scene seemed to suggest that the new creatures of capitalism (represented by Richard) only need to be cultured through institutions such as the RSC to restore order to a disordered society, 'in order to achieve a kind of cultural preservation and renewal.'<sup>80</sup> The production signalled a new negotiation with society, in which capitalism and tradition/theatre were resolved together: the conflict which Noble wished to resolve was, in this reading, the conflict

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<sup>75</sup> Peter Kemp, 'Strong ties of blood' *The Independent*, 3rd April 1989.

<sup>76</sup> *Representing Shakespeare*, p.187.

<sup>77</sup> This is from Smallwood's introduction to *Players of Shakespeare 3*, pp. 14-15.

<sup>78</sup> Alan Sinfield, 'History and Power' (programme notes for *The Plantagenets*, 1988).

<sup>79</sup> Hattaway, *The First Part*, p. 54.

<sup>80</sup> *The End Crowns All*, p.88.

between the 1980s entrepreneurial culture, which had rejected tradition, history and culture in the pursuit of money, and the RSC.

Noble had fashioned a work which did not politicise history as Hall and Barton had done, but rather mythologised it as a 'commemorative containment of English history as encoded in theatrical sign systems' which evoked the 'aura' of the 15th Century, rather than a direct representation of it which could be analysed.<sup>81</sup> The intervention of ghosts not only represented tradition reclaiming Richard's ego-centric universe, it also signalled the role of the supernatural in the production's interpretation of history. In direct contrast to the political theatres of Howell and Bogdanov, Noble's theatre included metaphysical realities as well as historical ones; it seized upon the presence of demons, witches, magic and prophecy in Shakespeare's plays and foregrounded them, to show that events in human history are shaped by wider metaphysical processes, defined here by what Jan Kott has called the last metaphysical absolute, History, and represented through an evocation of tradition which explicitly situated the RSC as a prime guardian of these forces. Where Howell and Bogdanov had explored the social and cultural dimensions of history, using the plays to explore class conflict, Noble instead asserted the value of order within a metaphysical order. In both Howell and Bogdanov, the witches scenes were shown to be artful pieces of theatre designed to deceive Eleanor: in Noble, however, both the Jourdain scene and Joan were unequivocally witches, and the magic that they practised had a real and demonic power. The other side of this was that Noble deleted many of the more political scenes of the *Henry VI* plays. Much of the commoners' sub-plot was dispensed with, including the Peter-Horner scene and the death of Suffolk at the hands of pirates - both of which draw attention to class struggle. More significantly, the character of Gloucester was downplayed considerably in favour of more attention on Winchester, so that spiritual issues were privileged over political ones. Gloucester's farewell to Eleanor was his final scene in the production and even this was buried in a huge composite scene which included the execution of Jourdain and the soliloquy that York gives before leaving for Ireland. The merging together of these different episodes deprived Gloucester's fall of a political interpretation and placed the emphasis on the dark and supernatural presence of evil working its way

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<sup>81</sup> *The End Crowns All*, p. 88.

through each event. The focus upon magic in history and the rejection of history meant that *The Plantagenets* was a very different play to either of its predecessors, which explored themes of spirituality and of magic, and showed that when the world is without this metaphysical context, human experience is essentially grotesque.

All of this took place within what Noble calls 'Shakespeare's 360 degree universe' by which he means a 'cosmos with an active and real demonology where this earth was an active battleground in the fight between good and evil'<sup>82</sup> rather than in any abstract idea of a 'grand mechanism.'<sup>83</sup> It is from this Manichaeic environment that the events and themes of the play were read. The mechanisms of power (Gloucester's fall, relations between lords and commoners etc.) were replaced with the metaphysics of power (good vs. evil etc.) which wholly reread the politics which remain in the adaptation so that, for example, the many political conspiracies were eroticised and located within the same world as the occultists, and the subtlety of York's political game was overridden by an unambiguously evil performance by David Calder.

In both the deviation from politics, and the use of myth, Noble's work in *The Plantagenets* looks back to the RSC of Peter Brook and it is this heritage - rather than that of Peter Hall - which Noble was interested in recovering for the RSC. A few years before, Noble paid homage to Brook with a production of *King Lear* (which, as we shall see, Noble recycled parts of for *The Plantagenets*) which looked back to Brook's 1963 production. Brook's *King Lear* is seen by many as an equally important production as *The Wars of the Roses*: it too focused upon a nation in civil war, but avoided political posturing in order to explore the relationship between Shakespeare's dramatic style and contemporary absurdist theatre. Brook showed an 'anguished disdain for history, politics and material reality' in his work; instead, Brook stressed the exploration of ritual and metaphysics in the theatre. Noble was later to pay homage to Brook again with a production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in 1994 which recycled Brook's landmark 1970 production. More significantly, *The Plantagenets*, which was in many respects Noble's 'war' production, copied Peter

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<sup>82</sup> Noble, *The Plantagenets*, p. xii.

<sup>83</sup> This is Jan Kott's phrase to describe the monolithic, abstract force of history that he reads into the history plays. See Kott's *Shakespeare our Contemporary* (London: Doubleday, 1965), particularly pp. 9-15.

Brook's improvised work about the Vietnam war, *U. S.*, by employing Charles Wood to prepare the script. (Coincidentally, Wood left both projects in somewhat mysterious circumstances).

The turn to Brook over Hall resituated the *Henry VI* plays away from their political performances to a performance which stressed instead psychological and metaphysical themes and explored the absurdity of modern life, in contrast to the absolutes of the past; however, in the performance of 'national' drama, these ideas were elevated to a national level, and mapped onto to a national psyche: in effect, the anxieties, fears and conflicts explored in the production were designed to have a national resonance. The influence of Brook could especially be felt in the Cade scenes, where absurd actions, grotesque stage pictures and a concentration upon the body and physical action overrode the political problems usually raised by the scenes. Here, Cade was simply part of a world that had already descended into existential absurdity. The grotesque theatre of *The Plantagenets* was its most distinctive feature, marking it out as different to Howell and Bogdanov in terms of its reading of the plays and in terms of the idea of theatre that it constructed.

The connections between *The Plantagenets* and the tradition within which it stands draws with it a perspective and an attitude towards drama and history which blocks the kind of analytic theatre which Bogdanov sought, and instead leads to an expressive form. Noble's ensemble methods, his characteristic interest in spectacle and design, and his deferral of artistry to actors and writers, all exhibit a pragmatic interest in the theatre in itself. Hugh Rorrison writes,

For him [Noble] the actors energise the stage space, they give shape to the words and are shaped by them, and it is the director's job to unlock their creativity. So he casts his plays with great care, always on his feet during rehearsals, like a rowing coach feeding in energy and coaxing further efforts from his performers. [...] His productions are often strikingly beautiful. They seem to start from an image, frequently derived from a hunch, which is translated in close collaboration with congenial designers, particularly Bob Crowley, into a visual framework for the play. The design incorporates the spirit, the moral overview, the 'dream' of the play.<sup>84</sup>

Noble's commentary on his own work support Rorrison's observations:

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<sup>84</sup> From David Pickering, ed, *International Dictionary of Theatre*, 3 vols (London and New York: St. James Press, 1996); vol. 3, p. 559.



I love visually exciting theatre just as much as textually stimulating theatre, and this has naturally shaped my work. For *The Plantagenets* Bob [Crowley] and I spent a lot of time thinking about how to create a world in which the lines can really live and make sense. We wanted a very clear and striking emblematic style.<sup>85</sup>

The emphasis was continually on how to use the acting company as a tool of narrative, how to create vivid, poetic images with human bodies, rather than scenery.<sup>86</sup>

Noble's disabuses us of the naturalism of scenic theatre and replaces it with a model which divides theatre into design and acting: however, even the actors are part of the design, they are a 'tool of narrative', their bodies are used to 'create vivid, poetic images', they 'energise the stage space' and 'they give shape to the words and are shaped by them'. In Bogdanov's theatre, design was another tool, another character in the play, which could be serviced to make political points about the use and abuse of history: for Noble, the design is the theatre, the meta-narrative or 'moral overview' missing from his use of history. Through the design, the discontinuities and ambiguities of the text are recuperated to an overall unity, to the 'dream' of the play which exists in circular, 'symmetrical' metaphysical world, rather than the linear world of historical events.<sup>87</sup>

Brook's *King Lear* was a 'determined realisation' of a chapter in Jan Kott's influential book *Shakespeare our Contemporary* called '*King Lear*, or Endgame': Noble also paid attention to this chapter in his production of *King Lear*, and used it once more for *The Plantagenets*. This is interesting, because another chapter in Kott's book, 'Kings', has underpinned many political interpretations of the *Henry VI* plays in the theatre. Most famously, Hall read the book in manuscript on the way to rehearsals for *The Wars of the Roses*; Hands and Bogdanov used it too, and all three directors seized in particular on Kott's idea of a 'grand mechanism', which views history as an abstract force of ambition and the pursuit of power in which human subjects are ground down, expressing an essentially cynical view of history's remorseless and destructive processes. According to Hayden White, Kott's sense of history as a burden on human

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<sup>85</sup> This is from 'Shakespeare on the War-Path'.

<sup>86</sup> Noble, *The Plantagenets*, p. xiii.

<sup>87</sup> Noble tells us that his ambition to stage the *Henry VI* plays began with a design project he worked on at college (*The Plantagenets*, p. vii).

experience derives from the modernist sense that the First World War represented the failure of history: in Valery's words, 'History will justify anything' or in Joyce's, 'History is the 'nightmare' from which western man must awake.'<sup>88</sup> Peter Hall and Michael Bogdanov both approached history in this way, using Kott's ideas to express their own sense of hostility towards history and towards forms of authority which used history and tradition to legitimate themselves.<sup>89</sup> However, by turning to the chapter on *King Lear*, Noble found a very different way of approaching history, in which tragedy and the grotesque are posited into relation to history as the last metaphysical absolute. *The Plantagenets* demonstrated the company's reverence towards history and tradition, drawing upon and recycling its own history and inscribing new, conservative meanings upon them. Rather than stage history as an abstract, monolithic and destructive force as his predecessors had done, Noble and his company explored the civil wars as a world which was without history, in which personal ambition and self-satisfaction had overtaken the demands of tradition and the lessons of history. This too derived its conceptual frame from Kott. In the chapter '*King Lear*, or Endgame', Kott argues that History is the last great 'absolute' in which experience can be said to be tragic; without History the tragic experience becomes, instead, grotesque. Tragedy, argues Kott, is based upon a realisation of the 'absolute' by which he means an unnegotiable and metaphysical figure of authority: God, Nature, or, finally, History. History is the last absolute, writes Kott, it is the last tragic theatre:

On the other side, opposed to this arrangement, there was always man. If Nature was absolute, man was unnatural. If man was natural, the absolute was represented by Grace, without which there was no salvation. In the world of the grotesque, downfall cannot be justified by, or blamed on, the absolute. The absolute is not endowed with any ultimate reasons; it is stronger, and that is all. The absolute is absurd. Maybe that is why the grotesque often makes use of the concept of a mechanism which has been put in motion and cannot be stopped. Various kinds of impersonal and hostile mechanisms have taken the place of God, Nature and History, found in old tragedy. The notion of an absurd mechanism is probably the last metaphysical concept remaining in modern grotesque. But this

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<sup>88</sup> Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), pp. 35-39.

<sup>89</sup> Peter Hall famously read a manuscript copy during rehearsals for *The Wars of the Roses* (although the book's influence on that production was less than is sometimes supposed); Michael Bogdanov talks of the 'great staircase of power' several times in relation to his history play sequence, which is a reference to the chapter 'Kings' which opens the book.

absurd mechanism is not transcendental any more in relation to man, or at any rate to mankind. It is a trap set by man himself into which he has fallen.<sup>90</sup>

The idea of an absurd mechanism in perpetual motion, which is rendered absurd by the collapse in authority of the absolute, was manifested in *The Plantagenets* in its increasingly absurd presentation of violence. *The Rise of Edward IV* in particular was little more than a series of violent episodes which were notable both for their graphic depiction of violence and for their increasing comic absurdity, adding in performance more violence than Shakespeare scripts, in turn undercutting their tragic seriousness.

Kott sees *Lear* as caught between tragedy and the grotesque, between a world which is transcendental and metaphysical and therefore makes Lear's experience tragic, and a world which is immanent and existential and therefore makes what happens to Lear grotesque and absurd. Kott nominates the tragic world the 'theatre of priests' and the absurd world the 'theatre of clowns':

The world of tragedy and the world of grotesque have a similar structure. Grotesque takes over the themes of tragedy and poses the same fundamental questions. Only its answers are different. This dispute about the tragic and grotesque interpretation of human fate reflects the everlasting conflict of two philosophies and two ways of thinking; of two opposing attitudes defined by the Polish philosopher Leszek Kolakowski as the irreconcilable antagonism between the priest and the clown. Between tragedy and grotesque there is the same conflict for or against such notions as eschatology, belief in the absolute, hope for the ultimate solution of the contradiction between moral order and everyday practice. Tragedy is the theatre of priests, grotesque is the theatre of clowns.

Kott goes on to develop this point by describing the relationship between the two types of theatres as a conflict, so that he is not simply putting one historical paradigm against another, but identifying a tension between the two in modern Shakespeare performance which, in Kott's argument, erupts at special moments of crisis:

This conflict between two philosophies and two types of theatre becomes particularly acute in times of great upheaval. When established values have been

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<sup>90</sup> *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, p. 105.

overthrown, and there is no appeal to God, Nature, or History from the tortures inflicted by the cruel world, the clown becomes the central figure in the theatre.<sup>91</sup>

In terms of *Lear*, the crisis of monarchy turns the tragic hero into a clown and it is this transition at the centre of the theatre that Kott identifies as grotesque. The structure suggested by Kott, of the theatre of priests and the theatre of clowns, resonated through *The Plantagenets*. The conflict was most perfectly realised at the end of *The Rise of Edward IV*, when Henry, in white robes, faced a clownish Richard. In Kott's terms, Henry was a priest figure, and occupied a theatre which retained a sense of the absolute and of tragic experience. This went beyond Henry's own religious nature, as it defined the spectacular, order and processional world of tradition and history which Henry was the centre of. Richard, on the other hand, was a maniacal, subversive clown, who rejected all of the forms of power which Henry represented. Henry embodied the hope for eventual, ultimate resolution, of the kind which Richmond attains in *The Plantagenets* final restoration of order. Richard denied such solutions and denied both eschatology and teleological narratives.

Henry (a priest figure) and Richard (a clown figure) represented the dichotomy suggested by Kott: if we follow through Kott's reading, then Noble's interpretation of the plays becomes clearer. The collapse of tradition - of the world that Henry embodied, including both a sense of the past and a sensitivity towards the future - gave rise to, first of all, the invasion of demonic influences, then the manic, clownish Cade scenes, and finally the tyranny of Richard. The demons of *Henry VI* were Joan and Jourdain and Noble drew attention to their importance by making their executions climatic moments in the performance which visually rhymed with each other. Cade and Richard represented human versions of the same forces: only, without the absolute of History to interpret events, the tragic theatre of *Henry VI* became instead the grotesque theatre of *The Rise of Edward IV*. The performance seemed to be directed at the late 1980s culture of entrepreneurism and the rejection of tradition: it seemed to say that, without tradition, without the RSC, ambition and individualism made life grotesque and absurd.

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<sup>91</sup> Both quotes are from *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, pp. 111-112.

As an approach to Shakespearcan history and to the 1980s, *The Plantagenets*' metaphysical approach to history shaped both the performance's response to the events within the plays, and also to the contemporary events which the production made connections with. As an epic, national drama, *The Plantagenets* performed the events of the 1980s in an epic panorama: however, whereas Bogdanov and Howell had drawn attention to the politics of cultural appropriation and the continuing realities of class struggle in a supposedly free market society, *The Plantagenets* brought the 1980s into a universalising discourse in which political positions were reread as moral positions, in which the question of an essential reality, an essential national identity, were explored and endorsed. However, there was a tension within the performance between this tendency to universalise history and between a profound performance of anxiety about social change: the grotesque theatre of Cade and the demonic magic of Joan expressed deep anxieties and fears about change and about the role of tradition, culture or even national identity in the deregulated world of the 1980s; if tradition reclaimed and renewed this world at the end of the cycle, it seemed more a performance of hope than reality.

A helpful concept here is 'vertical time', a term used by the American director Joseph Chaikin to describe the way that 'myth' apprehends and communicates historical events, as against the 'horizontal time' of chronicle history. Blumenthal explains:

Chaikin wanted to explore connections over 'vertical time', links with mythic roots, rather than horizontal, linear history. He hoped to discover forms that would express both the deepest, most private areas of experience and the external public experience that communities share.<sup>92</sup>

'Horizontal time' corresponds to the linear events and narrative of history which is placed within and across the field of 'vertical time': vertical time universalises the events of horizontal time, enunciating them within a larger structure of meaning and communication (myth). Myth, metaphysics, or 'vertical time', is another way of approaching human events, which places them within a framework or 'moral overview' through which they can express the relation between inner and outer experiences, and affirm the presence of

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<sup>92</sup> Blumenthal, *Joseph Chaikin*, pp. 107-8.

spiritual and unconscious experiences (desire, violence, pain etc.) which surround and penetrate history. Chaikin considered mythology to be 'personifications of states of mind and projections of fear and wishes.'<sup>93</sup> In other words, Chaikin reached through history, by expressing it symbolically and mythically, in order to explore the universal forces, within and without, which shape and condition 'horizontal time.' The central image of *The Plantagenets* embodied 'vertical time.' This was a set device in which a throne sat upon a prison of equal dimensions: '[t]he central device is a Kottian throne, towering grandly into the "flies," but perched on a prison cage', and 'a wooden latticed throne, furnished with a heaven-aspiring back tall enough to tower into the flies [stood] upon a prison cage that was thrust up from a central stage trap.'<sup>94</sup> It would be easy to misread this as a political statement about power and violence, as the throne rests upon the violent suppression of a competing claimant (Mortimer in *Henry VI*, Henry in *The Rise of Edward IV*), so that a metaphysical display hides a political reality. However, the point of the image was not that the two objects were connected with each other, but that they sped away from each other: the throne aspired to the grandeur of the heavens, disappearing out of the audience's view, whilst the prison sunk into the abysmal depths of hell. Between them, a moral universe was charted: the polarities of good and evil, of spirituality and violence, were marked. This was Shakespeare's circular '360 degree' cosmos. It was here, in this image, that the 'dream' of the play, its 'moral overview' was located. The action of the characters proceeded from its axis, on a linear plane of 'horizontal time', but the throne-prison was a reminder of the metaphysical circle which encompasses and universalised those events, so that an 1980s audience could discern lessons and echoes of their own experience in the distant crisis of the fifteenth century. The throne-prison was a vertical line drawn through the horizontal line of historical narrative.

Noble did not consider that *The Plantagenets* supported a single idea of history in the way that *The Wars of the Roses* had, and defended this judgement by reference to the plays themselves. However, *The Plantagenets'* roots in holy theatre do support a very specific sense of history, even if it is a negative one,

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<sup>93</sup> Joseph Chaikin, *The Presence of the Actor* (New York: Atheneum, 1972), p. 33. Chaikin is in fact paraphrasing (and endorsing) the views of Joseph Campbell, who goes on to describe 'religious stories as poems using symbols', a phrase which echoes Noble's desire to use actors to create 'vivid, poetic images.'

<sup>94</sup> The first quote is from a review in *The Listener*, 3 November 1988.; the second is from Hattaway, *The First Part*, p. 54.

in that Joseph Chaikin's 'vertical time' presupposes a concept of 'horizontal time.' Of course, Noble is not here addressing history as a philosophic concept, but as an interpretative object, as if to say, 'we do not subscribe to a particular version of events, we stage both France and England's side of the story, all history is subjective, we refrain from political judgements of events, we stand away from history.' In place of politics, Noble attempts to reach two metaphysical realities: the transcendent world of good and evil, and the immanent world of spirituality and desire. The appeal to vertical time is in itself a political gesture, designed to universalise historical events such as the Falklands, social fragmentation and the rise of Thatcherism in terms of enduring, perpetual struggles between good and evil, order and disorder and so on, thereby emptying the historical events of their specific force, and reinforcing a conservative agenda, which blinds us to change, and presents historical forces as both immutable and beyond analysis.

Rather than consider politics in itself, Noble turned to concepts such as futurority, healing and race myths which underline his debt to Brook. The interest in the future reflects Noble's interest in Shakespeare as a young writer, and the company as a young company, seeking the regeneration of the RSC through a staging of futures:

The revolution and counter-revolution which run through the plays give them a tremendous rhythm of change and regeneration, which makes them so exhilarating. They basically revolve around the future - what sort of future the characters want to build - so there is a strong feeling of motion and forward energy throughout.<sup>95</sup>

The future, rather than the past, points towards a strange kind of utopianism emerging through Noble's thoughts. Michael Billington was struck by this feature, commenting that 'I never noticed before how much these plays are about prophesy.'<sup>96</sup> The attainment of a future is idealist, and characteristic of Noble's focus on spirituality, his interest in peace and liberal critiques of war, and his references to healing and renewal: '[t]his sense of healing, of renewal, is perhaps my lasting memory of *The Plantagenets*, and perhaps the strongest "message" of the tetralogy - an anguished cry for peace.'<sup>97</sup> Or put simply, Noble's work is

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<sup>95</sup> This is from Romain, 'Shakespeare on the War-Path.'

<sup>96</sup> Michael Billington, 'Bloodstains over Eden', *The Guardian*, 24th October 1988.

<sup>97</sup> Noble, *The Plantagenets*, p. xv.

intended to be cathartic, and this places it squarely in the tradition of holy theatre. In “‘Holy Theatre’ and Catharsis’, Philip Auslander explicates the therapeutic catharsis of holy theatre, ‘designed to accomplish spiritual renewal by unmasking repressed psychic materials’<sup>98</sup>. Remapped onto history and society, it was just such a renewal that *The Plantagenets* was aimed at stimulating, through a revelation of the metaphysical forces which drove social fragmentation in the 1980s, and the offering of culture and cultural institutions as the salve with which to heal the wounds of a fractured society.

## II

The main themes of the performance were established in the funeral of Henry V, which was staged as an elaborate national spectacle. Noble made a social point about the nature of such spectacles by crowding the commoners into the rear of the stage as an onstage audience to the main action: the real RST audience was, in effect, looking at a representation of itself. Here, Noble recycled an idea from his production of *King Lear*, which had also begun with an onstage audience watching Lear carve up the nation - making the point that civil war begins with a political distinction between the people and an autocratic regime. The point then was that *King Lear* was being directed at the national experience of ordinary people, as Noble imagined his audience to be, during the political moves of the Falklands Crisis. In *The Plantagenets*, Noble once again included the audience within the representational frame of the drama. In effect, Noble was restating the relationship between theatre and audience which he envisaged. However, there was a crucial difference in this production, in which the onstage audience actually intervened in the performance of national identity which it was watching: when the messenger entered with news of the losses in France, the commoners actually crossed the boundaries, disrupting the formal patterning of the ceremony. Whereas *King Lear* had posited a relationship between audience, theatre and power, this production went further and included audiences in the action of the play as a destabilising and disruptive force that would eventually lead to the Cade scenes. One way to read this could be that Noble was representing the rising influence of popular opinion, as expressed in the tabloid newspapers, upon current affairs, which had subverted

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<sup>98</sup> Auslander, “‘Holy Theatre’ and Catharsis’, *Theatre Research International* vol. 9, no. 1 (Spring 1984), pp. 17-29, p. 18.



traditional hierarchies and given rise to the self-seeking entrepreneurs of the late 1980s. However, it was also a more direct attempt to include the audience in its own, national history. To underline the point, the funeral scene itself was turned into a scene based upon the crowds at the back: following the messenger's entrance, the funeral crowd became an army marching to France, with the second messenger's speech being given to the army's captain.

Noble approached the *Henry VI* plays not as political plays - as Hall and Bogdanov had done - but as anti-war plays. Noble had approached warfare, with the Falklands in mind, in productions of *Henry V* and *King Lear* earlier in the 1980s, so it was consistent with his artistic 'modus operandi' that he should approach Shakespeare's early history plays as 'anti-war plays' rather than 'political theatre'. Noble told the Observer in 1989 that the plays 'are a powerful indictment of war: not just the futility of war, but also the cant - the words we use and the flags we fly to do our fellow creatures down.'<sup>99</sup> A press statement: called the cycle one of 'the greatest military parables ever written.'<sup>100</sup> [8-9] The experience of war - for a nation and for the soldiers who fight it - was the starting point for the company's thinking about the production. The rest of the production followed from a preoccupation with the psychology and the 'spirituality' of war: Noble asked, 'How much responsibility is there to the spiritual life in the midst of war? All three brothers, Edward, Clarence and Richard, are racked with guilt - they die in torment. The tetralogy deals with a spiritual as well as a political world. It charts the complete transformation of civilisation, how values get corrupted and changed; how a great hope becomes a terrifying club to beat people with; how the sun of York becomes the long night of Richard.' [GL-10] Rehearsals (which began before the script had been finalised) were at first little more than a workshop on battle scenes which, writes Noble, 'led directly to much of the final physical manifestation of the productions.'<sup>101</sup> War was critiqued not just for its violence and waste, but for the way that representations of national identity are used in war; national identity was not attacked in itself, but the performance highlighted the problems involved when national identity is founded upon an expression of violence. In *Henry V* Noble had explored the negative

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<sup>99</sup> This is from Romain, 'Shakespeare on the War-Path.'

<sup>100</sup> Robert Gore-Langton refers to this in 'The Plantagenets', p. 8-9.

<sup>101</sup> Noble, *The Plantagenets*, p. xiii. This included a 'drill' outside the RST.

effects of war, being particularly critical of the way that national identity is constructed through violence and heroic ideologies which do not reflect the 'reality' of the battlefield. Noble's battlefields in *Henry V* and *Henry VI* were conceived of as 'unreal' places, in the sense that they opened up mental and ideological spaces beyond the values and beliefs of the soldiers who fought on them. In *Henry VI*, the battles mixed with the supernatural and fearful unrealities which the soldiers encountered and struggled to overcome. These demons, Noble stressed, were constructed by the soldiers' themselves. For example, Joan was to be staged in an even-handed way, a devil to the English and a saint to the French, an approach which Noble says focuses upon

the profound understanding Shakespeare had of soldiers and their need to re-shape the enemy into something worthy of slaughter, of their need of rhetoric to give others - but mostly to give themselves - courage; of their heroism and of their degradation. (Introduction to *The Plantagenets*, p. xi)

This early interest in war and the soldier also led to the contracting of the playwright Charles Wood to work on an early version of the script: in Noble's own words, Wood is 'the greatest writer I know of, second to Shakespeare, on soldiers' (*P&P*, 9). Wood's track record in military drama seems to have been his main qualification. Geoffrey Reeves describes Wood as 'pro-soldier but anti-war', a dualism which perfectly fits Noble's own pacifist conservatism.<sup>102</sup>

The negative terrain of the battlefield was imbued with the unreality of two worlds meeting, fighting on boundaries which were territorial and at the same time representative boundaries of belief, ideology and identity. That England and France represented not just different armies, but moral universes was indicated by the way that the company differentiated between the two by using the metaphor of a cathedral. Noble explains that 'each section had its own working title ... "The Cathedral of England"; "Cathedral Garden of France"; and "the Hunt".'<sup>103</sup> Cathedrals were both the supreme expression of

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<sup>102</sup> This is from 'Tumbledown (Charles Wood) and *The Falklands Play* (Ian Curteis): The Falklands Faction' in *British Television Drama in the 1980s*, edited by Brandt, pp. 140-161, p. 156.

<sup>103</sup> Noble, *The Plantagenets*, p. xiv. Of course, this information would not have been available to Stratford audiences, although the script was published to coincide with the transfer to London in 1989. Nevertheless, it is an important point to make, because it helps us to understand the thinking behind the performance.

medieval culture and the representation of entire universe: the beliefs, myths, and ambitions of a whole culture universalised in the structures of the church. Perhaps Noble wished to draw comparisons between the role that Cathedrals played in medieval culture with cultural institutions such as the RSC in this culture: nevertheless, the Cathedral metaphor makes plain that the production saw the war between England and France as a clash of realities, conducted upon an ambiguous territory which belongs to neither universe. This unreality emerged in the darkness of the battlefield, giving the impression that the 'Cathedral of France' was a collapsed cosmos, a nether reality beyond which difference and identity ceased to be meaningful. The unreality of the battlefield was indicative of the way that France was used as an expression of the limits of identity; a limit which, with its constant and necessary threat of fracture at its edge, receded into the Cathedral of England, reducing its splendid constellations of flags and costumes to the same blank space first staged here as an utter exteriority.

This battlefield was not just an area of human contestation: it was also a place where 'vertical time' intersected with 'horizontal time', where demons and witches permeated and influenced the course of the battle. The scenes dramatised fear - the English fear of what is different but what is also desirable. Bob Crowley chose to represent these ideas by having the stage almost entirely dark for most the act, using lighting and noise to create an atmosphere of threat and of fear. The stage was raked and lights were shone from beneath it and into a thick mist, so that light appeared to curl up into the playing area - an effect which one reviewer described as representing the 'crust of hell', signifying a place where reality is fissured and borders on the supernatural world of spirits and demons. At the rear of the stage, large gold thunder sheets were hung from gold battlements on the balcony. The thunder sheets could be shaken to make genuinely frightening noises, adding to the English sense of supernatural presence when they encounter the French. The ensemble of techniques was designed to create an appropriately demonic stage for the battlefield, a terrain not defined by any nation but fought over and contested by the worlds of England and France.

The two worlds which collided were represented in the two protagonists of the war, Talbot and Joan, who were fielded by Noble as symbols of the ethnic differences between the two nations. Because of this they also came to be the symbolic representatives of the nation that they were the generals of,

embodying its values and its character. Joan was a warrior, who combined physical aggressiveness with sexual power, whilst Talbot was presented as her male counterpart, aggressive but isolated and afraid. Talbot was a stocky, bullish figure, wearing animal skins and bearing a huge, heavy broadsword on his shoulders. Talbot was very much a soldier: he was not a tactician but a physical fighter and his whole performance was designed to stress Talbot's physicality. In his dual with Joan, Talbot roared and bullied his opponent, using expressions of physical strength, in low-slung movements and rages, as a way of intimidating Joan, and raising the morale of his own men. Talbot symbolised masculine aggressiveness, his costume, his speech and his body movements were all choreographed to represent a man whose masculinity overflowed itself: the size of his body suggested a figure who is more than himself. Likewise, Julia Ford's Joan was very much the figure of her nation, as her first appearance as a woman in a soldiers' uniform realised the implicit femininity of the French generals. In contrast, Joan's physical power was based upon her powers of seduction, allurements, and physical strength. The male-English fear of her, and their desire to dominate her, was translated by Joan into a dangerous and problematic counter-reading of the soldier. Her two costumes, a soldiers' uniform and her underclothes, represented the dualism of fear and desire which Joan's martial sexuality generated in her enemies.

Though Joan's magic was ambiguous it was clear from the beginning that the English fear of her, at least at the level of the soldier, was genuine. When Talbot and Salisbury heard the rumble of the thunder sheets and Joan's disembodied voice calling to the French they cowered in a corner of the stage. Talbot said, 'What stir is this? What tumult in the heavens?', to which Salisbury hazarded, 'A holy prophets new risen up.' When they returned from the second wave of the battle, and their first, shocking encounter with Joan, the company's editing drew attention to the following lines, which were integrated within the narrative of Joan's rise:

TALBOT: What chance is this that suddenly hath cross'd us?  
 Where is my strength, my valour and my force?  
 Our English troops retires, I cannot stay them;  
 A woman clad in armour chaseth them.

WATKINS: A witch! A witch.

TALBOT: A witch by fear, not force, drives back our troops.  
 My thoughts are whirled like a potter's wheel;  
 I know not where I am, nor what I do. (*The Plantagenets*, p.23.)

The fear of Joan, the conviction that she was a witch, was a part of the way that the soldiers confronted and apprehended the French army and its new general as both different and - for that very reason - threatening. Talbot's last line quoted, 'I know not where I am, nor what I do', was particularly resonant with the dark, featureless stage they were delivered on: the world of France, and of war, had been destabilised and cracked. With Joan, the world of France was made unreal and frightening.

The importance of Joan in the production was that she inculcated both fear (as a witch) and desire (as a woman) in the English, thereby criticising the limits of national identity. This reading extended to the rest of the French nation and the way that the performance manipulated the audience's responses to the French. Noble insisted upon the 'otherness' of France, which he read as its richness, its sensuousness, its femininity, its desirability. Even in early interviews, prior to the drastic changes made during rehearsals to the script, Noble was keen to stress the riches and the desirability of France, telling *Plays and Players*, 'I wanted to make France somewhere really worth having: a very rich place whose loss is a massive loss of power, status and money to the English.'<sup>104</sup> By the time of the production, this idea has developed to include the idea of France as England's 'other', as Noble outlines in his introduction to the script: '[w]e were fascinated by France and determined that it should be a colony worth fighting for and keeping, not just for its wealth but for its culture, its "otherness."<sup>105</sup> The world of France was defined by its sensuousness, its wealth and its ethnicity, drawing a racial line between the two nations, and then defining the English against them.<sup>106</sup> The 'otherness' of France was expressed in a seductive femininity in its performance,

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<sup>104</sup> This is quoted from an interview Noble gave to Robert Gore-Langton in *The Plantagenets*, p. 10.

<sup>105</sup> Noble, *The Plantagenets*, p. xii.

<sup>106</sup> The language that Noble uses has the ring of British imperialism, 'a colony worth fighting for', 'a very rich place whose loss is a massive loss of power, status and money to the English', whilst Noble's fascination with this 'very rich place', its 'otherness', locates the world as a source of desire and an object of negation, which holds the possibility of transgression. This has echoes of British rule in India, and on one level the loss of France maintains the post-war narrative of imperial decline. It is also a veiled reference to the Falklands, the most obvious association an audience is likely to make in 1988, and in some respects, Noble's strategic inflation of the importance of France into 'a colony worth fighting for and keeping' is reminiscent of the British Government's own strategy towards the Falklands, which was transformed from a distant island into a crucial theatre for national survival.

which was then demonised by the English. The French nation was constructed by the English as feminine, at turns demonic and attractive, threatening and alluring, so that all the exchanges, whether they be the violent exchanges of battle or the romantic comedy of Margaret and Suffolk, were charged with a dangerous eroticism. Consequently, Joan, and later Margaret, became the figures, both of the French nation, whose ethnicity they translated into gender difference, and of the more general sense of negation and the lure of the 'other' through which personal and national identity was explored in the subsequent events of the production. What we find in these scenes was a double expression of otherness which combines, in the figure of Joan and particularly in her execution, the wider processes of national identification with forces which are not usually regarded as historic, namely desire, sexuality, and impotency. The presence of the supernatural was generated by the minds of the soldiers of both armies through fear and desire in relation to the 'other' that they were employed both to brutalise and take possession of.

The 'otherness' of France was realised in a sumptuous staging of the French scenes; the French court was presented as a golden, spectacular world, in contrast to the traditionalist austerity of the English court. Whereas the English displayed themselves through national ceremonial events such as funerals and coronations, the French began with scenes which were rich in display and excess. In the first such scene, the audience was confronted with three soldiers, who were dressed in glittering gold armour and riding golden hobby horses - this followed an interpolated scene showing the rugged and dirty English army on its way to the wars. Behind the French generals, the stage was black, and this created an effect that one reviewer described as 'like jewels on black velvet.'<sup>107</sup> The French were seductive and confrontational, and they faced the audience as if it were the English army - this was not just a confrontation of armies, then, but of different representational worlds. At the end of the scene, the French appeared to charge into the audience, so that the theatre of the French was not only desirable and rich, but also dangerous and threatening.

The potency which Noble brought to their portrayal lent a sense of danger and of a martial eroticism which both underlined the failure and desires of the English, and of Joan's role as the hero of the

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<sup>107</sup> This is from 'New Broom with a Noble Sweep.'

nation. The stage which upon which Joan first appeared was a lavish and spectacular one. The French court was sumptuous and golden, expressing the wealth and the passion of the race. The king was heralded by large silk banners which were waved rhythmically either side of him as he moved forward with his commanders, who were all dressed in gold armour. The excess of gold, the sense of the French overflowing themselves, was caught in the flowing rhythm of the banners: the whole ensemble was a striking contrast to the processional world of the English. This world had more of the taste of carnival and celebration, even though they were entering from a disastrous battle. The Dauphin was disguised as one of the banner wavers and when he was alone with Joan, he took off his disguise to reveal the gold armour beneath. This was the first in a series of unveilings with a distinctly erotic tone to them. Later, Joan was discovered in her night-clothes and stripped on the stake, following which Suffolk tore away a peasants' cloak to discover Margaret dressed in a rich, olive green dress. This series of unveilings, associated solely with the French women Joan and Margaret stood both for duplicity and for the desirable prize which lies within, waiting to be discovered. The ability to discover is a power, a power which Joan has over the Dauphin and Burgundy, and the English have over Joan and Margaret. As the distribution of gender implies, the first half of *Henry VI* had sexual connotations beyond the eroticism of discovery: in particular, when the soldiers stripped Joan, their brutality was heightened by the implied possibility of rape. The fight with the Dauphin was a genuine physical conquest. It began with swords but quickly became a fist-fight, so that Joan won the fight through physical strength, aggression and passion. The characters onstage were completely beguiled by her, but the audience had already anticipated a female hero by reading the strong overtones of femininity, of excess and sensuousness, in the construction of the French world. Departing from stage tradition, Joan's presence did not send up the Dauphin's pompous Mars posturing, but reinforced and physically displayed the distinctive ethnicity of their military sensibility.

The staging of the French in this way was designed to activate responses in the audience that placed them in relation to that world, to feel the same emotions of fear and desire which the onstage English also felt. As Hodgdon noticed, the audience were in every sense constructed as English: this was a national performance, in which the audience were scripted within the action, constructed as part of the English army looking out onto the boundaries of national reality. The first half of *Henry VI* built to a climax following

Henry's French coronation, with Talbot and his men waiting in the trenches for the ensuing slaughter.<sup>108</sup> Tension was constructed through a merging of scenes, so that, at one point, four scenes were simultaneously available to the audience: Talbot in the trenches, York on the right of the stage, Somerset on the left, and in between, massed at the back, the French army. The tension was all the more powerful for the position of the audience, which sat behind Talbot and his men, looking out into the dark battlefield. As the lights changed from York to Somerset, they briefly illuminated the gold armour of the French soldiers at the back of the stage: the brevity of the moment added to its threat, and gave the impression of a huge army, dwarfing the pitifully small band of men in the trench. As the action moved from scene to scene, the glances became more substantial, the sense of impending disaster more and more palpable. The overall effect of these devices was that the audience felt as if it is in the trenches, as if it were also about to be rushed by a powerful foreign army. The use of the audience here is an interesting contrast to both Bogdanov and Howell's productions. Bogdanov's theatre had paid no attention to the audience: even in soliloquies, characters addressed themselves rather than the audience, so that the audience was invited in as critical observers of the processes of culture and history. In Howell's productions, television audiences were acknowledged as cavedroppers. Noble acknowledged his audience and made them a part of the play, manipulating their fears and activating their desires.

The final events of the French war staged the culmination of the contrasting narratives of the French fear of Talbot and the English fear of Joan, but both were displaced by other events, by young Talbot's death and by Suffolk's discovery of Margaret, which endeavoured to indicate the extent to which the myth and ideology of the military tragically slips into the domestic - so that 'national' events were reduced to the tragic experience of individuals and their relationships. The battle (theatrically speaking) was an anti-climax. The English charged desperately into the French army, and suddenly, for the first time in the production, the battlefield was filled with light. The different events of the battle were staged together, so that the stage represented a multitude of different locations simultaneously. The audience was

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<sup>108</sup> The 'trench' was the same space that Henry V's coffin was lowered into, so the audience were entitled to make a connection between the two events. Both centred upon the image of the warrior, of Henry and his trophies, Talbot and his men: if read this way, the entrance of Young Talbot was an ironic image of Henry VI's abject accession.



given a god's eye view of the events, able to see juxtapositions of actions, and the whole panorama of the battle which, though the stage was lit, the surrounding walls are not, given the impression of the battle suspended on a level plane in space, the radius of the cosmos. Talbot was killed in a manner which Joan's death would later recall: he was pinned by a circle of spears and lifted up by the French soldiers before being allowed to drop. The French approached him with apprehension, and were stunned when he was finally dead. However, Talbot's death had a secondary place to young Talbot's, whose tragedy and pain was so intense that it literally interrupted history. Young Talbot was caught from behind by a soldier, and another soldier drew a knife across his throat. However, as the knife was pressed against his throat, the stage froze for a few moments, presenting the audience with a still tableaux of the battle. Then Talbot cried out and started to move towards his son in slow motion, but the action started again before he reached him, and young Talbot was killed. The scene expressed the urgency of tragic pain, and its transcendence of history: Talbot was able to break through the cosmological pause, the interior drama being privileged over the historical narrative. When the French come for Talbot, the story had already moved on from 'Talbot and Joan' to 'Talbot and Young Talbot'. At this point, the whole tone of the battle and the battle narrative changed register, from the nominal external drama of war to the internal drama of guilt and desire which wracked Talbot. In effect, history had been decentred by this act of violence, which foreshadowed the grotesque theatre of Joan's execution.

Having dispatched Talbot, the French left the stage, but returned pursued by the forces of York and Somerset: as they ran back across the field, the Dauphin savagely pushed Joan into the middle of the corpses, abandoning her. Significantly, Joan's 'demons' were the English soldiers, including Talbot, who stirred to life at her incantation. Since her power resided in the fear she was able to inspire in the English, this conceit worked, especially when the living English soldiers sprung out of the darkness and entrapped Joan in a net. The beast finally netted, the soldiers were able to release all the violence and desire which their fear had generated and repressed. As Shakespeare's wrote the scene, the trial emphasised Joan's defence of herself and her use of her body to regain control; however, *The Plantagenets* made the scene an exercise in national spectacle, as Joan's bound and silenced body was made into a grotesque display of English power and its triumph over France - soldiers jeered and joked at her, eating a banquet whilst her

corpse burned. The festive atmosphere of the scene was apparent in a food table which was laid out beneath the stake; this created the idea of a cannibalistic displacement of Joan's consumption by the fire and registered the grotesque nature of the scene. Joan was placed on the 'stake': originally, this was actually Mortimer's cell but this was later performances used scaling ladders to raise Joan high above the stage, to emphasise that her demonisation was a public spectacle which dominated the stage.<sup>109</sup> Before this, the soldiers had stripped her and painted an English red cross on to her undershirt: so the elevated figure displayed the power of the English inscribed on her body. The burning itself was represented by a sharp red light which was cast from above and behind the stage across Joan's body: the soldiers brought flaming torches to the pyre, and the whole stage was bathed in a diffuse red. The mixture of lighting and darkness, of the incantations and revelry, and of the pyre and the torches, all set amongst the corpses of the battlefield, combined as a grotesque and ritualistic image of consumption.

The French war ended with another elaborate display of national identity. The English army filled the stage front with Suffolk at the centre: the soldiers brought flags and music with them, and Suffolk commanded the stage in triumph. The lights brightened, and behind Suffolk an English flag was unfurled from the balcony which totally obscured Joan: the English had written her out of their history, their version of events, absorbing the image of her corpse, with its white shirt and red cross, into the red cross of the English flag. The politics and the metaphysics of history were being explored: the audience was taught how the English covered the theatre of France with their own representations, repressing the more violent, darker aspects of their presence there. National identity, expressed through the spectacle, was a fiction, history also was a fiction, a dressing for power. The final irony was that Talbot and Young Talbot stood up to take their places in the pageant, transformed from death to life by the magical power of the national pageant: ironic, also, because the English had succeeded where Joan had failed, in raising the spirits of the underworld.

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<sup>109</sup> In fact, this was a scene which developed in performance. Another deviation was the incantation which climaxes the scene. In scripts lasting up until the end of 1988, York spoke these lines to Joan, casting York as the sorcerer, subverting the audience's expectations and questioning the nature of evil and the occult. This unusual ascription of demonic possession was reversed in the new year, so that it is Joan who ends her life with a spell, apparently fixing as reality the truth of her devilishness.

*The Plantagenets'* presentation of the French war was ambivalent in its political posturing.

Following Noble's sense that the *Henry VI* plays are 'anti-war', the performance followed this vague liberal sentiment in uncovering the unpleasant realities of warfare and extending this question to the role of war in national identity. Noble, like Brook in *U. S.* and Wood in *Tumbledown*, side-stepped issues of direct politics in order to focus upon the human experience of war. As a reading of the Falklands Crisis and its role in the configuration of the 1980s, the performance then seemed to be guarding its radical reputation. However, unlike Bogdanov's staging of the same scenes, Noble did not politicise this refutation of violence: instead, the martial construction of national identity was contrasted with the cultural construction of national identity, promoted by Richmond at the end of the cycle and implicitly associated with the RSC's own role in culture. This reading of the Falklands Crisis, though apparently critical in its depiction of the English soldiers, essentially reinforced conservative history by reading a political conflict in terms of a moral universe, in which the French are 'bad' (Joan was finally revealed as a witch, the French dump her as soon as she starts to lose) and the English are 'good': much the same kind of approach was taken by the tabloids and the government during the Falklands Crisis, where the 'Argies' were similarly constructed as evil. This performance did not challenge that construction, it ennobled it: what the performance did do, however, was to question the value of such conflicts. The experience of the battlefield in *The Plantagenets* was an experience of the limits of national and human identity which indelibly changed the nation; the confrontation with another moral universe destabilised the absolutes of the English court, and introduced conflict and division into the Cathedral of England.

### III

The grotesque theatre of *The Plantagenets*, then, was a decentering of human or even national experience from the absolutes represented by tradition. The rediscovery of tradition at the end of the cycle, in this context, is an affirmation of the value of 'one nation' conservatism, in which the progress of capitalism is reconciled with tradition, in which desire - which is, one might say, the principle drive of capitalism - is restrained by tradition and cultural institutions. What this return to order belied was a deep anxiety about the loss of such absolutes in the England of the 1980s: Noble may well not have been radical in the sense

that Bogdanov styled himself (although, as we have seen, Bogdanov's 'radicalism' has its own problems) but the production was in many respects a performance of doubt, fear and threat about the nature of rapid social changes in which past institutions were devalued and the pursuit of self was prioritised. This anxiety played itself out in the grotesque theatre of *The Plantagenets*; its violence - in particular, the performance's repeated and increasingly absurd images of bodily dismemberment and mutilation - registered a deep unease about contemporary materialism.

Dismemberment was a recurring theme of these productions, in relation to both the physical body and to other kinds of bodies: the State, tradition, the mind, and the cosmos. *Henry VI* had begun with an image of dismemberment inscribed upon the social body of the funeral procession. The way in which the stage was divided socially during the funeral scene was also a reminder that the ceremony was a ritual dismemberment and re-membering of the dead king. The stage directions make this plain:

Enter BEDFORD with the dead king's shield, WARWICK with the dead king's helmet and crest, EXETER old, his gauntlets, GLOUCESTER his mourning sword, SOMERSET the dead king's gipon on a cross. WINCHESTER. (*The Plantagenets* Ii, p. 7).

Each noble bore one part of the king's battledress, as a ceremonial dismemberment of the body of the king. At the close of the ceremony, each noble laid the object that he carried on top of the coffin, so that the warrior king was ritually re-membered by the nation. The discord that lay behind the ceremony was already evident in these actions because (as the stage directions indicate) Winchester was made to stand apart from the rest, and he became progressively more excluded from the main group through the scene. Winchester became an important character in Noble's *Henry VI*, arguably displacing Gloucester; as a figure of corrupt spirituality, Winchester better expressed the overriding theme of a world which had lost its sense of metaphysical location. Winchester's exclusion from the funeral ceremony - which he should, of course, have been conducting - foreshadowed the lack of attention to spirituality in the wars and conflicts which followed. The performance ended with Winchester's death. The priest's grotesquely pained body was a body which had broken inside and his madness prefaced the physical madness of the riots that followed in

*The Rise of Edward IV*. More tellingly, it displaced Suffolk's political death (which was cut from the adaptation) with a death scene that emphasised madness and the impact of evil, and showed that the theatre of priests had moved decisively into the theatre of clowns. In Noble's interpretation of Kott, madness, disorder and dismemberment were the characteristics of the theatre of clowns. The performance began with an ceremony of remembrance; it ended with a display of dismemberment, as Margaret brought Suffolk's head onto the stage, next to Winchester's grotesquely contorted body.

The company took dismemberment as a sign for social collapse, as the violation of the social, cultural body was progressively reduced to violations of the physical body: one event was seen as both the representation, the reality and the consequence of the other. Disorder was represented as disorders (in the sense of inappropriate distributions) of the body: the body without a head, the mind without a moral sense, the society without a king, society fragmented into disunited social groups. Noble's sense of madness and disorder was directly influenced by Artaud; according to Ronald Hayman,

The violence of the theatre that Artaud proposed is a Dionysian violence in which the floodgates of delirium and desire could be thrown wide open, and it might seem that the restraints of Church and State, morality and hierarchy, could be swept aside in the onrush of animal desires that come bubbling out of the liberated imagination.<sup>110</sup>

This comment is useful in locating the way that the performance counterpoised the order of Henry VI and Richmond's world with that of Cade's and subsequently Richard's. Cade and Richard represented 'the liberated imagination', freed from the absolutes of Church and State and able to pursue their own desires. Here, 'morality and hierarchy' work as restraints upon 'the onrush of animal desires.' In Artaud's own thought, this was to be endorsed; but in *The Plantagenets*, the grotesque excesses of Cade and Richard underlines the need for hierarchies and for institutions which promoted morality and hierarchy in social behaviour. The violence of *The Rise of Edward IV* registered the 'reality' of power and desire; it showed that, without these restraints, the exercise of power without authority - without, indeed, cultural authority - was nothing more than a grotesque and sadistic act of oppression. In contrast to *Henry VI*, power was

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<sup>110</sup> Ronald Hayman, *Artaud and After* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 160.

staged as a series of acts of strangulation, mutilation and entrapment, which showed power as 'power-over-the-body'. This picked up upon images of entrapment from *Henry VI*, which were presented as minor fractures peeping through the pageant of history. Mortimer, for example, was the negative image of Henry. The association was struck as they both wore a white costume and the next scene was Henry's first (his coronation scene). Mortimer's cage was literally transformed into Henry's throne, which sat on top of it and appeared to the audience as the cage sank into the floor. In this way, Henry's ceremonial position was read through the naked image of Mortimer, the forgotten pretender, imprisoned in the cage. The same cage was used again for the penultimate scene of *The Rise of Edward IV*, when the cage was not only Henry's prison, it was also Henry's tomb, as Richard through the body into it. Recalling the transformation from Mortimer to Henry, Henry's cage sank into the floor to reveal Edward's court celebrating its victory. In *Henry VI*, Henry's movements were formalised and, even when he was not being ceremonial, he was on ceremony: his every action and gesture was scripted within delimited boundaries of expression so that, for example, Henry was symbolically 'pinned' by Gloucester and Winchester when he acceded to the throne. Throughout *Henry VI* Henry was represented as caught between different points and, consequently, though a symbol of power, impotent in himself. The image of a body being physically or symbolically pinned recurred through the production: other examples included Joan, who was pinned to the ground by a net and then bound to a stake. Joan died struggling to break her bonds: her body had been disempowered, and rewritten by the English to represent their agenda: she had become a display. Talbot, too, died pinned to seven spears: his son was killed whilst in the grip of two soldiers, with another soldier cutting his throat and killing his voice.

The focus upon the body as the territory of power marked a shift away from the societal focus of both Bogdanov and Howell's approach to the play and introduced a different conception of national identity and of history into the performance of the civil wars. The grotesque character of these mutilations turned the *Henry VI* plays from political or national tragedies into epic, absurdist tragi-comedy which explored the grotesqueness of modern life. The true object of grotesqueness in *The Plantagenets* was not tragic form but the body. The negotiation between the common people and the nobles in the first scene of *Henry VI* established a dialectic between the ordered forms of spectacle and the disorderly behaviour of the crowd

which was developed as an image of social collapse and of a corresponding inward collapse. The dialect of bodies ran through the sequences of the production, from the captured and displayed body of Joan, to the fat, plentitudinous body of Simpcox who was presented as a harvest king, to the lord of misrule Cade, where Noble exaggerated Shakespeare to present a carnival of violence, mutilation, and body parts. These bodies were always contrasted with the structures that expressed them: from the ordered spectacles of Henry's court, which placed the body within a metaphysical order, to the disorderly spectacles of Cade's 'court', which internalised the topography of Henry's world, and uncrowned it with multiple beheadings, both parodying the spectacle of power and transforming its rules and concepts into ones which more readily maintained the grotesque images of fifteenth century England.

These images of dismemberment showed the different limbs of the world departing from the structures of authority which bound them. In *The Rise of Edward IV* the wounded space of the funeral procession turned into a mutilated and invaded space of riots and civil wars. The opening deliberately rhymed with the opening of *Henry VI*; it presented the commoners in an alternate universe to the hierarchical universe of Henry V's court, where the metaphysical structure of the universe replicated the social structure of the spectacle. Here, the free, playful and violent order of the commoners, with its perverse hierarchies and topsy-turvy sense of morality was reproduced on a bare stage, unadorned with spectacle, where the only spectacles were made of human bodies, not for them. Where *Henry VI* had begun with a formal procession, a hierarchised ordering of stage space, *Edward IV* began with commoners slowly entering the stage from all points: from the sides, from the rear, from above, and even from below. The sense was of the stage as a porous space, no longer the rigidly defined spaces of the previous production, or of rips in the fabric of that world through which these people-demons were spilling through into the forbidden area of history, finding new and unsuspected fractures in the stage world, and tearing entrances and exits in the fabric of the theatre: the whole body of the stage was figuratively mutilated and dismembered. Where the nobles of *Henry VI* gathered at his opening to ceremonially re-member the dead King Henry, the people who opened *Edward IV* gathered for the dismemberment and murder of the Clerk of Chatham. His body was pinned with a rope so that he was turned into a puppet for the people to play with; they hurled him across the stage, playing with his body, before finally impaling it on a knife. His body

lay forgotten in the centre of the stage for the rest of the scene, but it ordered the movements of the characters about it, so that it became just like Henry's coffin, which had a similarly ambiguous function in *Henry VI*. Cade exploited and subverted the hierarchised spaces of the processions: he swung on to the stage of *The Plantagenets* from above, gave a manic performance hanging off a rope and then swung over to the side of the stage where he attached his feet to the walls. This was a very theatrical kind of subversion: the free use of theatre space was a festive, anarchic image which made a clear and unambiguous impression on the audience: the theatre of priests had been subverted by a theatre of clowns.

The connection between Cade's riot and the theatre was made more explicitly than this in the next riot scene. Following a scene at the real court, the lights were blacked out so that the only theatre for the audience was the low muttering of falsetto voices. Slowly the lights began to rise, showing the shadowy outline of the king on his throne, surrounded by courtiers and banners crowded behind him. Details became clearer and the audience realised that this was not the king, but Cade sitting on a throne: the courtiers were Cade's followers, and the banners they held were poles on top of which were the heads of the nobles that they had killed in their riot. The falsetto voices, the audience realised with shock, were the rioters making comic voices for the decapitated heads, which they made a grim puppet theatre for Cade's fake court. It was a powerfully grotesque image, at once awful and funny, that challenged the audience to respond to it.<sup>111</sup> Not only was this a gruesome image of theatre, but to underline the point Cade's 'throne' was a modern director's chair. (This was the only anachronism in an otherwise scrupulously authentic period production). Cade was constructed not just as a fake king but as a theatre director. His followers were actors who aped the mannerisms and functions of the court using severed heads as masks and props for their play. Their clowning around suggested a relationship between theatre and politics which was both threatening and liberating: the image was a gory one, but roles had been reversed through Cade's theatre, because the commoners, who were just the audience in *Henry VI*, now occupied the centre of history, and those that

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<sup>111</sup> It was also an exaggeration of Shakespeare's text, as Robert Gore-Langton noticed in his article '*The Plantagenets*: 'Adrian Noble has rightly opted not to censor the violence but to bring it to the fore: a forest of severed heads on poles becomes the most striking image of civil carnage perpetrated by Jack Cade.' Where previous productions had sought to play down or contextualise the violence of these scenes, this production gave free reign to their violent and comic potential.



policed them before were now their mouthpieces. Noble staged the commoners as a group which reflected comically and grotesquely the presence of the audience in its own history.

The use of the body here was also a grotesque uncrowning of the funeral scene: the bodies which had been crowned and ennobled by the pageant of tradition and history were now actually made the spectacle of Cade's own self-ennoblement. This was an inversion both of the relationship between body and spectacle and of the presence of corpses in the two theatres: in the funeral, the corpse was centred and celebrated, but hidden; in Cade's theatre, the dead were visible, put on poles, displayed and given comic voices. The whole Cade sequence was a riot of mutilations and decapitations which developed utopian themes from *Henry VI*, tore up and inverted its hierarchised world, and set the scene for the violent staging of the real civil war, which followed Cade with almost no break or time for the audience to assess the development from riot to civil war. In *Henry VI*, divisions in history had been represented by fissures in reality, by the presence of demons and magic, and smoke from hell bleeding into earthly reality.

The apotheosis of the clown figure was Richard. Lesser played Richard as a maniac, with exaggerated gestures, quick movements and over-the-top expressions. Anton Lesser's Richard reprised a role that he had made his own in 1977, only now he was to carry on into *Richard III*, which gave extra force to Richard's seizure of the centre of history. Reviewers were disappointed with Lesser's performance, which seemed hysterically over-the-top compared to the studied political animal of Terry Hands' production. Lesser was very aware that this Richard was a clown, who mixed power with pathos, the capacity to subvert with the inability to command. In his first major soliloquy, Richard re-performed Cade's spatial subversions by draping himself across the empty throne, walking about it and climbing over it. When Richard finally took the throne in *Richard III*, the scene was played as a bathetic comedy:

They all go and just leave him sitting there on his own in a throne that is miles too big for him, his legs dangling down like a little child's, quite unable to reach the floor. The pathos of that image is important at this pivotal point in the play, the wild excitement of leaping into that seat followed in a second or two by the loneliness and stillness of the little figure dwarfed by it.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Lesser, 'Richard of Gloucester', p. 153.

The clown sat at the centre of the theatre and in Kott's reading this is fundamentally a grotesque vision of history. This clown had a very important contemporary resonance, which located the different theatres which *The Plantagenets* held in tension in such a way as to offer a critique of modern times. When Richard stabbed Henry, he slowly forced the words 'I am myself alone': it was an important statement, a rejection of culture and tradition and the apotheosis of the individual. In his pursuit of the material present and his denial of tradition, history and other absolutes, Richard represented the rise of a new, amoral and young class in 1980s Britain, which was rooted in materialism and the acquisition of wealth and power. The reduction of experience to money and the self was analysed in the performance of Richard, who emerged as the personification - and indeed, the demonisation - of social changes in the 1980s. His last word in *The Rise of Edward IV* - and its closing moment - was an angry and passionate one directed with sudden force at the audience: 'Now!' However, the self-destructive nature of Richard's ambition was characterised in *Richard III* by Richard stabbing his own hand, mutilating his own body.<sup>113</sup>

In the figures of Cade and Richard, the development of a new 'upwardly mobile' class based upon principles of acquisition and individualism was put in opposition to tradition and culture. The crisis that *The Plantagenets* performed explored the implications of individualism for the structures of society, in terms of its rejection of tradition and its denial of history. Identification was instead sought in images of the self. The triumphal ending of the trilogy was both a return to history and a redemption of the 1980s subject, as it proposed a renegotiation between culture and the individual and suggested that the Richard figure might, in the figure of Richmond, be reclaimed to the symbolic order of history. This performance should be seen in the context of the troubles which the RSC was experiencing at the time: its own role as a cultural institution was being threatened by the new emphasis upon commercialism and upon sponsorship. *The Plantagenets*, at a local level, was an extended argument for the need for theatre and for culture in modern society, and in this sense was a response to a changing and threatening situation which expressed anxiety and discontent, and highlighted the growing divisions in society between culture and the general public. Understood within this context, the reactionary stance of the RSC is no longer a straightforward nor easily

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<sup>113</sup> Lesser, 'Richard of Gloucester', p. 154.

dismissable position, but a position which emerges problematically out of a political situation in which the RSC was forced to survive. The tension in the performance between figurative (and physical) dismemberments and the spectacles of tradition disclosed a deep anxiety about the social changes which were affecting both the RSC and the rest of society.

In many respects, the *Henry VI* plays belonged to the 1980s: there has never been a decade in the history of the plays performance which has seen as many different productions, nor has there been a decade in recent history which has 'fitted' the story that the plays tell so well. In some ways, the plays are about the 1980s: they are about the folly of empty imperial victories, and they are about the consequences for defeat for a society which bases its identity upon an act of war. Hall and Barton's work in the 1960s made possible these performances, as they invented a national drama for the national poet, and it has been the performance of this national drama which has formed the basis of all three productions' work. However, in the politicised and divisive context of the 1980s, the *Henry VI* plays performed the divisions and fractures in society, and painted an epic picture of the times which was almost apocalyptic. The character of 'England' in the 1980s was a much less certain one than either Hall's or Hands' had been. The inauthenticity of Mrs. Thatcher's England was highlighted by all three productions and all three attempted to re-legitimate 'England', 'Shakespeare' and 'History' in contrasting ways. Howell looked back to the popular theatres that had formed the *Henry VI* plays in order to recuperate television as a modern popular theatre, in doing so exposing the contradictions in media events such as the Royal Wedding; Bogdanov explored the impotency of authority in its constructions of England, contrasting the authorised, imperial England with the illegitimate but culturally fertile worlds of the commoners and Joan; and Noble explored the consequences of a turn away from tradition (which was analogous to the RSC and its role in society) for a society which was fashionably egotistical. Although all three positioned themselves as opposition texts (although *The Plantagenets* ends with an olive-branch to the very people it has been satirising in the figure of Richard, by suggesting a new negotiation between business culture and theatrical culture in the figure of Richmond), the contradictions and the inconsistencies in their approaches reveal a deep anxiety about social and cultural changes moving through these performances: their presentation of history indicated a sense of

loss in regards to the past, and a sense of disquiet about an uncertain future. The 'waning of historicity' in the 1980s made the Shakespearean history play a radically unstable text.

### Conclusion: Detraditionalising *Henry VI*

The cultural materialist attempt to 'detraditionalise' Shakespeare, as Joughin points out, was largely a failure: Shakespeare remains implicated in nationalist traditions and remains a potent force in culture.<sup>1</sup> In the performance of the *Henry VI* plays, we have seen some complicated moves: on the one hand, there has been the overall attempt to institute a tradition of playing the plays as national dramas in which the anxieties and troubles of the times are theatrically explored. However, it has also been clear that this tradition has been tested, particularly in *The Plantagenets* when the direct quoting of tradition was in itself a detraditionalising act - as Noble drew attention towards tradition, and equated civilisation with tradition, so too did its structures and constructs become available for scrutiny. In that production, anxiety about change overrode Noble's shallow and self-serving concentration upon tradition; and the inclusive approach adopted towards the audience further underlined the cultural transaction of anxiety, disbelief and fear about modern society that was the performance's true interior. It has become clear, now, that *The Plantagenets* was not, as Noble had hoped, a new way forward, but the last, empty gasp of a moment in theatre history that has had its last gasp. The large 'event' production, in which national issues are summoned, performed

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<sup>1</sup> See Joughin's 'Shakespeare and De-Traditionalisation: Learning from L. A.', *Litterararia Pragensia* vol. 6 no. 12 (1996), pp. 57-75.

and projected in a cultural ritual of national self-affirmation seems to belong to the past - at least, as far as the RSC is concerned this is the case. Since *The Plantagenets*, the RSC has moved away from epic theatre entirely, instead concentrating upon touring, scaling down its London season to six months, and scaling down too its mainhouse RST productions.<sup>2</sup> The de-traditionalising of Shakespeare seems to have moved from criticism into the theatre, where the agenda is not so much a political one as a pragmatic attempt to restyle Shakespearean performance in an age which no longer demands epic theatre.

The outlook for *Henry VI* looks bleak in this case, and it may well be (as seems already to be the case) that the tradition invented by Hall and Barton in the 1960s, and reinvented for the 1980s by Bogdanov and Noble, may already have been eclipsed by the prevailing currents in modern culture.

Although small-scale versions of *The Wars of the Roses* continue to be performed (the most recent in England was at the York Theatre Royal in 1994)<sup>3</sup>, the large, national play which Hall and Barton promoted has, for the moment, and perhaps for sometime, disappeared from the theatrical repertoire. One recent American production used cross-gendered doubling to subvert and even parody the plays (for example, Lady Bona was extremely large and had a huge, bushy beard).<sup>4</sup> It could well be, as Sir Barry Jackson

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<sup>2</sup> Recent adverts for the RSC have been headed with the motto, 'Theatre for the Nation.' The crucial use of the word 'for' underlines the new attitude of the RSC - it no longer represents the nation, but puts plays that are accessible to the nation. The advert boasts that 'In the course of this year's programme, the RSC will be within an hour's drive of over 75% of the UK population.' If 75% of the population made the journey, the RSC would not need any financial support.

<sup>3</sup> This was played in repertoire with *Richard III* under the umbrella title of *Shakespeare's The Wars of the Roses*. This seems to indicate the permanent influence of the 1963 *The Wars of the Roses* - as it now seems that Shakespeare is remembered as the author of that adaptation. Of course, Shakespeare would not have been familiar with the name of *The Wars of the Roses*, which is yet another 'invented tradition.' Amusingly, Henry VI was played by an actor called Edward York.

<sup>4</sup> *Henry VI: The Edged Sword and Black Storm*, directed by Karin Coonrod at the Joseph Papp Public Theatre, New York Shakespeare Festival in 1997. This was a fast paced production. See Nina da Vinci Nichols review of the production in 'Henry VI', *Shakespeare Bulletin* vol. 15, no. 2 (Spring 1997), pp. 10-12. York lectured his genealogy to peers by drawing a family tree, which he concluded by emphatically circling 'me.' Joan's burning was represented by a paper cut-out inside a transparent cylinder burnt. In the Cade scenes, each man carried a 'brace of rag doll men.' After Prince Edward's disinheritance, we next saw Henry on a swing suspended in mid-air, 'a nice absurdist metaphor of his ineffectuality.' Another time, wooden chairs came sliding down from the ceiling on long red ribbons that 'represent bloodlines' (Coonrod says she sees the plays as 'a constellation of blood.') Warwick was played by an African-American, Fanni Green, who also doubled as Eleanor, whilst the Duke of Somerset was doubled with Joan. According to Nichols, the performance was 'about the eclipse of our own historical consciousness.'

wrongly predicted in the 1950s, that we will be unlikely to see a full scale history play cycle again in our lifetimes - but Jackson's own example should warn us off such easy assumptions.

Instead of cycles, the 1990s has yielded a notable production in *Henry VI - The Battle for the Throne* (i.e. *Part Three*), directed by Katie Mitchell. *The Battle for the Throne* made a major departure from established practices of playing *Henry VI*.<sup>5</sup> First of all, it played *Part Three* as a single and complete work without reference either to *Part Two* or to *Richard III* - neither of which were mentioned in the programme notes.<sup>6</sup> It was not an adaptation in the normal sense: Mitchell made a few minor cuts, and reduced the number of characters to make the play more manageable for the smaller space and company at The Other Place. Most significantly, a few speeches were imported from *Richard III* and *Gorbuduc*. However, these were well flagged and had specific roles in the performance, as I shall discuss shortly. In every other respect, the production was a faithful rendering of Shakespeare's play. Strangely, Mitchell's departure from the tradition of playing *Henry VI* was to play it in the same way that any normal Shakespeare play would be at the RSC - by not marking the play off as difficult or obscure, by not making unwarranted assumptions about their authorship, Mitchell recovered from the play a powerful meditation on the causes and the consequences of internecine conflicts, both in our own history and in contemporary conflicts such as civil wars in Rwanda and former Yugoslavia (the Bosnian Crisis). Civil wars around the world made the issue a pressing one; yet the British theatre had been slow to respond to the new challenges that it faced. Suddenly, civil war was no longer something that belonged to the past, to the pre-history of the nation, but was a present and nearby reality, which threatened even to extend to Britain, which had its own civil war in Northern Ireland.

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<sup>5</sup> Mitchell told me that she was not happy with the subtitle, which had been forced upon her and her company. The RSC was not satisfied with *King Henry VI Part Three* as a title and asked Mitchell for an alternative - she gave back a long list of possible titles out of which the RSC picked *The Battle for the Throne*. Though not ideal, the subtitle nevertheless has no precedent and implies no link with any previous production. Mitchell also complained about the publicity for the production - in effect, it seems that the RSC management really wanted Mitchell to do a different kind of *Henry VI*, one that did not break with the established RSC tradition.

The 'national', totalising approach instituted by Hall and Barton tended to read the civil wars in the plays as a metaphor for something else: in their work, it was about politics, in Hands the civil wars were metaphors for social divisions whilst in Howell and Bogdanov, the real conflict was a class one. Even in Noble, the real conflict was between greed and tradition. This was perhaps a consequence of the nature of the wars that they had experience of - in particular, the Falklands Crisis, but also Vietnam and the 'Cold' War. These wars defined national identity: they may have provoked criticism and even critique, but this was nevertheless within the paradigm of national identity. The civil wars of the early 1990s were rather about the collapse of nations: they were, to use a phrase that was fashionable at the time, 'culture wars.' This gave rise to a very different kind of performance of *Part Three*: that it was a single part indicated its disconnectedness from the traditions which have fed the *Henry VI* plays modern performances. English history was defamiliarised by using Eastern European images and stressing the Catholicism of the plays in order to force audiences to forget both the traditional and the anti-traditional performances of history that they had been used to (one scene was even performed in French, which culturally divided the audience between those who spoke the language and those who did not). The performance used direct address to construct the audience as the recipient of dire warnings from the past. Passages from *Richard III* and *Gorbuduc* were added to the text in order to sharpen its anti-civil war theme. *The Battle for the Throne* was significant in reactivating the cautionary theme of the play: for the first time since the 1590s, *Part Three* was addressing an audience to make it aware of how close it was to civil war.

In the light of Mitchell's work, it is perhaps worth reflecting on what role the *Henry VI* plays have, or could have, in the contemporary theatre. Hall and Barton's *The Wars of the Roses* has had both positive and negative effects on the performance of the *Henry VI* plays: on the one hand, it has given them a performance life which they did not previously have. However, the repetition of this kind of performance - especially as theatrical 'events' - has not necessarily helped and the last two productions of the three plays

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<sup>6</sup> Despite pressure from Adrian Noble to do otherwise, the production did not (as was widely reported) include any material from *Part Two*. This is discussed in more detail on p. 33, n. 24 of this thesis. It is interesting to reflect that



have certainly demonstrated diminishing returns. The failure of British theatre to move beyond *The Wars of the Roses* is disappointing, and has left the plays performance history imprisoned in an era which has now past. The return to the margins of the Shakespearean repertoire with Mitchell's work is, then, not to be unwelcomed: here, the plays rub against the established ways of playing Shakespeare, and force audiences to rethink both Shakespeare and English history; here, also, the plays have finally disconnected themselves from the strait-jacket of *The Wars of the Roses*.

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Noble was trying to impose the 'matter of England' tradition on Mitchell.

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In addition to the works listed below, I have also worked heavily on videos of *The Plantagenets*, the BBC Shakespeare Series' *Henry VI-Richard III* series, the ESC's *The Wars of the Roses* and the BBC's 1966 versions of the RSC's *The Wars of the Roses* held at the Shakespeare Centre in Stratford. I have also consulted prompt books, programmes, newspaper reviews and miscellaneous documentary materials (including an uncatalogued bundle of papers which the librarian at the Stratford Centre patiently sorted out for me - it included versions of Wood's draft, which I was not able to obtain permission to use in this thesis) during the course of my research. The main RSC resources are held at The Shakespeare Centre in Stratford; the main ESC resources are kept at the Theatre Museum in London.

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