
Transformational Shakespeare

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“Done Like a Frenchman”: *Henry VI*, the Tyranny of the Audience and Spect-Actorial Adaptations

In early modern theatre, there are many examples of audiences recognising themselves in performances that they watch. It is this recognition which creates comedy in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, when the young married aristocrats comment on how absurdly the rude mechanicals perform a story of thwarted love which exactly mirrors the potential play which *Dream* so nearly becomes. The same idea is the source of dramatic tension in *Hamlet*, when Hamlet's adaptation of *The Mousetrap* is performed as a trap to “catch the conscience of the king”; Hamlet's commentary is a diversionary tactic, for Hamlet is not watching the play at all, he is watching the King's reactions to it and it is when the King apparently recognises himself and stops the play that Hamlet believes his trap has worked. In the so-called bad quarto *The Taming of a Shrew*, Christopher Sly sees in the story of Petruchio and Katherina a taming fantasy of male dominance, but in the play's final scene he is chased offstage by his shrewish wife. Sometimes, when recognising themselves in the play, audiences can change the play as well. Arguably, this already happens in *Dream*, where tragedy is made into a comedy and in *Hamlet*, where the play cannot continue once the King has recognised himself in the play. In Act 2, scene 1 of Middleton's *Hengist, King of Kent*, the clown Simon, who has implausibly become Mayor (in one of those “I'll make the next person I meet mayor!” plots), has to approve a play for performance. Watching the play, he becomes enraged at the players' derogatory representation of the clown and insists on playing the part himself. He throws off his Mayor's costume to

reveal his own clown's clothes underneath and sets about playing the part of the clown as if he were a serious character. The performance collapses and in the confusion the players make off with all the silver.

Simon is not a typical spectator, he is a spect-actor. This is a word coined by the Brazilian director Augusto Boal, who has spent his career developing versions of "forum theatre" where spectators become actors. Spect-actors are able to divert and remake the play that they are watching through their own commentary and, if appropriate, direct intervention. The relationship between the spect-actor and performance is permeable, as the spect-actor is capable not only of repositioning the play, he or she can change its direction and its story completely. The key to the Spect-Actor's power (one that Simon aspires to) is his/her ability to demand a repetition of performance and, through that repetition, change it and then reflect upon that change. What angers Simon about the players' performance is the way that they make fun of and marginalise the person with whom he most identifies. Using his authority both as audience and mayor, Simon changes the play into its opposite, one in which the clown emerges from the margins to become a serious character. However, when he does so, the spell of performance is broken and everything falls apart, just as it does when the King flees in *Hamlet*. What Anne Righter memorably calls the "tyranny of the audience" is, when exercised, paradoxically disempowering.¹

Susan Bennett argues that, when analysing the relationship between audience and player, it is critical to look not to conventional theatres, where audiences are modelled as consumers of spectacle, but to emergent theatres that have "self-consciously sought the centrality of the spectator as subject of the drama" with the proviso that they address a subject who can "think and act". Bennett calls such a subject a "productive and emancipated spectator" (Bennett 1). The question I want to explore in this paper is what happens when a spectator (or spect-actor) becomes productive and emancipated *anyway*, irrespective of the intentions of the players. In particular, I will focus on what happens when the audience-performance dialectic in early modern drama is transferred from these

¹ This is one of the chapter titles in her seminal book *Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play* (1962). As well as being effective dramatic devices for both comedy and political thrillers, these plays-within-plays highlight a problematic potentiality that arises in the relationship between audiences and players. The Mayor is a good example, for Middleton's scene recalls a practice, which had been in long decline since the 1570s, of Mayors approving performances in a private show before allowing travelling companies to play in their jurisdiction. As a Mayor's son, Shakespeare probably first encountered players through such private performances and he may have kept them in mind in his earliest plays which include flattering representations of the Mayors of Coventry and York in his 2 and 3 *Henry VI* (versions of these plays were probably toured by Pembroke's Men in the early 1590s). Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* and Middleton's *The Phoenix*, both staged at Whitehall in 1604, seem to deliberately invite identification between King James I (notorious for going incognito amongst his subjects) and the disguised-monarchs at the centre of both those plays, in full knowledge that James was likely to be in the audience.

local acts of audience recognition and intervention to an intercultural scene: that is to say, when an audience recognises itself performed in a play staged by a foreign company playing a play written for a different national audience. The audiences I will discuss are active and interventionist, intent on appropriating plays and performance to a different paradigm and so inscribing themselves permanently on what they see. By exploring such extreme audiences, I hope to raise questions which might be applicable to any theoretical consideration of intercultural performance and think discursively about what it means – what it might mean – when a play written for one kind of audience is then played before another.

In the first part of this essay, I will raise some theoretical issues, in the second part I will imagine a French appropriation of the *Henry VI* plays if they were stripped down to only those scenes which are played in (or concern) France. Finally, I will analyse a performance of *3 Henry VI* which radically re-figured the relationship between audience and performance by playing one scene in French.

I

The intercultural scene I want to begin with (and which will remain a slightly tongue-in-cheek touchstone for my discussion) is a curious record of a court performance, by an English company, at the great hall in Fontainebleau in 1604, of a play which might have been *Henry VI*. In the audience were the physician Jean Héroard and his young student Louis (the future Louis XIII). On the 18 September, Héroard notes in his dairy that they saw “une tragédie représentée par des Anglois” and that the French court watched with “froideur, gravité et patience” until the English started playing scenes of men having their heads cut off. A couple of weeks later, Louis was pretending to be an actor and astonished Héroard by remembering the play as a comedy. He put on a mask and, speaking in a booming, declamatory voice, announced, “nous sommes des comédiens!” (qtd. in Chambers 293). A week later, Louis still had not tired of the game. He marched about with exaggerated gestures, wearing wigs and masks to mimic the English players. What the court watched with seriousness as a tragedy was taken by the boy as a comedy and not just any comedy, but one that had so much impact on him that he repeated it for days afterwards.² Through his absurd and juvenile repetitions, Louis, who as a future King probably had most at stake in the players’ representation of tragic history, of aristocrats being executed, remembered and remade the play as grotesque

² This story has been repeated in several studies as evidence of a French performance of *Henry VI*. Chambers quotes the diary of court tutor and physician Jean Héroard, who describes the episode (although Chambers mistakenly calls the prince the future Louis XIV). The evidence that the play was *Henry VI* is far from conclusive (Chambers 293).

farce. In effect, Louis did the opposite of what Simon attempted, for where Simon tried to force comedy into serious drama, Louis rejected the tragic representation of nobility. In mocking the performers through trying to become a caricature of them, Louis asserted the tyranny of the audience and reclaimed the right to play the play in his own fashion against the grain of the text.

In the twentieth century, it has become a commonplace of experimental theatre that theatrical performance should take arms against the text and in doing so blur the boundary between audience and player. It was Antonin Artaud who declared, with characteristic bravado, that “all writing is filth”. Boal’s forum theatre is one practical way of exploiting an audience’s power over the text. A more radical approach, that mirrors the intercultural scene of Louis’ ecstatic repetitions, is that taken by the late Carmelo Bene, the Italian performer whose free adaptations of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* (1976) and *Richard III* (1977) are discussed theoretically in a classic programme note by the radical philosopher Gilles Deleuze and later published as the essay “One Manifesto Less”. Bene’s *Richard III* was adapted (so he claims)³ with Deleuze and included passages from *Henry VI*, but discarded much of the text to focus in on only Richard and the female characters. Bene adapted the text like a spect-actor, discarding all that was not relevant to his reading to leave only these fragments. His portrayal of Richard was not unlike Louis’ imitation of the English players. He wore prosthetic devices and false organs, his face was painted in exaggerated colours and he wore wigs and costumes. Each one was a parody of power and sexual attraction: through the performance, he discarded his limbs to the middle of the stage until he was left with none, but the stage was littered with his prosthetics.⁴ Ronald Bogue described Bene’s reworking as “a critical commentary on Shakespeare and a creative response to the play, a performance event extracted from the text, latent within it and yet alien to it” (126). By thinking about the intercultural version of audience recognition and intervention as a “critical commentary” and a “creative response” to the text, one which reclaims the text and dismisses it simultaneously, we move closer to understanding how the “tyranny of the audience” can transform the play and rob the players of their author-ity. Developing this point, Mark Fortier argues that Deleuze and Bene’s project was “to disrupt the impossibility of invariance and homogeneity, the domination of the text over theatre”, but he extends the definition of the “text” to include, as well, the performance text “that functions as a systematic set of controls and limitations in the service of clarity and reason”. This is a key insight: it is not just the words on the page but the very manner of their articulation that is challenged in these linked appropriations. Simon does not simply change the text (the other players do not know what to do when

³ Ronald Bogue suggests that this claim may be spurious (126).

⁴ I rely for my account of this production on Gary Genosko’s excellent descriptions (43–45).

he steps into the performance, they do not have any lines to respond to his extempore piece) he challenges the performance codes by which it has been articulated and his interruption dismantles the play to the point where it is not a play anymore (and is exposed as a con trick). Louis also challenged the performance text of the English players, mocking them with his wigs and booming voice. Fortier continues, “Bene wants a crisis or impasse, a disarticulation whereby the performance would ‘stop making the text.’ [...] This is accomplished by perpetual variation, turbulence and excess [...] in light, sound, movement and speech whose purpose is not to clarify but to create a ‘congestion of signs’ [...] and a breakdown in communication” (34).⁵

In developing a theoretical account of what Bene did to his texts, Gilles Deleuze looks back to Bene’s similarly radical *Romeo and Juliet* (1976), in which so much of the text was cut that Romeo’s entire part was absent. Deleuze argued that this provocative rewriting exposed a whole new play: Mercutio’s, “no more than a potentiality in Shakespeare’s play”. Made the central figure, Mercutio can no longer die in Act 3 for “he does not want to die, cannot die, does not succeed in dying, since he will constitute the new play” (204–5). As a twentieth century Italian playing an Italy authored by a sixteenth century Englishman, Bene’s adaptation has a curious authenticity in Deleuze’s view, almost as if Bene had a national entitlement to reclaim the play from Shakespeare. But Deleuze goes further and makes an interesting claim for this particular act of intervention by arguing that what is “subtracted” is the traditional actor’s “ancient complicity with princes and kings – the theatre, with power”. Because power and its systems are so integrated with theatrical convention, Deleuze suggests, their very removal shifts performance into an unstable, non-representational field: “the subtraction of stable components of power [...] releases a new potentiality of theatre, a non-representational force always in disequilibrium”. The potentiality is then not just Mercutio’s, but a form of performance which challenges the representational magic of theatre itself. The sudden dissolution of the performance when Simon strips the play of all elements bar his own manic soliloquising is, perhaps, best taken as an authorial anxiety on Middleton’s part on the threat posed by someone in the audience capturing the play. Simon’s Fool, Bene’s Mercutio and Louis’ France are all such potentialities whose new articulation, achieved through strategies of subtraction and repetition, bring to the fore the latent “minor” theatre of the work which, adds Deleuze, is like “being a foreigner, *but* in one’s own tongue” (204–5).

Louis’ behaviour as an emancipated spect-actor raises a theoretical concern about the way audiences recognise themselves in performances which cross cultural boundaries. The spect-actorial scene of Louis’ forced repetition suggests a reappraisal of theatre itself, turning the nervous performance of an English

⁵ The two phrases Fortier quotes are from Bene and Deleuze, pages 89 and 67 respectively.

troupe into an unwitting critique of an audience's ability to disempower performance through subtraction. What was it that Louis recognised in the play that provoked such a reaction? What was the play? E. K. Chambers tentatively suggests that the play might have been *Henry VI*, although *2 Henry IV* and *Richard III* have also been argued for. For the sake of this argument, I will assume that it was *Henry VI* for, although there is no certainty about Chambers' hypothesis (which is impossible to prove), considering *Henry VI* (I will refer to *Henry VI* generically as a shorthand for "the *Henry VI* plays") as an intercultural play which can be remade through a radical act of spect-actorship will illustrate the theoretical issues I want to raise in relation to intercultural performance and audience recognition, because there can be few plays from the period less likely to engage a French audience, or more squarely written for an English one. The gap between Héroard's reaction to the play, the stiffness of the French whose attitude to the English players changes when they stage executions and Louis' ludic re-performances of the same play suggest ways in which *Henry VI*, arguably Shakespeare's most xenophobic play, could be re-made as a French play. In the next section, I will re-read *Henry VI* as if from Louis' perspective, using Bene's methods of reducing the play to only those scenes which concern France, in order to expose the latent counter-play, the "minor" work which is "no more than a potential" in the play which Shakespeare wrote.

II

By defining the play in his own terms, Louis achieved an exaggerated form of what all spectators must at some point secretly desire. However, as Deleuze points out in relation to Bene, such editorialising is necessarily a form of subtraction. To paraphrase Deleuze, France cannot be conquered, because it will constitute the new play. *Henry VI* is Shakespeare's most English set of plays, particularly as England is for the most part defined in relation to France as the "Other" – demonic, sexual, uncontainable and so on. On the face of it, there is little in the play to entertain an early modern French court. The plays, which depict the Wars of the Roses but start with the quelling of uprisings in the French territories previously conquered by Henry V, give them short shrift. Joan of Arc is famously traduced, made a witch and a whore. The French generals are hardly better portrayed: the Dauphin is a foppish prig, his companions are thinly sketched and written as fools. Even the Anglophile Burgundy ends up a turn-coat – "Done like a Frenchman, turn and turn again" (3.7.85) mocks Joan after persuading the Duke to give up his alliance with the English. In parts 2 and 3, the French Margaret of Anjou, Henry's queen, stirs it up: an ambitious adulteress, she ends the trilogy a child murderer by association and is almost the cursing harridan she will become in *Richard III*. Although only present in *1 Henry VI* and briefly in 2, France itself haunts all

three: it is constantly remembered as the scene of Henry V's great conquest and its loss is entirely viewed in terms of England's self-defeat. Various people, from Suffolk to the simpering Lord Saye, from the Duke of Gloucester to Henry himself, are blamed for losing France. In all but one scene (which I will come on to), France is "this thing of darkness" which must nevertheless be possessed, its loss so crippling that all of England falls into civil war.⁶

In *1 Henry VI*, France is cited – and indeed, sited – as a liminal space upon which issues of national selfhood are played out. Although specific locales are invoked and France is, in words at least, mapped by Paris, Orleans, Auvergne etc., it never appears directly as anything more than a notional space whose definition, both political and national, is being hotly contested. When, for example, Lucy desperately runs between the camps of the Duke of York and the Duke of Somerset, pleading for help to rescue Talbot, their locations are so vague, they might not even be in France. Many of the court scenes could be in either Paris or Westminster; Joan's trial is equally imprecise in its locale. When it appears more concretely, it is always as a contested space – the battlefields on which Talbot and Joan fight and on which the English cower at supernatural sounds; the boundary spaces before city walls, which are somehow somewhere and nowhere at the same time; the edges of battles, such as the field where Joan is deserted by her demons, or where the Duke of Suffolk captures, then courts, Princess Margaret. Various productions have played with the permeability of these spaces. For example, Terry Hands, in his 1977 full-text trilogy for the RSC, created ironic juxtapositions by paralleling entrances and exits, Joan eyeing Margaret on her way out.

France first appears through report, as Henry V's funeral cortege is interrupted by a series of messengers, each with worse news for the English nobility about France. The messengers are not just bringing news, they have literally come "out of France" (1.1.58) and are witnesses as well as messengers. This is most evident in the third messenger, who passes on a detailed account of Talbot's apparent death. A French audience might well enjoy these scenes: the Agincourt conqueror Henry V is dead, his political settlement crumbling, the French resistance working effectively even without Joan. Yet this is not simply a question of audience positioning, for France, in its subversion of the memorial ceremony which starts the play, has a thematic presence which subverts the play's attempt to begin with an English scene. In effect, France invades England at this point. The first messenger not only interrupts the eulogies directed at Henry V but supplies a counter-eulogy. If the traditional pattern of funeral was followed, the nobles should have been remembering Henry's achievements in conquering

⁶ Line references refer to the Oxford Shakespeare (Wells and Taylor 1986). However, for convenience, I have used the conventional short form of the plays' Folio titles – *1 Henry VI*, *2 Henry VI* and *3 Henry VI*. (Wells and Taylor give to *2 Henry VI* and *3 Henry VI* short forms of their octavo/quarto titles, *The First Part of the Contention* and *Richard, Duke of York*).

France; the messenger takes that role from them and supplies instead a counter-eulogy, written in fact by the French resistance, of uprising and capture.

This counter-eulogy is recalled in act 3, scene 7, when Joan persuades Burgundy, “undoubted hope of France”, to switch his allegiance from the English to the French. “Look on thy country”, she says, “look on fertile France,/And see the cities and the towns defaced/By wasting ruin of the cruel foe,/As looks the mother on her lowly babe/When death doth close his tender-dying eyes”. In this striking passage, France is invoked as a place of plenitude “defaced” by the invaders. Joan invites Burgundy to effeminise himself, to put himself in the place of a mother holding a dying child – and the child is France. “See, see the pining malady of France”, Joan continues, piling metaphor on metaphor with proto-Proustian excess, “Behold the wounds, the most unnatural wounds” and she urges Burgundy to “wash away thy country’s stained spots” (3.7.41–57). When Burgundy relents, Joan undercuts her own eulogy with a joke that mocks the French: “Done like a Frenchman, turn and turn again” (3.7.85). Some productions take the strategy adopted by the English Shakespeare Company who, in their 1987 touring production, simply removed the second part of the sentence to make the line a proud celebration of Burgundy’s return not just to France (he has not even left France) but to being French. This is an elegant way to reclaim Joan as a heroic rather than demonic figure. Many productions in the last century have struggled to rescue Joan’s character from Shakespeare’s presentation of her as a sexually promiscuous witch, often by implying that her powers were divine rather than demonic. However, Joan’s ambivalence offers other ways of recovering a “minor” Joan as a sexually threatening force who cannot be contained. Phyllis Rackin notes that the play defines the conflict between England and France as a “conflict between masculine and feminine values” (151). When Joan tries to escape execution by claiming to be pregnant and wildly names a number of men as the father, York jokes, “There were so many – whom she may accuse” (5.6.81) but the joke turns cruel when he sends her off to die with the words “Break thou in pieces and consume to ashes” (5.6.92). York’s seeks to contain Joan’s subversive energy by dismembering her and burning her body. However, as several critics have pointed out, Joan’s role in the trilogy is transferred to the Princess Margaret, who becomes Henry’s queen in the next play (Rackin 157).

2 Henry VI is a somewhat different case. France does not appear at all as a place, but nevertheless it haunts everything that happens and its loss is invoked as a symptom of English decline. The play opens with Henry and Margaret meeting yet, strangely, they are already married. The Duke of Suffolk tells us in the opening speech that he married her in France on Henry’s behalf, with himself as a proxy groom. France’s one physical appearance, apart from Margaret herself, is in the form of the marriage treaty which Gloucester tries to read but, when he realises that the treaty will give back much of France,

he drops it. For a moment, the celebrations are disrupted, just as the messengers had interrupted Henry's funeral. The scene is a small one for the play – for a French spect-actor, it is a significant moment in French history, the end, in effect, of the Hundred Years War.

These acts of marital displacement are revisited later when Margaret recalls the “awkward wind” which pummelled her ship as she first approached “England's bank”, trying to drive her back to her “native clime”. Nearly “wreck'd upon the sea”, Margaret threw her most precious jewel into the sea as a sort of sacrifice. The journey from France to England, with which the play began, is then imported into the play almost at its exact centre, subverting Henry's grief for Gloucester (Margaret's speech, one of the longest in the play, is from the scene in which Gloucester is found murdered: 3.2.74–121). The scene of Margaret's “wreck” is quickly reversed when, at the end of the scene, Suffolk is banished for murdering Gloucester. When he tries to flee to France – “I charge thee waft me safely cross the Channel” he says (4.1.115) – he is captured by pirates one of whom mocks him with his own words, “Come, Suffolk, I must waft thee to thy death” (4.1.117). This infrequently discussed scene calls attention to the dichotomous relationship between Suffolk's two names, between his very English title the Duke of Suffolk and his Norman name, William de la Pole. For Suffolk, France is a refuge, both a place to continue his life and to retain his identity. His captors, who blame Suffolk for helping those “false revolting Normans” (4.1.87), punningly turn the promise of French freedom into the more immediate prospect of an English death. As well as changing “across the Channel” to “to thy death” in the lines quoted earlier, the French “de la pole” is Anglicised into “Sir Pool” and then “kennel, puddle, sink” (4.1.73) by the Pirate Captain.⁷ Suffolk is particularly anxious about one name, that of his eventual killer Walter Whitmore. Remembering a prophecy that he will die “by water”, Suffolk first starts at “Walter's” name but then quickly reassures himself that “thy name is Gaultier, being rightly sounded” (4.1.38) as if, in turning the name into its “right” French form, the prophecy could be defeated. Whitmore is callously indifferent: “Gaultier or Walter, which it is, I care not” (4.1.39). For a French spect-actor, such references would be hard to miss. Stripped to just these scenes, *2 Henry VI's* representation of France is no longer that of England's hell, but of a “world elsewhere”, which holds open at least the possibility of escape, of freedom. It is England, beset by devilish insurgents, usurpers and murderers, which is the true hell, bounded by treacherous shores, awkward winds and indifferent pirates.

⁷ The Oxford Shakespeare omits the Quarto jibe “Sir Pool”. Many editions conflate the Quarto and Folio versions of this speech. The line should immediately precede “Ay, kennel, puddle, sink etc.” at 4.1.73.

In *3 Henry VI*, France makes an unexpected reappearance in act 4. No longer a contested territory and now ruled by Louis' ancestor Lewis XIth, "mighty King of France", it is here that Margaret escapes to when Henry is overthrown by Edward IV. She is soon followed by Warwick, who carries with him a marriage proposition that will unite the new King with France. France operates here as both a sanctuary and the *locus* for the main turning point of the play, when a messenger brings three letters (structurally rhyming the three messages which interrupt Henry V's funeral, although this time the news is from England) each of which tells the same story, that Edward has thrown diplomatic caution to the wind and married the widow Lady Grey instead. Warwick switches his allegiance from Edward to Henry. In contrast to the divisive Parliament scene which opens *3 Henry VI*, when York and Henry argue over the crown, France represents an oasis of stability and wisdom in a play well-known for its chaotic intensity. Modern productions often mark this shift with subdued lighting, mellow music and even, in more than one that I have seen, birds calling in the background. This serenity constructs France not as a state full of "false revolting Normans" but a mature monarchy better able to act decisively in English politics.

In this counter-reading of *Henry VI* as someone like Louis might have seen it, France is no longer simply England's Other; rather, in this inversion, England becomes France's Other and a new play is born, the minor, Becoming-French play of *Henry VI*, radically refigured by my imagined "productive and emancipated" spect-actor. In practice, *Henry VI* has rarely been staged in France. Jean-Louis Barrault was bitterly disappointed when his production was a dismal failure. His spectators *were* productive and emancipated, perhaps too much so: Barrault recalls that "all we got was insults" (Barrault 300). Dominic Lorca's *Kings, ou les adieux à Shakespeare*, staged at the Maison des arts André Malraux, Créteil in 1978, was more successful but stripped the plays' national contexts by universalising their themes.

To take this theoretical exploration of potentiality and emancipated spectatorship in intercultural theatre into a more grounded analysis of the audience-performance dialectic, I will in the next section conclude this essay with a study of one scene of a performance of *3 Henry VI* in 1994 which was played entirely in French.

III

In Katie Mitchell's 1994 RSC production *Henry VI – The Battle for the Throne* (based on *3 Henry VI*), France was not just a sanctuary, it was a place whose strong cultural authenticity worked as a powerful contrast to an England divided by civil war. So important was it to establish that France was a different culture that Mitchell provocatively translated most of the scene into French. All lines up to Warwick's entrance with news from England were spoken in

French. The actors made no concessions to their audience; their French was fast and fluent. The French was a straight translation of Shakespeare's text so even those with conversational French would have found it a difficult scene to follow.

Margaret (played by Ruth Mitchell) was the central figure in the scene, as she was in the production. She had spoken before this scene in a thick French accent, but it was only now that she spoke in her *own* voice. As a migrant and an ex-patriot, this Margaret existed between languages. Many productions overlook this aspect of her character, even though in the more well-known *Richard II*, Mowbray calls his exile a "speechless death" because he cannot speak another language (1.3.166). Margaret's outsider status was established in the first scene when she hot-temperedly chided Henry (Jonathan Firth) for disinheriting her son. This characterisation of her as an angry, dispossessed and disinherited mother was in part inspired by the main figure in Pieter Brueghel the Elder's famous painting *Dulle Gret* (usually translated as "Mad Meg"), whom she was dressed to recall. Brueghel's Meg is pictured at the edge of a hellmouth fighting back hordes of misshapen demons tumbling out of a giant mouth, which morphs the landscape into a face. Gret holds a baby in one hand and a sword in the other. The painting's motto is "he could plunder in front of hell and return unscathed". Plundering at the edge of hell, but also at the same time defending her territory from invaders, Gret is both an insider and an outsider. Her world has become transformed by the hell beneath to such an extent that it is not her land anymore: she is dispossessed, an insider become an outsider. The connection with Brueghel was made explicit by the souvenir programme, the cover of which showed a detail of Gret in close-up. Audiences were only allowed to buy the programme after the performance, so that their understanding of Margaret's role in the play, as both French and English, could only be completed once the connection with Brueghel was made clear. Gret's anger became Margaret's and Mitchell played on Margaret's outsider status as both an English Queen and a French Princess. Margaret's linguistic dispossession only became an issue when her child was disinherited; this was the spur for her anger in 3 *Henry VI*. Her escape to France was also a homecoming, a way of reintegrating with a culture not falling apart, a way of becoming an insider again. This was the "minor" play that Mitchell recovered by turning Margaret's visit to France into a linguistic homecoming. Margaret spoke like a foreigner in her own tongue.

France was invoked not just by its language but by a sense of custom largely absent in the English scenes. The scene began with a servant clearing a path across a wood-chipped stage with a large brush, the French King (Stephen Simms) walking behind him distractedly reading a book and playing with a wooden ball in one hand. Following him was Margaret (here wearing

only a plain cream dress) and her party, all walking on their knees in humble subjugation and each one apparently being ignored. Lewis took his throne (which was no more than a plain wooden chair) and the servant prayed at an altar next to him, but Margaret was left prostrate on the floor. This was, it soon became clear, a ceremony of reincorporation, a rite of re-territorialisation which Margaret had to endure before Lewis would allow her to stand and sit by him. Such rites were not observed by Warwick, played by John Keegan, who entered the stage without ceremony and, speaking in English, addressed the King bluntly and without deference. From this point on, all characters spoke in English. Where France, in French, had been mysterious and hierarchical, now rendered in English it became blunt and political. Lewis, at first offended by Warwick's directness and his inability to speak in French, swiftly exiled Margaret to the edge of the stage when it seemed his political advantage lay with Edward. Margaret was the outsider once again and when the scene was turned on its head by the messenger who brought news of Edward's clandestine marriage and Margaret and Warwick joined forces, she set to return to England and to madness.

Playing the scene in French had another effect: Mitchell divided the audience along cultural lines. Those that understood French had complete access to the scene, those that could not (and 80% of Britons do not have a second language) were linguistically exiled from it, shut out from the scene and only able to guess at the relationship between Margaret and the King. For a few minutes, the potential for cultural misunderstanding, even civil war, flickered in the audience. Such strategies were deliberately conceived to remind audiences and British culture generally, that civil war was part of British history. Mitchell's agenda was closely bound up with her personal response to the civil wars then being fought in former Yugoslavia, in particular the battles between the Serbians and the Bosnians. This was a war fought in cultural as well as physical terms: mosques were destroyed and, in one of the abiding horrors that the conflict is now remembered for, rape camps were set up to "cleanse" the Bosnians of Muslim ethnicity. For Mitchell and many other artists at the time, the war demanded a cultural response as a counter-weight to the prevailing political apathy in the West which conducted a policy of appeasement and containment towards the region.⁸ Bosnia was not directly alluded to by the production itself, although the score was based on Bosnian folk music. Rather, Mitchell sought to recover *3 Henry VI* as a warning play from an England lost to history as a way of

⁸ The Serbian president Slobodan Milosevic was put on trial for war crimes in 2001. Although he did not live long enough for the trial to reach a verdict, Milosevic is now so closely associated with culpability for the war's worst atrocities that it is difficult to imagine a time when he was regarded by the West as an ally.

signalling the common threads that linked Britain with Eastern Europe. Shakespeare's England was a strange place: its inhabitants participated in long-forgotten Catholic rituals. More of the play was in another language: as well as the scene in France, the play was punctuated by liturgical chants in Latin. Each time a character died, an unnamed woman in black (named "Mad Meg" in the prompt books) escorted the dead offstage singing a Kyrie. After her, Exeter (played by Chris Garner as a young gardener) planted a cross at the perimeter of the thrust stage. By the end of the production, the audience was completely separated from the stage by these crosses.⁹

It was not, then, just French which worked as a foreign language: Shakespeare and English were recovered as foreign languages too. If some of the audience were included in the French-language scene, all of the audience were shut out from the play's conclusion, the physical space of the theatre divided by memorials for the dead. Mitchell's political point was made by recovering *3 Henry VI's* potential to be a disturbing play which renegotiates the relationship between theatre and power. She played Shakespeare's England as "a foreigner, but in one's own tongue". This minor, untimely *Henry VI* did not, however, give the audience any kind of transformative power. On the contrary, the audience was radically divided from the stage, exiled from its language, made to feel momentarily what it is like to have one's culture robbed. If there was empowerment, it was for an audience that was not there, could not be there, but was imagined as a potential. The players challenged their audience to see itself in the English history that they staged and then mourned their inability to recapture that moment of audience identification. Shut linguistically from some parts and culturally in almost all parts, audiences were forced to reflect on their own cultural dispossession in the moment of this performance. The performance ended with the company singing one final, dismal sounding Kyrie, the ensemble facing the audience from the back of the thrust stage, as if it was the company which had become the emancipated spect-actors watching the audience and challenging them to rethink their history.

Conclusion

In this article, I have explored several different models of what might be termed spect-actorial adaptation, whereby intercultural audiences become "productive and emancipated" not because they are invited to, but because they retain the power, as all audiences do, to exceed the performance and re-member it differently. *Henry VI* served as a running example in part because the plays

⁹ For more on this production, see Hampton-Reeves and Rutter 168–185.

are, on a superficial reading, firmly committed to what it imagines to be an English audience. Joan's quip, "Done like a Frenchman, turn and turn again", is written with the confident presumption that the audience is English and part of their Englishness is a shared feeling that foreigners "can't be trusted". By exploring the untimely, minor play that might emerge if Bene's methods are applied to *Henry VI*, I have illustrated how the plays might indeed be remembered as a comedy in which the joke is on the English, not the French. In my concluding performance analysis, my aim has been to explore spect-actorial adaptation through a performance of *3 Henry VI* which specifically sets out to alienate its audience (in both the Brechtian *and* conversational sense) from its own history. In this performance, the players in effect became the kind of audience I have been talking about. Like Bene, Mitchell and her company produced a "critical commentary" *and* a "creative response" to the text – but it was *not* Shakespeare's text, or even the "performance text" which they commented on, it was the "audience text" itself which became the object and the absent presence of their meditation on civil war. The French language scene was a cipher for the production as a whole, which presented Shakespeare as "a foreigner, *but* in one's own tongue".

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