

**‘ACTING GOOD PARTS WELL’:
SIR IAN McKELLEN IN SHAKESPEARE**

by

HILARY EDITH W. LONG

**A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Arts
of the University of Birmingham
for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

**The Shakespeare Institute
School of English
Faculty of Arts
The University of Birmingham**

March 2000

UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM

University of Birmingham Research Archive

e-theses repository

This unpublished thesis/dissertation is copyright of the author and/or third parties. The intellectual property rights of the author or third parties in respect of this work are as defined by The Copyright Designs and Patents Act 1988 or as modified by any successor legislation.

Any use made of information contained in this thesis/dissertation must be in accordance with that legislation and must be properly acknowledged. Further distribution or reproduction in any format is prohibited without the permission of the copyright holder.

M0060034BU
20553250

SYNOPSIS

This thesis examines the performances which have earned Sir Ian McKellen a reputation as one of the foremost Shakespearean actors of the day. His reputation has been built on five major performances: Richard II, Macbeth, Coriolanus, Iago and Richard III. His performances as Hamlet, Romeo, Leontes and Kent were only limited successes. This thesis places McKellen's performances in these roles in the specific context of the production as a whole. Where it is relevant it assesses the significance of the casting of other roles, the influence of the personality, style and interests of the director, the policy of the theatre company and the impact of the performance space. This thesis identifies patterns in McKellen's work determined by his own personality and sexuality, the Cambridge education he shares with Sir Peter Hall, John Barton and Trevor Nunn, and his relationships with other actors.

The Introduction considers the characteristics of a McKellen Shakespeare performance and assesses the importance of his intellectual approach to the text. It looks at how his sexuality has influenced his performances. His devotion to touring is also highlighted. Chapter 1 concentrates on the Shakespeare roles McKellen played early on in his career. Chapter 2 is devoted to McKellen's celebrated performance as Richard II. Chapter 3 examines McKellen's interpretation of Hamlet. Chapter 4 looks at his performance as Edgar in the Actors' Company's King Lear and his taking over the role of The Bastard in the Royal Shakespeare Company's King John. Chapter 5 considers his performance as Romeo and chapter 6 his interpretation of Leontes. The success of McKellen's portrayal of Macbeth is scrutinised in Chapter 7, and his Sir Toby Belch in a touring production is also examined. Chapter 8 assesses the strengths and weaknesses of his performance as Coriolanus at the National Theatre. His NCO Iago is explored in Chapter 9. Chapter 10 looks at the difficulties McKellen confronted when playing Kent and Chapter 11 the success of his portrayal of Richard III.

Length: approximately 75,000 words

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Illustrations	i
Acknowledgements	iii
List of Abbreviations	iii
Introduction	1
Chapter 1 Early Roles	20
Chapter 2 <u>Richard II</u>	36
Chapter 3 <u>Hamlet</u>	59
Chapter 4 Part 1: <u>King Lear - Actors' Company (1974)</u>	79
Part 2: <u>King John - RSC (1975)</u>	83
Chapter 5 <u>Romeo and Juliet</u>	92
Chapter 6 <u>The Winter's Tale</u>	116
Chapter 7 Part 1: <u>Macbeth</u>	134
Part 2: <u>Twelfth Night</u>	152
Chapter 8 <u>Coriolanus</u>	158
Chapter 9 <u>Othello</u>	196
Chapter 10 <u>King Lear - National Theatre (1990)</u>	221
Chapter 11 <u>Richard III</u>	244
Conclusion	274
Appendix A Stage appearances by McKellen in professional Shakespeare productions	277
Appendix B Production Information	279
Bibliography	307

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

(Between Chapters 7 and 8 - pp.157-158)

- Fig.1 Ian McKellen as Richard II (photograph: Observer newspaper)
- Fig.2 Ian McKellen as Romeo and Francesca Annis as Juliet (photograph: Nobby Clark, Shakespeare Centre)
- Fig.3 Ian McKellen as Romeo and Francesca Annis as Juliet (photograph: Nobby Clark, Shakespeare Centre - this image has been marked up for a poster hence the white outline)
- Fig.4 Ian McKellen as Leontes (photograph: Donald Cooper, Shakespeare Centre)
- Fig.5 The set for The Winter's Tale RSC 1976 (photograph: Joe Cocks, Shakespeare Centre)
- Fig.6 Ian McKellen as Macbeth and Judi Dench as Lady Macbeth (photograph: Joe Cocks, Shakespeare Centre)
- Fig.7 Ian McKellen as Macbeth and Judi Dench as Lady Macbeth (photograph: Joe Cocks, Shakespeare Centre)
- Fig.8 Ian McKellen as Caius Martius (photograph: John Haynes, NT publications)
- Fig.9 Ian McKellen as Caius Martius and Irene Worth as Volumnia (photograph: John Haynes, Coriolanus at the National by Kristina Bedford)
- Fig.10 Ian McKellen as Caius Martius (photograph: John Haynes, Coriolanus at the National by Kristina Bedford)
- Fig.11 Ian McKellen as Caius Martius (photograph: John Haynes, publicity department at the National Theatre)
- Fig.12 Ian McKellen as Iago (photograph: The Listener)

Fig. 13 Ian McKellen as Iago and Imogen Stubbs as Desdemona (photograph: Stuart Morris, Independent newspaper)

Fig. 14 Ian McKellen as Kent and Brian Cox as King Lear (photograph: Neil Libbert, The Lear Diaries by Brian Cox)

Fig. 15 Ian McKellen as Richard III (photograph: John Haynes, The Lear Diaries by Brian Cox)

Fig. 16 Ian McKellen as Richard III and Brian Cox as Buckingham (photograph John Haynes, The Lear Diaries by Brian Cox)

Fig. 17 Ian McKellen as Richard III (photograph: Alex Bailey, William Shakespeare's Richard III, a screenplay by Ian McKellen and Richard Loncraine)

Fig. 18 Ian McKellen as Richard III (photograph: Alex Bailey, William Shakespeare's Richard III, a screenplay by Ian McKellen and Richard Loncraine)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to the National Theatre and the Shakespeare Centre for giving me access to the relevant promptbooks. Thanks are due to Joy Leslie Gibson for her generous gifts of material and ‘insider’ knowledge, to Mr E.J. Ebutt at Birmingham Central Library for his courtesy and thoroughness. At the Shakespeare Institute Library thank you to Jim Shaw for being interested in the subject and offering helpful suggestions and to Kate Welch for her patience assistance. I appreciated Ian McKellen answering my letters and am beholden to Russell Jackson for his supervision.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

RSC - Royal Shakespeare Company

LWT - London Weekend Television

BBC - British Broadcasting Corporation

INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines the Shakespeare performances which have largely contributed to Sir Ian McKellen's reputation as one of the foremost actors of the day. My definition of a classical actor is simply an actor who establishes a reputation in revivals of what are recognised as being seminal texts rather than in new plays. McKellen's identification with classical acting is all the more interesting when one considers that he has appeared in as many new plays as revivals. With the exception of Martin Sherman's Bent, however, McKellen's impact has not been as great in new plays. It should be noted that he himself dislikes the tag of 'classical' actor, preferring to be called a serious actor. McKellen's reputation as one of the best actors of Shakespeare in this country seems to have been built on five major performances: Richard II, Macbeth, Coriolanus, Iago and Richard III. His performances as Hamlet, Romeo, Leontes and Kent were only limited successes.

One aspect of his performance that is often remarked on is his vocal delivery. Critics and audience alike are more likely to remember how McKellen said a certain line than what stage business accompanied it, although in his best moments the two are symbiotic. This provides a clue as to what differentiates McKellen from his peers. One of the hallmarks of a McKellen Shakespeare performance is his obvious love of the language. He believes that 'Shakespeare should, on the whole, be aural primarily rather than visual. If you don't get the language, then you've lost the heart of the matter.'¹ When rehearsing a Shakespeare role he gets to know 'exactly what the words mean' Only then can he understand the emotions behind them:

I'm persuaded that in order to act Shakespeare well, you have to understand the

¹ Shakespeare Quarterly, Vol 33 (1982), p.140.

words, absorb the meaning in all your being, and then rattle the lines out the way John Gielgud does.²

Both Gielgud and McKellen have been praised for speaking the verse as if they were creating the words to express the emotion on the spot, 'coining' rather than reciting it. It is interesting that McKellen cites Gielgud as a role model: most actors of promise from the 1950's onwards have been hailed by the press as the next Olivier rather than the next Gielgud.³ His placing himself in the tradition of the 'beautiful voice' testifies to an element of the old-fashioned in McKellen's approach.

Since 1945 perhaps the most important development in British acting has been the change in balance between vocal and physical technique. In British Theatre Since 1955 - A Reassessment, published in 1979, Ronald Hayman wrote that drama schools now devoted more time to the actor's body and less to his voice: 'it can no longer be said of British actors that they are dead below the neck'.⁴ English actors had a reputation for being unable to use their bodies expressively on stage. Kenneth Tynan, writing about Gielgud's one-man Shakespeare show The Ages of Man, commented: 'I have always felt that Sir John Gielgud is the finest actor on earth from the neck up'.⁵ The tradition of acting Shakespeare in Britain changed in the late 1940's and Laurence Olivier was one of the exponents of the new style. At the beginning of his Shakespeare career Olivier was criticised for speaking the verse badly. In his review of Romeo and Juliet at the New Theatre in 1935 (in which Olivier and Gielgud alternated the roles of Romeo and Mercutio), James Agate wrote: 'Mr Olivier's Romeo showed himself very

² Shakespeare Quarterly, Vol 33 (1982), p. 141.

³ The headline of an interview with McKellen in the Daily Mirror 7 October 1969 read: 'The new Olivier from Wigan market.' A profile of McKellen in Woman and Home in May 1984 stated that he had been described as ' "the natural heir to Olivier" '

⁴ Ronald Hayman, British Theatre Since 1955 - A Reassessment (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p.134.

⁵ Kenneth Tynan, A View of the English Stage 1944-1963 (London: Davis-Poynter, 1975), p.247.

much in love but rather butchered the poetry.’⁶ Subsequently, however, it was Olivier’s large gestures, his death fall as Coriolanus, his posture and gait as Richard III, that captured the imagination of the theatre-going public. His alleged inability to speak the verse became a secondary concern and his physical approach to Shakespeare roles changed twentieth-century perceptions. What had previously been regarded as a largely rhetorical art became an arena of passionate energy. McKellen (unlike, for example, Antony Sher) is not a physical actor in the Olivier tradition and yet does use his body as much as his voice to communicate narrative and character to the audience. However, it is his emphasis on the word rather than the action that characterises his performances.

McKellen’s feel for language was developed at Cambridge where he read English at St Catharine’s College and established himself as an acting talent. McKellen’s love of language coincided with the rise of academic directors. In the late 1950’s and early 1960’s a new breed of university (in particular Cambridge) educated directors came into being. Stephen Fay has noted that ‘earlier generations had learnt their craft in the theatre itself, in stage management, or, like Gielgud and Olivier, by acting.’⁷ The man who led what turned out to be a revolution in this area of British theatre was Peter Hall, who also read English at St Catharine’s College. By the age of twenty-four Hall was running the Arts Theatre, London where he directed the English-language premiere of Waiting For Godot in 1955. The production became a ‘theatrical legend, and it made Peter Hall famous.’⁸ His influence on the presentation of Shakespeare began when he became Director of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre in 1960. He formed the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) in 1961. The ascendancy of

⁶ James Agate, Brief Chronicles (London: Jonathan Cape, 1943), p.214.

⁷ Stephen Fay, Power Play (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1995), p.60.

⁸ Fay, p.80. There were exceptions, Tyrone Guthrie and Peter Brook were both Oxford graduates.

the Cambridge-educated director was immediate with John Barton, Peter Wood and Hall himself directing all the plays, bar one, in his first season.⁹ When Peter Hall resigned from the RSC in 1968 he was succeeded by another Cambridge-educated director, Trevor Nunn. The influence of Hall, Barton and Nunn on the received notion of how a Shakespeare play should be performed is immense. As Alan Sinfield has pointed out, at the end of the Second World War Shakespeare at Stratford was 'artistically, culturally and politically insignificant. Since that time... [the Royal Shakespeare Company] has become one of the most prestigious companies in the world'.¹⁰ The RSC approach to a Shakespeare play initiated by Hall and continued by Nunn can be described as being 'Shakespeare-plus-relevance: this is the combination of traditional authority and urgent contemporaneity which proved so effective.'¹¹ McKellen's approach to acting Shakespeare can be seen to be identical to Hall's: 'What one should do, but it is not always easy, is to read the text very carefully to find out what the author meant and then make this understandable for a modern audience. This is what I try to do.'¹² Sinfield has stated that, 'The RSC has, from the start, fostered this potent combination of relevance and the real Shakespeare by announcing its respect for the scholarship which seems to authenticate the process... The outcome has been a convergence of the academic and theatre Shakespeares which is without precedent.'¹³ It is perhaps no coincidence that this academic approach to Shakespeare and especially the notion of making it relevant for a modern audience came from men educated at Cambridge.

⁹ John Barton was replaced by Hall as director of *The Taming of the Shrew* after a delegation of actors led by Peggy Ashcroft said they couldn't work with Barton any longer - he was too obsessed by detail.

¹⁰ Alan Sinfield, 'Royal Shakespeare: theatre and the making of ideology' in *Political Shakespeare* ed. by Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), pp.158-181, p.158.

¹¹ Sinfield, p.159.

¹² Bergens Tidende 11 March 1980.

Nunn has commented: 'My loyalty to the text is total because it is my starting point and my finishing point.'¹⁴ Two major figures can be seen as influencing this generation of Cambridge students in their textual seriousness: F.R. Leavis and George Rylands. Leavis was part of a revolutionary movement in literary criticism started by I.A. Richards and T.S. Eliot. This movement came to be known as New Criticism, a term adopted from the title of a book published in 1941 by John Crowe Ransom. As a young man Leavis had contributed to Richards' practical criticism courses which expounded the values of close reading. Terry Eagleton has described 'a typical New Critical account of a poem':

[It] offers a stringent investigation of its various "tensions", "paradoxes" and "ambivalences", showing how these are resolved and integrated by its solid structure'¹⁵

Leavis eschewed literary criticism that was concerned with biographical or social background: literary appreciation should be based on a close reading of the text, eliciting the nuances of the language and the themes which create the structure. In addition to this new critical practice Leavis, through the journal Scrutiny, which he founded in 1932, introduced the issue of discrimination, a concern to establish the great authors from the second rate. He also believed that reading literature had a higher moral purpose and 'made you a better person'¹⁶ One of the weaknesses of Leavis' approach to Shakespeare is a failure he shares with other 'new critics' in their approach to drama: the 'inability to recognise that a play is not made up of words alone.'¹⁷ In his diaries Peter Hall points out the irony that Leavis a man who 'hated the theatre and

¹³ Sinfield, p.175,176.

¹⁴ Ralph Berry, On Directing Shakespeare (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1988), p.80.

¹⁵ Terry Eagleton, Literary Theory (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), p.49.

¹⁶ Eagleton, p.35.

¹⁷ J.L Styan, The Shakespeare Revolution (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p.169.

never went to it... has had more influence on the contemporary theatre than any other critic.¹⁸

McKellen has spoken of the influence that Nunn and Barton have had on his approach to acting Shakespeare and how he sees it as being linked to Leavis' influential ideas about literary criticism:

I have been introduced to their disciplined examination of the poetry; its precision of feeling and its subtlety of device which makes demands on acting equivalent to those which Leavis, who taught Nunn at Cambridge, urged on literary criticism.¹⁹

Michael Billington has described McKellen's one-man show Acting Shakespeare as being in some degree an 'I. A. Richards-type Cambridge Practical Criticism made manifest.'²⁰ It certainly reveals McKellen's attempt to get back to Shakespeare's original thoughts, and highlights his belief in Shakespeare the man of the theatre whose language can be trusted to give the actor directions. He has anatomised Juliet's line to Romeo in Act 3 scene 5, 'It was the nightingale, and not the lark/ That pierced the fearful hollow of thine ear'(2-3), explaining that:

It is a very exact expression and has to do with reality, it is not poetry. How near the hollow of an ear do you have to be to see that it is hollow and not that it is pink, beautiful or ugly? In other words when the two lovers hear the bird... they were very close to each other, they were in bed, they were making love, Juliet doesn't speak poetically... this line is not 'nice' but sensual, real, passionate.²¹

In Shakespeare Superscribe and also in his one-man show he considers Macbeth's soliloquy in Act 5 scene 5, and examines the precise meaning behind the images:

'Life's but a walking shadow' A walking shadow - what does that mean?
Well, it's a shadow following a man walking along a country lane lit in the

¹⁸ Peter Hall, Peter Hall's Diaries: The Story of a Dramatic Battle (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1983), p.347.

¹⁹ Ian McKellen, 'A distant, fabled place', The Times, 9 October 1976.

²⁰ Michael Billington, Drama, Vol 2, 1984, p.33.

²¹ Press Conference Bucharest, Romania, British Council Archive.

dark by a guttering candle. It's a shadow which hardly exists - it's wavering about the road. All the evidence is that Shakespeare was not just a playwright but also an actor. There is a phrase in the theatre, not used now very much... 'a walking gentleman' was an actor who played any old part. Life isn't even a walking gentleman, he's a walking shadow.²²

McKellen performs a critical analysis of the text before attempting to perform it.

The other influential Cambridge figure was George Rylands, who lectured on Elizabethan and Jacobean playwrights including Shakespeare and who, like Leavis, believed in close examination of text. However, unlike Leavis he was a man of the theatre. He was involved with the two main student drama groups: the Amateur Dramatic Club (ADC) and the Marlowe Society.²³ He provided links between the academic scrutiny of the text and the acting of it and also between student drama and the acting profession. In 1944, on the strength of his work with the Marlowe Society, Rylands was invited by John Gielgud to direct him in Hamlet and Peggy Ashcroft in The Duchess of Malfi at the Haymarket. According to Gielgud, Rylands was 'very strict over the text in both plays that he directed... He kept his eye on the book all the time.'²⁴ Hall, who played First Citizen in a Marlowe Society production of Coriolanus directed by Rylands, agrees with Gielgud, commenting that he directed with 'his nose firmly in the text. He was more concerned with our line endings and our iambics than with whether we were bumping into each other.'²⁵ Noel Annan comments that Rylands:

drilled his undergraduate actors and actresses to think, while they were speaking, what the Elizabethan and Jacobean blank verses meant instead of ranting or throwing away the lines. They learnt how to respect the interplay of rhythm and metre of the lines - a discipline that after the war was to transform for three decades the speaking of verse at Stratford and on the London stage'.²⁶

²² ed. by Myra Barrs, Shakespeare Superscribe (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1980), p.48.

²³ McKellen was President of the Marlowe Society - 1960-61.

²⁴ John Gielgud, An Actor and His Time (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1989), p.149.

²⁵ Peter Hall, Making an Exhibition of Myself (London: Sinclair-Stevenson 1993), p.72.

²⁶ Noel Annan, Our Age: Portrait of a Generation (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1990), p.6.

Leavis' influence can clearly be seen in the Shakespeare productions of such Cambridge-educated directors as Barton, Hall, Nunn and Richard Eyre, whose emphasis on detailed and precise textual analysis is based on his advocacy of close reading. Their productions are also concerned with how the separate themes cohere into an organic whole. Rylands' influence is also obvious.

The fact that McKellen as an actor shares these directors' academic background and so complements their ideas has meant that his relationships with them have been felicitous. McKellen's acting style needs directors whose priorities reflect his intellectual approach, directors who are able to satisfy his desire to understand the meaning of every word he speaks on stage, and who value the language above all else. Although in his one-man show McKellen jokes about the 'Cambridge mafia', the Cambridge connection should not be underestimated. His five most acclaimed Shakespeare performances were all directed by Cambridge graduates.

However, intellectually understanding the emotion of the language and feeling it are distinct and there have been two directors who have been central in developing McKellen's ability to feel the emotion. Significantly neither is a member of the 'Cambridge mafia' and both are from different generations. Both Tyrone Guthrie and Mike Alfreds have been responsible for encouraging McKellen to be true to the emotion of the moment, although it has taken McKellen many years to learn this lesson and incorporate it into his acting style. Guthrie gave McKellen his first instruction in 1963 when he directed him as Tullus Aufidius at the Nottingham Playhouse. McKellen was finding the moment where he had to keen over the body of the dead Coriolanus too difficult and he was failing to convince the director that he was really feeling his character's emotion. Guthrie told him to 'commit to something that is bigger than you

are’²⁷ McKellen did finally succeed, and he was able to achieve true expression of emotion at certain moments in subsequent productions. In 1988 Mike Alfreds directed him as Lophakin in The Cherry Orchard. Alfreds says that an actor is unable to do anything on stage that he does not actually feel, that the audience will not feel anything if the actor doesn’t.²⁸ For McKellen, who had often been criticised for indicating emotion rather than communicating it, this was quite a shock. He has stated:

If people want to see how I’ve developed, they have to look as much to my working with Mike Alfreds as to my coming out. The two are related, since they are both about not being artificial, not lying, but living in the moment.²⁹

The lessons of Guthrie and Alfreds have only become a consistent part of McKellen’s acting style since he ‘came out’ as a homosexual in 1989. Since then he seems to have developed the skill of being able to express the truthful emotion without having to resort to technique or dazzling displays of bravura. Whether he would have been capable of the Iago he gave in 1990 had he not come out is an interesting question. The restraint of emotion in Iago that he conveyed might not have been possible without the emotion being first felt, the repression of it was communicated because the audience could believe in its existence. Richard Eyre can see that McKellen’s acting has changed since 1989:

It’s an attractive metaphor: that coming together of life and art has the tidiness of fiction. Actually I think it’s true. Given Ian’s increasing desire to improve, it was inevitable he would reach a point when he said, ‘Ah my life is a lie, therefore my acting is a lie.’³⁰

The influence of McKellen’s sexuality on his Shakespeare career is a difficult and delicate subject to discuss. McKellen ‘came out’ during a radio debate on Clause 28 (government legislation concerning the so-called promotion of homosexuality by

²⁷ Irving Wardle, Independent, 23 June 1991.

²⁸ Robert Chesshyre, ‘The Age of McKellen’, Sunday Telegraph, 15 August 1992.

²⁹ Robert Chesshyre, ‘The Age of McKellen’, Sunday Telegraph, 15 August 1992.

³⁰ Robert Chesshyre, ‘The Age of McKellen’, Sunday Telegraph, 15 August 1992.

local authorities) in January 1988. Therefore, all but three of his Shakespeare roles predate the revelation of his sexuality. As these roles were assessed by critics and audiences alike without consideration of his homosexuality it seems somewhat problematical to do so in hindsight. In an interview in 1990 he stated that one of the reasons why he didn't come out earlier was the practical consideration that 'it would exclude him from certain film parts and it would change the audience's image of him on stage.'³¹ However, I do believe that McKellen's identity as a gay man has caused a certain pattern to arise with regard to his Shakespeare performances.

Only one of the Shakespeare roles that McKellen has played has been given a homosexual agenda. In Guthrie's 1963 production of *Coriolanus* the relationship between Tullus Aufidius and Coriolanus was presented as being blatantly homo-erotic. McKellen has commented that he feels that this interpretation is 'there' in the text and that 'it was very nice for me playing Aufidius'³² However, for the rest of his Shakespeare performances McKellen appears to have deliberately avoided suggesting a homosexual element. When McKellen played Coriolanus in 1984 he wanted to emphasise the domestic, family context, and Coriolanus' relationship with Aufidius remained shadowy due to McKellen's reluctance to suggest any sexual connection between the characters. He eschewed any suggestion of latent homosexuality in his performances of Richard II, Richard III and Iago, all roles that can be interpreted as having homo-erotic tendencies. Although McKellen's wariness in revealing his own homosexuality due to audience perceptions may have resulted in his being cautious of introducing it into his performances, he did not shy away from playing homosexual

³¹ Bryan Appleyard 'Portrait of the Actor as a Gay Man', *Independent*, 22 February 1990.

³² Kristina Bedford, *Coriolanus at the National* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 1992). p.145.

characters. He played Edward II and Max, in Martin Sherman's play Bent, before he declared his sexuality.

Another issue to consider is whether McKellen's sexuality has prevented him from being successful in portraying heterosexual characters. His performance as Romeo was considered to be a limited success. One of the criticisms levelled at the production was the lack of sexual frisson between McKellen and Francesca Annis' Juliet. It is too simplistic to say the reason for this was that McKellen as a gay man was unable to relate to Romeo's heterosexual desire for Juliet - after all there was plenty of charged sexual eroticism between McKellen and Judi Dench as Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. The weakness of McKellen's Romeo was not to do with his being gay but was related to the limitations of his intellectual understanding of personal, intimate relationships. McKellen has been very successful in portraying heterosexual relationships that are based on power: The Macbeths had a sexual attraction that was fuelled by ambition and power; his Coriolanus was locked into a power feud with his mother - although it was his son and not the women who persuaded him not to sack Rome. McKellen admits to being 'ecstatic'³³ at not having had to try Bassanio, Ferdinand and Florizel. These characters are similar to Claudio and Romeo which he did play and felt uncomfortable with. It seems that the straightforward role of the young heterosexual lover was one he could not play convincingly. The reason for this is that he approaches roles intellectually and while he can comprehend partnerships based on power, ambition and the desire to continue life through children he can not understand young heterosexual love that has no basis in thought but is pure overwhelming emotion.

³³ Acting Shakespeare programme 1988, p.14

Therefore, as McKellen was reluctant to identify Shakespeare's characters as having homosexual feelings and could not relate to blatant, irrational heterosexuality, he has made the characters he has played in his own public image asexual. Even though the Macbeths were initially seen as being physically intimate Lady Macbeth was quickly replaced with Seyton as Macbeth's confidant. The pattern that has emerged and can be attributed directly to McKellen's homosexuality is his skill at presenting characters' asexuality. McKellen came out when he was forty-nine, a fact which means that he spent over twenty-five years of his professional career as a gay man closeted to his public. He presented himself as a single man without personal relationships and this persona is reflected in his most successful roles.

The element that Richard II, Macbeth, Coriolanus, Iago and Richard III have in common is that the society they operate in fails to satisfy or contain them and so seeks their destruction. They stand alone and are isolated, and their interplay with other characters is limited. It may be significant that McKellen's Iago did have complex feelings for both Emilia and Desdemona and suggests that since coming out McKellen is beginning to explore the delicate and intricate area of gender relationships.

McKellen's Shakespeare career has been characterised by a commitment to touring. Six of his eleven Shakespeare roles have been with a touring company. Three of his Shakespeare roles have been given within companies which were set up exclusively to tour. This commitment to touring is emotional, moral and intellectual. McKellen has an old-fashioned romantic view of actors as 'rogues, peasant slaves and vagabonds, travelling whence their audiences live and work'³⁴ He has admitted to having 'romanticized myself as a maverick and as a wanderer.'³⁵ Considering this

³⁴ Ian McKellen, 'A Distant Fabled Place', *The Times*, 9 October 1976.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

vagabonds, travelling whence their audiences live and work'³⁴ He has admitted to having 'romanticized myself as a maverick and as a wanderer.'³⁵ Considering this sentiment alongside his enjoyment of feeling part of small tight-knit affectionate community it is not surprising that he has spent so much of his career in touring productions. He also feels that he owes a debt to the companies and individuals involved in the weekly repertory and variety theatre that he saw in his youth, at the Grand Theatre in Bolton.

Although McKellen considers himself lucky to have been able to see theatre in Bolton, he recognises that:

A lot of the tours that I saw were attempts, not to bring us the best of British theatre, but to boost earnings of a show by dragging it round the provinces. The management were either trying to get it right before it opened in London or exploiting it after the London run with a substitute cast. I wouldn't wish those days back on anybody.³⁶

McKellen is passionate about the high standards and serious intentions he brings to touring: 'I want people in the provinces to see what London sees.'³⁷ He believes that subsidised theatre should be seen by everyone in the country. Referring in particular to the public's relationship with the National Theatre, McKellen has stated: 'They pay for it, after all. Give them free train rides to London. Or give us a circus tent in which to take our shows to them.'³⁸ This moral belief in the duty of subsidised companies to the country as a whole has resulted in McKellen leading touring productions for the RSC and the National Theatre.

³⁴ Ian McKellen, 'A Distant Fabled Place', *The Times*, 9 October 1976.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Peter Lewis, 'McKellen and his foot soldiers', *The Sunday Times*, 22 July 1990.

³⁷ Pat Garratt, 'The best actor of his generation?', *Woman's Journal*, 1976

³⁸ Anthony Holden, 'McKellen's Big Chance', *Sunday Express*, 16 December 1984.

the RSC in Stratford, he has commented: 'A lot of people don't want to go to the theatre at all ... They go for the same reason we go around St Peter's - because it is there'. In 1976 he described West End audiences as 'an amorphous lot, half of them are foreign, all strangers to each other, unresponsive and unexcitable.'⁴⁰ McKellen enjoys touring because he finds that the audiences in places like Leeds or Bolton are more likely to be local and/or enthusiastic.

McKellen's first triumph in a Shakespeare role was in his first touring production,⁴¹ in 1968 when he played Richard II for Prospect Theatre Company. When McKellen joined the company Toby Robertson was Director, Richard Cottrell Assistant Director and Iain Mackintosh Administrative Director. Both Robertson and Cottrell had been to Cambridge. Toby Robertson's company manifesto in the programme for Richard II at the Piccadilly Theatre read:

The Prospect Theatre Company exists to tour: in this it is different from all other established companies in the country; it has no theatre of its own.... It is also part of the artistic policy to present the classics in as uncluttered a manner as possible...The acting company is not a permanent one but it is interesting that recent companies tend to be composed of actors most of whom have worked for Prospect before. This has resulted in a high level of ensemble playing...It has always been part of the policy of the company to offer the challenging or unexpected role to actors with the result that there has always been a combination of experience and promise running through all aspects of the company... each production is an individual creation ... which does not have to conform to any given house-style or accommodate any particular artist under permanent contract. Most actors are gregarious by nature and I think the fact that it is their own choice to go on tour with the company is very important to them.

Prospect gave McKellen the opportunity to play both Richard II and Edward II at the Edinburgh Festival in 1969, launching his classical reputation. He also played a less acclaimed Hamlet for Prospect in 1971.

⁴⁰ Ian McKellen, 'A Distant Fabled Place', The Times, 9 October 1976.

⁴¹ When he was playing Claudio in Much Ado About Nothing, for the National Theatre in 1965, he played a small number of tour dates.

In 1972 McKellen and Edward Petherbridge set up the Actors' Company. There were sixteen actors in the company (six of them female). The company had no permanent theatrical base and was committed to touring. At the time McKellen explained to Michael Billington the reason behind Petherbridge's and his concept. It arose from

a feeling that we ought to be doing more as actors than we are to help change things, particularly the conditions under which we all work. The physical conditions are not very good. And the psychological conditions are often worse, partly because of the difficulty of knowing what one's position is within the organisation that puts on a play.⁴²

The company agreed to put on three plays, all the actors having a leading part in one play and small ones in the other two. They would choose the plays, directors and venues democratically. They also agreed to equal pay. In the programme for Feydeau's Ruling the Roost (one of the first productions) there is a description of the company rationale:

The Actors' Company is a group of experienced actors and actresses who have combined to play both leading and supporting roles in their own company. Through mutual discussion they have made all artistic decisions concerning plays, directors and casts. Their aim has been to produce a company of equals.

McKellen only played one Shakespeare role, Edgar in King Lear, for the Actors' Company. He left in 1974 to play Dr Faustus in an RSC production directed by John Barton, and has admitted that he had 'got bored playing minor roles.'⁴³ He also seems to have been frustrated that he 'could not persuade the majority that they should run their own repertory theatre.'⁴⁴

⁴² Michael Billington, 'A pride of players', Guardian, 1 September 1972.

⁴³ Anthony Holden, 'McKellen's Big Chance', Sunday Express, 16 December 1984.

⁴⁴ Observer, 21 March 1976

Barton, and has admitted that he had 'got bored playing minor roles.'⁴³ He also seems to have been frustrated that he 'could not persuade the majority that they should run their own repertory theatre.'⁴⁴

As has been noted McKellen distrusted the audience at Stratford, but agreed to play Faustus partly because the production was not going to be performed at Stratford. Instead it opened at the Edinburgh Festival and then went on a short tour before going into the RSC's London base, the Aldwych Theatre. In 1976 the RSC asked him to go to Stratford to play three leading roles. McKellen anticipated that his Macbeth, which was to be performed in The Other Place, would be seen by a different type of audience than is usual at Stratford:

It's a bit of a tin hut... It's classified as a village hall ... The seats are hard. It's not heated... But whoever puts up with that as opposed to the red plush and comfortable bars of the big theatre, is likely to be keen.⁴⁵

Once he had joined the RSC it is not surprising that he pioneered their touring tradition. In the middle-seventies Buzz Goodbody and Terry Hands had set up and run Theatre-Go-Round, which would second RSC actors on their days off and travel round the Midlands presenting Shakespeare, in modern dress, at ad hoc venues. However, McKellen organised a 'purpose-built' tour, comprising of two plays - Twelfth Night and The Three Sisters - and an entertainment devised by Roger Rees called Is There Honey Still for Tea? Edward Petherbridge was in the fifteen-strong cast. The company visited 22 towns playing 'in all kinds of halls to all kinds of audiences.'⁴⁶

In 1976 McKellen stated that he would like to see the Actors' Company 'infiltrating companies like the RSC and the National and, with all their enormous resources of buildings, of money and prestige, then being able to put their ideas of

⁴³ Anthony Holden, 'McKellen's Big Chance', Sunday Express, 16 December 1984.

⁴⁴ Observer, 21 March 1976

of the National Theatre, announced the subdivision of the organisation into 5 separate groups of 20 to 25 actors.⁴⁸ Each would have its own director, budget and annual production schedule: three plays a year, one in each of the auditoria. Only one of the groups was to be run by actors: the McKellen/Petherbridge company, this was not a new Actors' Company. Instead of assembling the cast first, McKellen and Petherbridge chose the first two plays to be performed at the Lyttelton and the Olivier theatres. They were The Duchess of Malfi and the double-bill of The Critic and The Real Inspector Hound. They then approached the directors Philip Prowse, Sheila Hancock and Tom Stoppard.⁴⁹ As a compromise, the third play, to be performed in the Cottesloe Theatre, was to be decided on by the director Mike Alfreys and the cast. The Cherry Orchard was finally selected. McKellen and Petherbridge had parts in all three plays. In 1990 McKellen agreed to return to the National 'on condition that he could tour for a year'⁵⁰ He orchestrated the tours of King Lear and Richard III for the National Theatre, as well as playing Kent and Richard III.

In 1976 McKellen stated: 'The only thing I'm dogmatic about is that there should be as much theatre as possible everywhere.'⁵¹ McKellen's career with its emphasis on touring is witness to the fact that he has put this belief into practice. McKellen's Shakespeare performances have become part of a rich and varied historical stage tradition started by the King's Men. There is myth that surrounds so-called great Shakespearean performances, by which they are supposed to be passed down from generation to generation, becoming part of the collective theatre-goers' consciousness of how a role could or should be played. Critics reviewing a Shakespeare production

⁴⁸ Due to the National Theatre's grant not being as much as was hoped for the groups were reduced to 17 or so actors and the Cottesloe Theatre was closed temporarily.

⁴⁹ Sheila Hancock, Ramblings of an Actress (London: Hutchinson, 1987), p.184.

⁵⁰ Peter Lewis, 'McKellen and his foot soldiers', The Sunday Times, 22 July 1990.

⁵¹ Observer, 21 March 1976

often refer to previous performances and stage traditions. This thesis is in part a contemporary record of McKellen's contribution to this theatrical history. McKellen's renown is in part attributable to his success in a very august arena. He has achieved approval in a tradition that carries with it importance and respect. His knighthood in 1990 was an acknowledgement of his contribution to cultural life in his country.

For each chapter my methodology is to start with McKellen's performance, which I reconstructed from promptbooks, reviews and other accounts. In the case of *Coriolanus*, *Iago*, *Kent* and *Richard III* this was augmented by first-hand personal knowledge. From this basis I proceeded to explore issues that arose from the productions. The areas of interest included critical writing on the play and theatrical precedents of the play in performance. Apart from the first chapter, the chapters in this thesis are divided into sections with subheadings indicating the line of enquiry. As the particular circumstances of each production differ the subheadings in the chapters are by no means identical. In order to place McKellen's performance in the context of the production as a whole I have examined elements that had a key influence: the circumstances which governed the assembling of the company, how the director became involved, the reasons why McKellen was cast in the role and McKellen's relationships with other actors.

I have only discussed textual cuts and emendations where they seem to have had a direct effect on the interpretation of the play and in particular on McKellen's interpretation of the character and/or his performance of the role. This can mean cuts made to lines spoken by his character or changes to the text executed to suit the director's reading of the play. Consequently, I have not discussed, for example, the

relatively few cuts and emendations Deborah Warner made to her conflated King Lear text because the changes did not bear directly on McKellen's interpretation of Kent.

Shakespearean quotations have been standardised as follows: the New Penguin edition was used for Macbeth (1967), Othello (1968), Richard III (1968), Romeo and Juliet (1967) and The Winter's Tale (1969); The Arden Shakespeare was used for Coriolanus (1976), Hamlet (1982), King Lear (1966), King Richard II (1961), Much Ado About Nothing (1981), and Twelfth Night (1975).

EARLY ROLES

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING - BELGRADE THEATRE COVENTRY 1962

On leaving Cambridge in 1961 McKellen joined the repertory company at the Belgrade Theatre in Coventry. During his year there he performed in sixteen plays. The directorial and acting styles of these productions have been summed up by McKellen in a quotation from the director of his first play, A Man for all Seasons: 'In your scripts you'll find the moves they did in the West End production - what was good enough for Paul Scofield for over a year will do us very nicely for a couple of weeks.'¹ His first professional Shakespeare role at Coventry was Claudio in Much Ado About Nothing in March 1962. Much Ado About Nothing had been presented twice in the previous four seasons at Stratford, so the choice was a brave one. The Coventry Evening Telegraph described the Belgrade production as being 'workmanlike and stripped of unnecessary fussiness... it has a good pace, the villainy strikes at the heart and the comedy ripples over the ribs.'² Bernard Kilby's Benedick was singled out by the reviewers for particular praise: 'Mr Kilby sparkles with nervous energy. Once again he reveals his ability to lift ordinary proceedings to the level at which one is captured by them'³ and 'He is a great asset to the Belgrade.'⁴ Not surprisingly perhaps, given the directorial technique outlined above, McKellen's appraisal of his performance is superficial: 'As Claudio, I wore far too much paint round the eyes - my one regret about missing drama school is that I've never really understood stage make-up.'⁵ McKellen was clearly competent as Claudio. The reviewer for the Stratford Herald stated that he was 'rightly,

¹ Ian McKellen, 'A Titan of the Theatre', Sunday Telegraph Magazine, 11 September 1983.

² N.K.W., Coventry Evening Telegraph, 7 March 1962.

³ Ibid.

⁴ J.E.M., Birmingham Post, 7 March 1962.

⁵ Acting Shakespeare Programme 1988, p.5.

blatantly romantic'⁶ and another critic commented that 'there is a likeable, ultra-earnest Claudio from Ian McKellen, who seems to progress in giant strides with every major role.'⁷ There was nothing prodigious about McKellen's first professional Shakespeare performance.

HENRY V - ARTS THEATRE IPSWICH 1963

Robert Chetwyn, Director of the Ipswich Repertory, was a good friend of Elspeth Cochrane, later McKellen's agent, and she invited him to come to Coventry and see McKellen in David Turner's play Semi-Detached. Chetwyn thought him interesting and so invited him to Ipswich. Eight plays into the season Chetwyn decided to produce Henry V with McKellen in the title role.

An ambitious choice, the play presented many technical complications. The space was small and Chetwyn had soldiers entering the auditorium through the lighting box. The cast had been augmented to twenty-four which is probably standard for a small-scale production of Henry V.⁸ However, McKellen recalls that 'there were too few friends to urge unto the breach. To disguise this, those soldiers we had, crouched in front of the tiny stage and, in the dark, I whispered the final battle instructions, as if the whole audience were my band of brothers.'⁹ Talking about this production to John Barton in 1980, for the LWT programmes Word of Mouth, McKellen stated, 'I was able to get just as much passion... bravado and patriotism by whispering as I could by shouting. In fact I think I got more because it was more real'¹⁰ This search for the

⁶ Stratford Herald, 9 March 1962.

⁷ N.K.W., Coventry Evening Telegraph, 7 March 1962.

⁸ The 1997 RSC touring production of Henry V, directed by Ron Daniels, had a cast of 22. This production played large spaces including the Alhambra, Bradford which has a capacity of 1,464.

⁹ Acting Shakespeare Programme 1988, p.5.

¹⁰ John Barton, Playing Shakespeare, (London: Methuen, 1984), p.185.

reality and the humanity in the part was recognised by the critic for the East Anglian Times:

Ian McKellen's King Henry disturbed one at first by an apparent over-emphasis of youthful exuberance, but, as the action develops, so also does his potential of chivalrous authority and the sum total is a good study of character development. His final scene, the wooing of Katherine, may not in a few of its flippancies please some Shakespeare purists, but it is a gay, happy moment with the touch of a very human producer.¹¹

Although the production only played for two weeks Chetwyn recalls that McKellen was still working on his performance ten days into the run.¹² This production in many ways anticipated the future hallmarks of a McKellen Shakespeare performance: a strong, intimate connection with the audience, an emphasis on the humanity of the character and an element of innovation in the presentation.

CORIOLANUS - NOTTINGHAM PLAYHOUSE 1963

In 1963 McKellen turned down a job in London and went instead from Ipswich to Nottingham, where he had been asked to join the first company at the new Playhouse Theatre. The inaugural play was Coriolanus, directed by Tyrone Guthrie with John Neville in the title role. The choice of play proved to be extremely apposite as political squabbling over funding for the Playhouse had bedevilled its construction for five years. Bernard Levin was appalled that the Tory-controlled council demanded rent of £26,000 a year, which was double the grant they gave the theatre.¹³ One reviewer wryly commented that 'Shakespeare's only class-war play was an almost inevitable ... choice for launching a new Playhouse in the city of Luddites. The fine 360¹⁴ seat theatre stands

¹¹ A.G.G., East Anglian Times, February 1963.

¹² Joy Leslie Gibson, Ian McKellen (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1986), p.39.

¹³ Bernard Levin, Daily Mail, 13 December 1963.

¹⁴ John O'Callaghan's reference to 360 seats is incorrect. The actual capacity of Nottingham Playhouse is 766, reducing to 685 with large forestage or orchestra.

after almost as much political conflict as brought about Coriolanus' fall.'¹⁵ It seems that McKellen accepted the role of First Citizen but found out later that he was to play Tullus Aufidius. McKellen believes that this experience with Guthrie was perfectly timed: 'He was inspiring. He was just what I needed.'¹⁶

Guthrie was well-known for his fresh, experimental approach to Shakespeare. In the 1930's he was heavily influenced by the Freudian psychiatrist Dr Ernest Jones and when he directed Laurence Olivier as Hamlet in 1937, they consulted Jones, who had written a paper in which he had set out Hamlet's Oedipus complex.¹⁷ Olivier liked the Freud-Jones interpretation as he felt it 'gave his performance a consistency'¹⁸ although few among the critics or public noticed it. Guthrie visited Jones again in 1938 when he was directing Othello with Ralph Richardson. Jones's theory was that Iago's villainy is rooted in his frustrated homosexual love for Othello. However, neither Guthrie nor Olivier, who was playing Iago, had the courage to tell Richardson about this interpretation, 'knowing that he would have no truck' with it.¹⁹ Consequently it was 'no surprise that the critics failed to perceive what had had to be concealed from the Moor.'²⁰ In 1938 Alec Guinness was directed by Guthrie in a modern dress production of Hamlet. He records that Guthrie often labelled Shakespeare's plays with a single word 'such as Spite (for The Merchant of Venice), Adolescence (Romeo and Juliet), Ambition (Macbeth), Spiritual Pride (for Measure for Measure), etc., to convey its essential element.'²¹ This indicates how strong and straightforward the underlining

¹⁵ John O'Callaghan, Guardian, 13 December 1963.

¹⁶ Acting Shakespeare Programme 1988, p.5.

¹⁷ Ernest Jones, Oedipus and Hamlet, Essays in Applied Psychoanalysis (New York, 1923)

¹⁸ Anthony Holden, Olivier, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1988), p.118.

¹⁹ John Miller, Ralph Richardson, (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1995), p.71.

²⁰ Miller, p.72.

²¹ Alec Guinness, Blessings in Disguise, (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1985), p.81.

communication of his productions was. It is interesting that both Olivier and Guinness, when remembering Guthrie's direction, recall that in rehearsal he tended to leave them alone despite his very individual and rigid ideas about the plays. He trusted his actors and only intervened directly when they continually failed to communicate precisely the correct emotion necessary to keep the audience interested. Both Olivier as Henry V and McKellen as Aufidius were given very specific instructions by Guthrie on how to deliver certain key lines 'properly'

Given Guthrie's interest in the psycho-sexual relationships in both Hamlet and Othello it is not surprising that he saw the relationship between Coriolanus and Aufidius as being not only central to the play but as also being a homosexual relationship. This interpretation altered the balance of the play and placed more emphasis on Aufidius than was then usual. At the first day of rehearsal Guthrie read out the introduction of an 'American edition' of the play which argued the legitimacy of such a reading and told the cast that he agreed with every word of it. McKellen later discovered that the introduction had been written by Guthrie himself. This interpretation proved somewhat controversial. The Yorkshire Post thought that 'It is being contrary to a fault, I think, to read into the personal conflict of the two warriors ... a hysterical and homosexual element.'²² However, the reviewer for The Times recognised that 'The interpretation is based on the circumstance of Coriolanus being the fatherless son of a dominating mother - a text-book origin of homosexuality' and found that although it was not 'consistently satisfying...in many passages it electrifies.'²³ An instance of Guthrie's interpretation proving effective was the first duel between Coriolanus and Aufidius

²² Desmond Pratt, Yorkshire Post, 13 December 1963.

²³ The Times, 14 December 1963.

when they circled one another ‘uttering threats like sensual caresses.’²⁴ The relationship was one of intense love combined with intense hate and it made Aufidius’ acceptance of Coriolanus as an ally in Act 4 scene 4 plausible. J.C. Trewin especially enjoyed the scene where Coriolanus broke down in the arms of Aufidius in the scene at Antium: ‘it is a new conception of this particular passage, and it is beautifully done.’²⁵

The production was generally felt to be anti-heroic and ‘at times a leisured satire on manners’.²⁶ Guthrie burlesqued Cominius’ speech to the Senate in praise of Coriolanus. It was also anti-sentimental: ‘My gracious silence, hail!’(2.1.174) was marred ‘by having Virgilia entangled at that moment with a ceremonial rope.’²⁷ Guthrie completely cut Act 2 scene 3 in which Coriolanus stands before the citizens in the gown of humility so that, as the Guardian reviewer observed, ‘The production does not emphasise over-much the individual intransigence of Coriolanus and is more the study of him as the only vigorous member of an ossified aristocracy.’²⁸

The set for Coriolanus, designed by Patrick Roberston, was simple and classical with huge portals and pillars. Rosemary Vercoe’s costumes were based on the French First Empire and the Napoleonic wars. Levin thought this ‘the most grotesquely inappropriate period’²⁹ in which to set the play. However, Ronald Mavor thought that the setting of the play was fortuitous as ‘the end of the eighteenth century is perhaps the period in which we are most aware of the gap between the aristos and the plebs’.³⁰ Coriolanus wore knee-high boots, white trousers and a gold breastplate with a high

²⁴ The Times, 14 December 1963.

²⁵ J.C. Trewin, Birmingham Post, 13 December 1963.

²⁶ Desmond Pratt, Yorkshire Post, 13 December 1963.

²⁷ J.C. Trewin, Birmingham Post, 13 December 1963.

²⁸ John O’Callaghan, Guardian, 13 December 1963.

²⁹ Bernard Levin, Daily Mail, 13 December 1963.

³⁰ Ronald Mavor, Scotsman, 14 December 1963.

plumed helmet, while McKellen as Aufidius was dressed all in black, with a pigtail and a moustache. The Volscians were Cossacks. The citizens were dressed 'in the rags typical of the first machine-minders in the early industrial revolution'.³¹ Several critics referred to Leo McKern's Menenius as Pickwickian and Christopher Hancock's Tribune was described by the Yorkshire Post as 'a Pecksniff of a rabble rouser'.³² In the same vein one reviewer thought that the mob 'look like strays from "A Tale of Two Cities"'.³³

McKellen's Aufidius was described as 'a sinister fellow, well spoken'³⁴ and 'waspyish'³⁵, while The Times reviewer hailed him as 'A new actor with a prodigious range of hysterical passion which rises to its climax in a lone wailing phrenody[sic] over the hero's body'.³⁶ The reviewer's reference to the wail over the body of the dead Coriolanus at the end of the play is particularly significant. McKellen claims that at the dress rehearsal Guthrie 'changed [his] life'³⁷ when he taught him a valuable lesson on feeling emotion as an actor rather than simply indicating it. Aufidius's instantaneous change from hate to grief in the final scene of the play proved too difficult for McKellen and the day before the opening Guthrie berated him: 'If we haven't convinced the audience by this time, that they've been witnessing great events and that the theatre is larger and more unexpected than life... then we are cheating them and ourselves and Shakespeare. Once more please, and properly'.³⁸ Or, in another version of the story, Guthrie said: 'Aufidius is a man but he can grow, as we all can, to behave like a god.

³¹ John O'Callaghan, Guardian, 13 December 1963.

³² Desmond Pratt, Yorkshire Post, 13 December 1963.

³³ E.A.B., Theatre World, January 1964, p.31.

³⁴ J.C. Trewin, Birmingham Post, 13 December 1963.

³⁵ Desmond Pratt, Yorkshire Post, 13 December, 1963.

³⁶ E.A.B., Theatre World, January 1964, p.31.

³⁷ Ian McKellen, 'A Titan of the Theatre', Sunday Telegraph Magazine, 11 September 1983, pp. 45-46.

³⁸ Acting Shakespeare Programme, p.5.

His rage can turn to sorrow. Fill your mind, your imagination with your feelings and let your heart wail. If you can't do it, it's all a waste. You can.'³⁹ McKellen had to let himself go and was directed to kneel beside the body of the dead Coriolanus and embracing him 'keen out a wail of true despair' After Guthrie's reproach at the dress rehearsal, McKellen finally succeeded in making this moment real. Through this experience Guthrie taught McKellen why acting is difficult; it 'demands that you dare to cut open your heart and make the audience care that you have done it.'⁴⁰ After this moment of enlightenment, it was sad that McKellen's next Shakespeare play was such a negative experience. The confidence that he had only just been given by Guthrie was destroyed by Franco Zeffirelli.

SIR THOMAS MORE - NOTTINGHAM PLAYHOUSE 1964

There was, however, a last brush with a page or two of Shakespeare before he left Nottingham. At the end of the season Frank Dunlop directed Sir Thomas More, a play believed to have been written by Henry Chettle, Thomas Dekker, Thomas Heywood, Anthony Munday and William Shakespeare. Owing to objections by Edmund Tilney, Master of the Revels, it was never acted in Elizabethan times. An article in the Daily Telegraph in 1954 records only two amateur productions in the twentieth-century, at Birkbeck College in 1922 and King's School, Canterbury, in 1938. Dunlop's production appears to have been the first professional one and McKellen, who was cast in the title role, is delighted that 'assuming that no-one unearths Love's Labour's Won or Henry 5 part 2, [he] shall forever be the last actor to create a part by Shakespeare.'⁴¹ At the time, Dunlop revealed that Nottingham Playhouse had hoped to do 'three plays

³⁹ Ian McKellen, Sunday Telegraph Magazine, 11 September 1983.

⁴⁰ Ian McKellen, Sunday Telegraph Magazine, 11 September 1983.

⁴¹ Acting Shakespeare Programme 1988, p.5.

from the Shakespearean apocrypha, but our budget would only run to Sir Thomas More.⁴² Dunlop had become interested in the play whilst a student at University College, London and had wanted to direct it ever since. In an interview, he commented on the play: 'It certainly isn't a "well-made" play - rather a vaudeville about Sir Thomas More, who emerges not as a hero but as a fallible human being who is remembered with affection.'⁴³ McKellen has stated that the style of the production, which developed in rehearsals, was to play 'each scene for what it was worth...declamatory, bold, theatrical, or obvious.'⁴⁴ This style suited McKellen and he was commended for his performance. The Times reviewer thought that he gave 'a beautifully modulated performance as More' and especially praised him for keeping 'the jocularly within the bounds of character. He jests his way to the scaffold, but unblatantly.'⁴⁵ Emrys Bryson believed that McKellen proved that like Thomas More 'he is indeed a man for all seasons'; Bryson continued, 'gravely spry, courteously dignified, he gives the role and production an authority remarkable for such a young man'⁴⁶ Benedict Nightingale stated that the strength of McKellen's performance was his ability to present 'dignity without a trace of mawkishness'⁴⁷ - a promising end to his Nottingham season.

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING - OLD VIC 1965

In 1964 Maggie Smith had seen McKellen at the Duke of York's in his first West End play, A Scent of Flowers by James Saunders. She recommended McKellen to Laurence Olivier and as a consequence he was asked to audition for the newly

⁴² 'Dwarfed by Shakespeare', Plays and Players, July 1964, pp.8-12 (p.11)

⁴³ Plays and Players, July 1964, p.11.

⁴⁴ Maire Jean Steadman, 'Sir Thomas More in the Twentieth Century' (Master's thesis, University of Birmingham, 1989), p.20.

⁴⁵ The Times, 11 June 1964.

⁴⁶ Emrys Bryson, Nottingham Post, 11 June 1964.

⁴⁷ Benedict Nightingale, Guardian, 12 June 1964.

established National Theatre at the Old Vic. McKellen chose to reprise his Cambridge Justice Shallow. Franco Zeffirelli was also present, casting for Much Ado About Nothing, and McKellen was offered and accepted the role of Claudio and stayed with the company for eight months.

Zeffirelli had directed Shakespeare at the Old Vic before. In 1960 at Michael Benthall's invitation he had directed John Stride and Judi Dench in Romeo and Juliet. Although the production was savaged by the daily critics, Kenneth Tynan in the Sunday Observer claimed that it was masterly and consequently people flocked to see it; the run was extended. Zeffirelli had also directed John Gielgud as Othello for the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1961; a production that was generally considered disastrous. Perhaps the main reason for his mixed fortune was his attitude to Shakespeare's language. Zeffirelli recognised that he had been asked to direct Romeo and Juliet because he could 'bring to the production the feel of Italy, not the Victorian interpretation that still dominated the English stage but something truly Mediterranean: not heavy carved furniture and velvet drapes, but sunlight on a fountain, wine and olives and garlic.'⁴⁸ He realised that he did not have much to contribute with regard to the language. The reasons for asking him to direct Othello are less obvious. An understanding of the characters through their language, Iago's prose and Othello's poetry, is essential. Zeffirelli is able to acknowledge, in hindsight, that what had been 'forgivable oversights in my *Romeo* when set against the vivacity and the drama would ... be inflated into major errors in *Othello*.'⁴⁹ He had also directed an Italian version of Hamlet which he had brought to the Old Vic for the World Theatre Season in 1964.

⁴⁸ Franco Zeffirelli, Zeffirelli, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1986), p.157.

⁴⁹ Zeffirelli, p.166.

Zeffirelli followed Shakespeare's directions and set Much Ado About Nothing in Sicily. He moved the action forward to around the end of the nineteenth century. There was no attempt to play anything realistically. B.A. Young commented that 'The piece is done as the broadest farce.'⁵⁰ The Nottingham Evening Post remarked that, "‘Much Ado’ becomes not so much a Shakespeare, more a way of pantomime’⁵¹ Zeffirelli is aware that he was employed to deliver a Zeffirelli production, ‘lavish in scale and unashamedly theatrical.’⁵² He believes that ‘the British have an instinctive yearning for Italy, for sunshine and the Mediterranean’ and he records that the company ‘let rip as if relieved to be enjoying themselves after all the recent bout of depression that had struck the English stage.’⁵³ The emphasis of the production was on freshness and dazzling theatricality.

Robert Stephens' Benedick was 'a sharp-suited provincial spiv, Sicilian to his last gold ring', Albert Finney's Don Pedro was 'a cheroot-smoking, somewhat greasy, insinuating prince' who strutted about the stage 'bottom stuck out jauntily, hand on hip'⁵⁴ whilst Dogberry and his watch spoke in cod Italian accents. Dogberry usually played 'as a slow-witted English rustic constable' was instead 'an excitable carabinieri [sic], still stupid but now he sings Verdi.'⁵⁵ The audience did not appear to mind that his malapropisms were lost in his Italian accent as they were being entertained and Malcolm Rutherford's insistence that 'Dogberry is English, he is there because he is

⁵⁰ B.A. Young, The Times, 17 February 1965.

⁵¹ Emrys Bryson, Nottingham Evening Post, 30 March 1965.

⁵² Zeffirelli, p.176.

⁵³ Zeffirelli, p.155 and p.202. Perhaps Zeffirelli is thinking of the recent rise in kitchen-sink drama. Or he could be referring to the fact that the other plays in repertory with Much Ado About Nothing (apart from Hay Fever) were all rather serious and his production provided welcome light relief. The other plays in repertory, from February 1965, were: The Royal Hunt of the Sun, The Crucible, Hobson's Choice, Othello, The Master Builder and Mother Courage.

⁵⁴ Scotsman, 22 February 1965.

⁵⁵ Scotsman, 22 February 1965.

English - deliberately, because he does not appear in any of the sources'⁵⁶ was just not relevant to them or seemingly to the director.

The setting was created by the lighting: 'For house interiors the back wall glows in terra-cotta [sic]: on a warm summer night it becomes a velvet heaven-tree'.⁵⁷ A town band oompahed across the stage, a watchman struggled to ride a bike and 'animated fountains and statues ...walking hedges and prancing lamps'⁵⁸ all added to the toy town world of the play. The costumes were 'coloured and padded out to resemble Sicilian confectionary dolls.'⁵⁹ Maggie Smith (playing Beatrice) and McKellen wore blonde wigs, Derek Jacobi (playing Don John) wore a red wig and Stephens was 'tottering around in huge dark glasses, [his] hair slicked back with a ton of pomade.'⁶⁰

Along with the updated setting came a controversial decision to invite Robert Graves to modernise the text. Kenneth Tynan was responsible for asking Graves to adjust the language so that the comedy could be more readily understood and appreciated by both the actors and the audience. In an article at the time Graves commented that he hated 'hearing actors pretend to understand unintelligible jokes, and I hate hearing the front row of the stalls pretending to do the same.'⁶¹ Graves did not modernise Shakespeare's language but proposed using another set of words from Shakespeare's own vocabulary. For example 'tire' meaning 'the complete head-dress'⁶² referred to by Margaret in Act 3 scene 5 was changed to peruke. Other alterations

⁵⁶ Malcolm Rutherford, *The Spectator*, 26 February 1965.

⁵⁷ *The Scotsman*, 22 February 1965.

⁵⁸ R.B. Marriott, *The Stage*, 18 February 1965.

⁵⁹ Michael Coveney, *Maggie Smith: A Bright Particular Star* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1992), p.114.

⁶⁰ Robert Stephens and Michael Coveney, *Knight Errant: Memoirs of a Vagabond Actor* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1995), p.82.

⁶¹ Robert Graves, 'Making sound sense of Shakespeare', *The Sunday Times*, 14 February 1965.

⁶² William Shakespeare, *Much Ado About Nothing*, ed. by A.R. Humphreys (London: Methuen, 1981), p.164.

proved more contentious, for example Graves' suggestion that instead of Beatrice explaining that, 'I'd rather lie in the woollen' (2.1.27) than marry a man with a beard she should say 'I'd rather sleep with a blanket next to my skin.' Maggie Smith refused to accept any alteration to the line and, as Michael Coveney records, 'proceeded to show Tynan and Graves how to convey the meaning and gain the laugh.'⁶³ Graves suggested 300 textual alterations, many of which were taken up. B.A Young thought that the alterations were a sensible idea and believed that 'except to the scholar ... they will be virtually imperceptible.'⁶⁴

Zeffirelli's sidelining of Shakespeare's language and Graves' tampering with it meant that before rehearsals began it was unlikely that the production's approach to the play would suit McKellen. Zeffirelli's direction was not what McKellen had been used to either at Cambridge, where John Barton had directed him, or his recent experience with Guthrie. J.C. Trewin wrote of Zeffirelli, 'He does not care for the sound of the word' and this attitude was never going to complement McKellen's acting style which is rooted in the language of the text, especially when the text is a Shakespeare play. Textual examination was overtaken by design, the toy town set and 'doll-like' make-up made McKellen uncomfortable: 'I wore even more make-up than at Coventry but at least, this time, it was expertly applied - by the director himself, as he faced me sitting on my lap!'⁶⁵ Throughout rehearsals, he had only one note of any substance: ' "It's so simple, Jan [sic]; you enter in and make all the audience fall right in love with you,

⁶³ Coveney, *Maggie Smith: A Bright Particular Star*, p.115.

⁶⁴ B.A. Young, *The Times*, 17 February 1965.

⁶⁵ *Acting Shakespeare Programme* 1988, p.5.

caro.” A fat chance of that, I thought, with Albert Finney, Derek Jacobi and Bob Stephens in all my scenes’.⁶⁶

McKellen was not the only actor in the cast to find Zeffirelli’s directing style difficult. Stephens also felt very uncomfortable as Benedick and found Zeffirelli’s direction very unhelpful. He records that the only piece of direction he gave him was that his performance was not Italianate enough: ‘I could never reconcile what I knew about the character with what we were required to do in the production, and I was never happy with it.’⁶⁷

B.A. Young thought that Zeffirelli ‘grafted a sprig of comedy onto characters who generally get along without one. ... Claudio (Ian McKellen in a blonde wig) has been fitted out with such a store of priggishness that even when he hopes to be dignified we see the moral banana-skin ever-present beneath his feet.’⁶⁸

McKellen did receive some good notices; the Nottingham Evening Post thought that he trod ‘an adroit tightrope as the callous Claudio and yet [made] him likeable’,⁶⁹ while Harold Hobson wrote, ‘In ridicule and stupidity Ian McKellen finds poetry and pain’⁷⁰ However the experience unsettled him. He did not feel ‘attractive enough’⁷¹ to play the part. In his programme notes for his one-man show Acting Shakespeare he has stated: ‘I’m ecstatic not to have had to try Bassanio, Ferdinand, Florizel and others of that ilk. Like Claudio and Sebastian they should be attempted only by charismatic beauties.’⁷²

⁶⁶ Acting Shakespeare Programme 1988, p.5

⁶⁷ Stephens and Coveney, Knight Errant, p.82.

⁶⁸ B.A. Young, The Times, 17 February 1965.

⁶⁹ Emrys Bryson, Nottingham Evening Post, 30 March 1965.

⁷⁰ Harold Hobson, Sunday Times, 21 February 1965.

⁷¹ Acting Shakespeare programme 1988, p.5.

⁷² Acting Shakespeare programme 1988, p.14.

The production was generally well received by the critics. J.C. Trewin claimed that he enjoyed it 'as a theatrical exercise, a blaze of technique, a successful choreographic diversion, a visually witty extravaganza' but warned his readers that 'it is not Shakespeare's Much Ado About Nothing but Zeffirelli's sustained divertissement on the same theme.'⁷³ Despite the production's frivolous fiesta atmosphere most critics felt that the tragic plot was successfully integrated. B.A. Young believed that the marriage scene 'takes on all the more unpleasantness in contrast with what has gone before,'⁷⁴ and Penelope Gilliatt thought that 'Hero becomes a wretchedly believable girl trapped in a perfectly recognisable Sicily' ⁷⁵ The question over how to play Beatrice's command to Benedick to 'Kill Claudio' was very satisfactorily resolved: 'Maggie Smith delivers the line with a savage force that makes laughter unthinkable.' The public certainly enjoyed the production, as Stephens recalls in his autobiography, it was 'a block-busting crowd-pleaser'.⁷⁶ It was revived in 1966 and again in 1967.

Michael Coveney in his biography of Maggie Smith assesses the influence the production had on future interpretations of Shakespeare's plays: 'However reprehensibly glib was Zeffirelli's irreverent approach to the comedy, we can see it now as the first of a whole string of major Shakespearean knees-up in the latter half of the century. Within two decades, the RSC would present other comedies by swimming pools, on motorbikes and as thinly disguised sub-Broadway musicals' ⁷⁷ There is, however, one very important difference between Zeffirelli's Much Ado About Nothing and subsequent updated productions, directed by for example Michael Bogdanov, and

⁷³ J.C. Trewin, Birmingham Post, 27 February 1965.

⁷⁴ B.A. Young, The Times, 17 February 1965.

⁷⁵ Penelope Gilliatt, Observer, 18 February 1965.

⁷⁶ Stephens and Coveney, Knight Errant, p.82.

⁷⁷ Coveney, Maggie Smith: A Bright Particular Star, p.114.

that is Zeffirelli's lack of real interest in the language. Zeffirelli and Bogdanov share certain characteristics as directors: they are both highly theatrical and they both favour updating. However, Bogdanov does not prioritise the spectacle or, the politics (which is often his key area of interest) at the expense of the language.

McKellen's experience at the Old Vic was damaging: he lost confidence and 'went right off Shakespeare'.⁷⁸ However in 1968 Richard Cottrell's invitation to play *Richard II*⁷⁹ reunited him with Shakespeare and marked the beginning of his reputation as a Shakespearean actor.

⁷⁸ Acting Shakespeare programme 1988, p.6.

⁷⁹ Toby Robertson was Director of Prospect Theatre Company and Richard Cottrell Assistant Director. According to Cottrell he told Robertson it was his turn to direct a Shakespeare play and suggested *Henry V*. Robertson proposed *Richard II* and asked Cottrell who he would like to play the main role. 'I said I would do it if Ian would play it. He was free so it was quickly arranged' (Joy Leslie Gibson, Ian McKellen (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1986), p.55.

RICHARD II

INTRODUCTION - INCLUDING THE *EDWARD II* PAIRING

It was his performance as Aufidius in Tyrone Guthrie's Coriolanus that really bought McKellen to the notice of the critics. He was described as making an excellent contribution to the production and also of being 'well spoken' - an early indication of his special talent at Shakespearean verse-speaking. It was his performance as Richard II, though, that saw him metamorphose from an actor of promise into a Shakespeare star, receiving headlines such as the Daily Mail's, 'Actor Ian is king of the stage'.¹ McKellen's reputation as a classical actor was built on this performance.

Ian McKellen's Richard II has a long performance history. Directed for Prospect Theatre Company by Richard Cottrell, the production opened at the Arts Theatre, Cambridge, in November 1968 and then toured England; visiting Brighton, Newcastle, Leeds and Guildford. It was a success but an extension of the tour was not practicable as McKellen was committed elsewhere. However Toby Robertson, director of Prospect, was invited to take the production to the Edinburgh Festival in August 1969, and then on a longer tour including overseas dates as well as London (it was hoped). There were a few cast changes made to Richard II for the 1969 tour. The tour culminated in a season at the Piccadilly Theatre, London and the production was filmed by the BBC at Television Centre for broadcast in late 1970.

For the 1969 Edinburgh Festival Prospect was asked to present two plays at the Assembly Hall and Robertson decided that the companion piece to Richard II was to be Marlowe's Edward II in which McKellen was offered the part of Gaveston, which he accepted. Edward was offered first to Derek Jacobi who, as an undergraduate, had

¹ Peter Lewis, Daily Mail, 3 December 1968.

played the role for Robertson at Cambridge in a Marlowe Society production (and in the Gardens at Stratford), but he was involved in another project. Next Gary Bond was approached: he accepted, but then had to decline. So it was by default rather than by design that McKellen came to play both kings. The last English actor to perform both Richard II and Edward II had been Harley Granville-Barker in 1903. McKellen's acceptance of this challenge proved to be a turning point in his career. He was able to display his virtuosity, to show-off in spectacular classical style. Although the risk was considerable, the sheer bravado of the enterprise was bound to bring him to the notice of the critics and the public.

McKellen's performance as Edward II was audacious and packed with physical detail. He presented Edward as a man full of nervous energy: 'He clenches his medallion between his teeth as if to contain his fury at the taunting of Gaveston, clutches his crown with white-knuckled intensity, and rocks back and forth on his heels when rebuked by his barons as if afraid where movement might lead him'.² Benedict Nightingale recorded that 'he can scarcely keep still. Even when he sits, which tends to be informally on the floor, not formally on the throne, his arms and legs dart and writhe, bent on self-expression and contact'.³ In accordance with this characterisation Edward's relationship with Gaveston was also extremely physical. Edward flaunted their intimacy: there was touching and kissing, in fact, 'all of the gestures with Gaveston that one would normally expect to see him have with his wife'.⁴ The Sunday Telegraph reviewer felt that McKellen made Edward's 'compulsion to self-

² Michael Billington, The Times, 26 September 1969.

³ Benedict Nightingale, New Statesman, 5 September 1969.

⁴ George L. Geckle, Tamburlaine and Edward II Text and Performance (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), p. 97.

dramatisation' central and that whether he was 'hugging his lover, capriciously dubbing his knights, or ordering executions, his impetuosity is nothing if not whole hearted.'⁵ Edward's 'self-dramatisation' was expressed in flamboyant gestures such as 'the arm flung in anger over the head' in the abdication scene.⁶ There was less extravagance as the play progressed, and 'weariness... clog[ged] his movement and his speech'⁷ as he drew nearer to death. One of the strengths of McKellen's characterisation of Edward was his showing 'a proper sense of tragic development'.⁸ McKellen and Robertson saw the movement of the play and the character of Edward himself as having three distinct divisions. In an interview in 1970 McKellen explained that initially he portrayed a 'very young man who suddenly gets the key of the kingdom and who has all the potential to develop into a marvellous person.'⁹ Instead because his emotions are thwarted Edward develops into a tyrant; the third stage is his 'degradation and loss of power'¹⁰ As the play progressed Edward's maturation was encapsulated in a vivid piece of stage business: early in the production Edward 'with difficulty ... jokily lifted a huge broadsword' in order to make Gaveston Earl of Cornwall, but after Gaveston's murder McKellen slowly raised the sword 'snaking his body forward from the hips, advance[d] to battle, swinging it in great, waist-high circles.'¹¹ Sean Day-Lewis, who disliked the production, singled out one moment for particular criticism: he felt that on the news of Gaveston's death 'McKellen's cry of anguish came too soon as if he was reacting to a cue instead of to a loss. From then on he was more or less submerged by Marlowe's

⁵ Sunday Telegraph, 28 September 1969.

⁶ Benedict Nightingale, New Statesman, 5 September 1969.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ The Times, 26 September 1969.

⁹ Michael Billington, The Illustrated London News, 17 January 1970.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Observer, 28 September 1969.

rhetoric, offering little twirls of mannerism like a drowning man appealing for help.¹² Robertson has identified this scene in Arundel, when Edward hears the news of Gaveston's death, as being a difficult moment for McKellen, 'almost a gear change' which marked a watershed in his performance; up to this point McKellen was histrionic, after it Robertson felt he 'became a more believable person, a real person, as well as a king.'¹³ In the last movement of the play McKellen attempted to show the humanity of Edward as he did with Richard II. Both his Edward and Richard displayed 'flashes of spite and petulance' and 'quick grins of triumphant, egotistic mischief'¹⁴ McKellen played the role of Edward 'up to the hilt', particularly pleasing Philip Hope-Wallace, who claimed that there is 'no use mumbling Marlowe or trying for voguish naturalism.'¹⁵ Robertson has commented that at this stage in his career McKellen was 'very much an actor who acted'¹⁶ His Edward II was admired for being full of the appropriate blood-and-thunder.

Whilst McKellen's performance as Edward was generally well received his Richard quickly became the stuff of legend. Even while he was performing it critics were filing it away as theatre history in the making: 'one of those performances to store up in the memory and boast of later to less fortunate generations'¹⁷ The critic of the Observer enthused that McKellen's performance was 'destined to become a collector's item... Connoisseurs of future fame will vaunt about seeing this performance as they do now over Finney's Stratford Coriolanus or O'Toole's Bristol Shylock.'¹⁸

¹² Sean Day-Lewis, Daily Telegraph, 29 January 1970.

¹³ Geckle, p.89 and p.90.

¹⁴ Observer, 28 September 1969.

¹⁵ Philip Hope-Wallace, Guardian, 29 August 1969.

¹⁶ Geckle, p.96.

¹⁷ Christopher Small, Glasgow Herald, 27 August 1969.

¹⁸ Observer, 17 November 1968.

THE INFLUENCE OF THEATRICAL PRECEDENTS AND CRITICAL ESSAYS

One of the reasons for the amount of critical attention McKellen's Richard II received, even before the Edinburgh Edward II double, was because he was regarded as presenting a new and exciting characterisation. A headline in the Northern Echo read 'New light on a royal autocrat' and the reviewer commented 'Gone was the pious, gentle but weak King'.¹⁹ Prior to McKellen the more popular interpretations of the role in performance had presented Richard either as a holy and weak king or as a decadent and spineless fop, 'a mincing exquisite who throws away his kingdom with his little finger crooked'.²⁰ The strongest established tradition had been provided at the beginning of the century by Frank Benson's performance of the role, which had been celebrated by C. E. Montague in his Manchester Guardian review, as Richard the 'conscious artist, at once grief's subject and its king'.²¹ Montague stated, 'It has been called the aim of artistic culture to witness things with appropriate emotions. That is this [Benson's] Richard's aim. Good news or bad news, the first thing with him is to put himself in the right vein for getting the fullest and most poignant sense of its contents.'²² Richard II is considered to have been one of Gielgud's finest parts. Hobson described his interpretation at the Queen's Theatre in 1937 as concentrating on 'the royalty of speech, the tension of nerves, the overriding of all rational emotion by the torrential or elegiac beauty of words and images'.²³ While acknowledging the dominance of Benson's interpretation, A.C. Sprague believes that '[t]he great Richards,

¹⁹ Sue Whittaker, Northern Echo, 20 November 1968.

²⁰ Michael Billington, The Times, 5 November 1968.

²¹ T.C. Kemp and J.C. Trewin, The Stratford Festival, (Birmingham: Cornish Bros., 1953), p.38.

²² C.E. Montague, Manchester Guardian, 4 December 1899, reprinted and edited by Stanley Wells in Shakespeare in the Theatre An Anthology of Criticism (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p.168.

²³ Harold Hobson, Theatre in Britain (Oxford:Phaidon, 1984), p.98.

Gielgud and Maurice Evans, both added genuineness of feeling; were more, that is, than mere “artists in words”.²⁴ Andrew Gurr in his New Cambridge edition of the play traces the view of Richard as the ‘tragic poet’ back to Walter Pater’s recollection of Charles Kean’s interpretation of the role in 1857. Pater remembered ‘the grace, the winning pathos, the sympathetic voice of the player’²⁵ Pater went on to claim that the deposition scene ‘has felicity of poetic invention, which puts these pages into a very select class, with the finest “vermeil and ivory” work of Chatterton or Keats.’²⁶ Pater believed that the play ‘approaches to something like the unity of a lyrical ballad, a lyric, a song, a single strain of music’²⁷ and this, alongside his description of the narrative as ‘the great meekness of the graceful, wild creature, tamed at last’,²⁸ gave rise to the strongly held impression that Richard is a poet-king in an overwhelmingly lyrical play. Gurr places Hardin Craig’s 1912 edition of the play in this tradition and states that Craig’s view was ‘transferred back to the stage in the 1951 Stratford production’²⁹ with Michael Redgrave. However, A.C. Sprague argues that Redgrave broke with the Benson tradition ‘partly out of regard for the supposed values of the “tetralogy” as a whole... partly out of belief that there was inadequate textual support for this view of the character’³⁰ and indeed Redgrave wrote (in 1954) that he believed ‘Shakespeare would have been astonished at C. E. Montague’s suggestion that Richard II is a

²⁴ A.C. Sprague, Shakespeare’s Histories: Plays for the Stage, (London: The Society for Theatre Research, 1966), p.48.

²⁵ Walter Pater, Appreciations (London: Macmillan and Co., 1889), p.203.

²⁶ Pater, p.206.

²⁷ Pater, p.211.

²⁸ Pater, p.207.

²⁹ William Shakespeare, King Richard II, ed. by Andrew Gurr (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984). p.47.

³⁰ A.C. Sprague, Shakespeare’s Histories: Plays for the Stage, p.48

conscious artist.³¹ Generally the critics did not view Redgrave's performance as a radical break with the Montague tradition.

Sprague also cites Douglas Seale's production of Richard II, at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre in 1955, as rejecting the 'Montague theory': 'Mr Seale thinks of him as at first dangerous but changing in the course of the play and at last ready for kingship when it is too late'³² The reviewers for Punch and the Illustrated London News³³ agreed that Seale left the Montague tradition behind while J.C. Trewin welcomed this 'pre-Montague Richard' reminding his readers: 'we knew that the man's fall from his regal height must be great indeed, that "unking'd Richard" would suffer in earnest', an understanding which is 'not easy to reconcile with Montague's king and his "delighted apprehension" of each new grief.' The headline for Trewin's review in The Times was 'A Break with the "Artist-King" Tradition'³⁴ Seale's production appears to have been a significant forerunner to the Prospect production. McKellen clearly attracted more press attention than Seale (including a very good review from the influential Harold Hobson in The Sunday Times) and the critics, somewhat unfairly it seems, described McKellen's interpretation as being unique and ground-breaking. Like Seale and his lead actor Jack May, Cottrell and McKellen decided to move away from the presentation of a sympathetic king and eschewed the image of Richard as effeminate and weak. Their rejection of the notion that Shakespeare presents Richard's fall as being the result of his love of words is in line with Peter Ure's view as expressed in his New Arden edition of

³¹ Michael Redgrave, 'Shakespeare and the Actors' in Talking of Shakespeare, ed. by John Garrett (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1954), p. 140.

³² A.C. Sprague, Shakespeare's Histories: Plays for the Stage, p.48-49.

³³ Punch, 29 June 1955; Illustrated London News, 2 July 1955.

³⁴ J.C. Trewin, The Times, 23 June 1955.

the play (1956). Ure comments that Richard's fall is due not to his poetic nature but to 'a failure in duty and the understanding of his function'.³⁴

In the programme for the original tour of Richard II, opposite the cast list, there is a collection of quotations on the subject of God's relationship with royal power. One of the quotations is taken from Jan Kott's book Shakespeare Our Contemporary:

In *Richard II*, Shakespeare deposed not only the King but the idea of kingly power... Royal power comes from God and all power on earth is merely a reflection of the power wielded by the King...*Richard II* is a tragedy of dethronement, not just Richard's dethronement but that of ... the idea of regal power.³⁵

Kott's book was first published in 1964 and I believe that it had a significant influence on Cottrell and McKellen's interpretation of both the play and the character of Richard II. In his opening essay, titled 'The Kings', Kott claims that in the history plays Shakespeare presents the 'order of history' as 'Grand Mechanism'. The metaphor used to describe this mechanism is a flight of stairs which end in abyss. Kott argues that 'there are no good or bad kings; there are only kings on different steps of the same stairs'.³⁶ Kott sees Richard II as being played out 'on the uppermost step', as a 'tragedy of knowledge gained through experience' and he believes that just before Richard is 'hurled into the abyss' he 'reaches the greatness of Lear'.³⁷ Cottrell's production illustrated these ideas. Richard's learning curve began in Act 3 scene 2 with Cottrell and McKellen identifying the moment of truth as being Richard's admission

³⁴ William Shakespeare, King Richard II, ed. by Peter Ure (London: Routledge, 1956), p.lxxi.

³⁵ Jan Kott, Shakespeare Our Contemporary (New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday & Co., 1966). pp. 47, 38, 39.

³⁶ Kott, p.38.

³⁷ Kott, p.40,41.

that he can 'feel want' and 'taste grief'(175-6). In line with Kott the Prospect production presented Richard's moment of salvation as coming in Act 5 scene 5 when the Groom's sympathy and compassion touched him. As the Groom left he kissed Richard's hand and McKellen looked after him with genuine wonder and a dawning comprehension of humanity that led directly to Richard fighting hard for the life that he had just learnt to value. Kott's summation of the development of the character of Richard II could also be a description of what McKellen presented on stage:

Richard II grows in the course of his tragedy. On the lower steps he is just the name of a king; only on the last step do we see him in a big tragic close-up. He has regained his human face.³⁸

INTERPRETATION OF THE PLAY

Although McKellen's performance was hugely successful, the production was not simply a 'star-turn' There was a coherence established by a strong sense of family loyalties and relationships. In the programme for his one-man show McKellen comments that he and Cottrell saw the play as 'a royal family saga of squabbling marriages, rebellious sons and worried parents, of cousins who love or hate each other.'³⁹ There was a real sense of passionate love between Richard and Isabel in Act 5 scene 1 as McKellen whispered into her ear, 'Thus give I mine, and thus take I thy heart' (96) followed by an intense embrace and kiss. Likewise the parting of Bolingbroke and Gaunt in Act 1 scene 3 was very moving as Bolingbroke fought back the tears at having to leave his father and anger at his suggestion that he '[l]ook what thy soul holds dear, imagine it /To lie that way thou goest, not whence thou com'st'

³⁸ Kott, p.51.

³⁹ Acting Shakespeare programme 1988, p.6

(286-7). Neil Stacy and, later, Timothy West played Bolingbroke. Hobson described West's Bolingbroke as 'a rationalist frowning at the excesses of a particularly gorgeous High Mass'.⁴¹ The cruel arbitrary nature with which Richard exercised his power riled Bolingbroke who in Act 1 scene 3 was unable to contain his anger and spat out his contempt for privileges possible with the 'breath of kings' (215). In this production Bolingbroke provided the combination of authority and humanity that Richard was unable to achieve in the play: a strong practical man, sensitive, thoughtful, intellectual and aristocratic. There was a suggestion that Bolingbroke had no intention of becoming King when he returned to England. In Act 3 scene 3 a long pause followed Richard's declaration to Bolingbroke that 'Your own is yours, and I am yours, and all' (197). The 'and all' was being offered to Bolingbroke. He had not sought it yet he would not refuse it either, so at the end of the scene when Richard asked 'Set on towards London, cousin, is it so?' (208), he went along with Richard's impetus.

The set for Richard II, designed for touring, was simple. A central disc-shaped playing area was slightly tilted. A broad flight of steps (an unconscious link with Kott or perhaps a conscious one) led up to a platform on which the throne was set. Behind this was a black cyclorama emblazoned with an ornamental gold star. There were sound effects of the sea as Richard arrived back from Ireland and birdsong in the garden scene (Act 3 scene 4). The costumes provided a feeling of medievalism and lent pageantry to the minimal set.

The initial alienation of the audience and rejection of their sympathy was deliberate, part of the overall interpretation of the central role. Both Cottrell and McKellen saw Richard as undergoing a spiritual journey. In his programme notes for his

⁴¹ Harold Hobson, The Sunday Times, 31 August 1969.

one-man show McKellen comments: 'At the outset King Richard behaves as if he were God himself and it is only as his power is challenged and eventually usurped, that he comes to painful terms with those human failings'⁴² McKellen's Richard had to earn the audience's sympathy. The actor did not want to use Richard's effeminacy or the poetry as a pretext for gaining sympathy for the character, but on the contrary displayed the king's 'whining arrogance'.⁴³ He was ruthless and dominant so that the lessons he learnt appeared all the more painful and the subsequent vulnerability and realisation of his humanity was all the more affecting. Billington picked out the delivery of the line 'I live with bread like you, feel want,/ Taste grief, need friends' (3.2.175-6) for its 'poignant urgency',⁴⁴ although Robert Cushman felt that this moment had 'no real significance' for a Richard who 'needs only an audience.'⁴⁵ In an interview in 1985 Cottrell commented that both McKellen and he saw the 'pivot' of Richard's journey 'coming at the "needs friends" speech... that was the turning-point.'⁴⁶ This was the moment at which Richard began to come out of the golden shell of kingship and acknowledge the pain of his humanity. Before this McKellen established the self-dramatising mask that Richard hides behind. The fact that McKellen was able to secure the audience's sympathy on the same line every night, pinpointed in advance by Cottrell and himself, is testimony to his control of the role as well as of the audience.

This golden shell was more than just a metaphor. McKellen's main costume was a stiff golden cloak which fitted round his body like a carapace. He was literally wearing his power. On his return from Ireland he wore golden armour with sun

⁴² Acting Shakespeare programme 1988, p.6

⁴³ Eric Shorter, Daily Telegraph, 7 November 1968.

⁴⁴ Michael Billington, The Times, 5 November 1968.

⁴⁵ Robert Cushman, Spectator, 6 September 1969.

⁴⁶ Joy Leslie Gibson, Ian McKellen (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1986), p.58.

beams around the neck of his breastplate fitting his description of himself as the sun 'rising in our throne the east'(3.2.50).

McKELLEN'S PERFORMANCE

When McKellen is beginning to rehearse a Shakespearean character he tries to find modern parallels for them. For Richard II he hit upon the Dalai Lama who, like Richard, is divine yet human. This paradox formed the basis of the characterisation. An important element in this comparison is that both Richard and the Dalai Lama were children when their divine (or quasi-divine) status was recognised. Richard had been made king at the age of eleven, and McKellen's Richard had an arrogance that was essentially a deeply ingrained habit. The arrogance and petulance seem also to have been suggested by McKellen's other modern parallel, his unnamed 'movie-star colleague'. When Cottrell approached McKellen with the suggestion that he play Richard II, McKellen was making a film in Ireland. This recent experience found its way into his characterisation as he had seen at first-hand how the star had been 'surrounded by a little court of employees and fans, who guarded his security, carried his cash, laughed at his jokes, procured his women and gave [McKellen] the creeps.'⁴⁶ What he had witnessed was transmuted into his presentation of Richard as a man 'living a fantasy', his 'eyes glazed with egoism'⁴⁷(See Fig.1)

McKellen's monarch was 'highly self conscious of his own royalty',⁴⁸ and Irving Wardle described him 'consciously holding himself as a sacred vessel.'⁴⁹ McKellen's physical movement on stage was different from that of every other actor, defining

⁴⁶ Acting Shakespeare Programme 1988, p.6.

⁴⁷ Observer, 17 November 1968.

⁴⁸ Christopher Small, Glasgow Herald, 27 August 1969.

⁴⁹ Irving Wardle, The Times, 30 August 1969.

Richard's peculiar status, giving a physical expression of his royalty and also of his sense of divinity. He has explained the psychology behind the movement: 'You walk ever so slowly, like the Queen does, as if the slightest hurry would crack the precious glass which invisibly protects you from your subjects.'⁵⁰ Billington saw Richard as 'an overwound toy, gliding smoothly and ceremonially into the court as if on castors.'⁵¹ The defining thought of McKellen's interpretation was Richard's belief in his supreme authority, his absolute trust in the Divine Right of Kings. His position as King was unassailable and separate from his nature as a man. In rehearsal McKellen came up with a gesture that would encapsulate the essence of this belief: both hands raised from the elbow, the palms facing forward at the same level as the crown: 'The formality of this gesture - and its physical awkwardness - set the monarch apart.'⁵² This gesture was established at Richard's first entry as he glided onto stage 'with a more than human smoothness',⁵³ and it was used at key moments in the production. In Act 3 scene 3, when Richard appears high on the ramparts of Flint Castle, McKellen's Richard stood with his arms raised as if believing that his presence and the power of the gesture would be enough to curb Bolingbroke: it had an effect on York whose automatic reaction - to kneel - was prevented by Bolingbroke. York's heartfelt excuse for his behaviour was 'Yet looks he like a king' (3.3.68). McKellen's Richard only lowered his hands, admitting the impotence of the gesture, on the word 'usurp'(81). He faltered at this word and self-consciously looked ashamedly at his hands and quickly pulled them down. When he entered 'below', however, he did so with his arms upraised and

⁵⁰ Acting Shakespeare Programme 1988, p.6.

⁵¹ Michael Billington, The Times, 5 November 1968.

⁵² Margaret Shewring, Shakespeare in Performance King Richard II (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), p.84.

⁵³ Harold Hobson, The Sunday Times, 8 December 1968.

Bolingbroke knelt obediently and commanded his men to do the same and so 'show fair duty to his Majesty' (188). A moment of poignancy was achieved in Act 5 scene 5 when Richard slowly and tentatively repeated the gesture in Pomfret castle as he gently mused 'Sometimes am I king'(32). The long journey between the egocentric King Richard who had first used the gesture in Act 1 and the vulnerable, broken and very human Richard in his prison cell was the narrative that McKellen and Cottrell set out to tell.

In the first half of the production McKellen's Richard was temperamental and childishly petulant. When he pronounced his sentence on Mowbray his face was a mask, with no flicker of feeling until he became angry at Mowbray's pleas for clemency and shouted at him 'It boots thee not to be compassionate'(1.3.174). In the BBC recording of the production, Act 1 scene 4 begins with Richard sulking because he thinks that Aumerle has sided with the newly banished Bolingbroke, 'How far brought you high Herford on his way?'(1.4.2) Aumerle is slightly taken aback by the petulant tone and shows evident relief when Richard laughs a cold hard bark of disdain at his pun, 'I brought the high Herford, if you call him so, /But to the next highway, and there I left him'(1.4.3-4). In the same scene Richard amuses himself by adopting an Irish accent as he proclaims 'We will ourself in person to this war'(1.4.42). Nicholas Brooke's advice to actors playing the king is not to try 'too hard to establish Richard's personality before Shakespeare lets it emerge in 1.iv.'⁵⁴ McKellen did this, although Cottrell and McKellen had decided to intensify the audience's lack of sympathy for Richard by making clear Richard's guilt in Gloucester's murder. The BBC television film of the

⁵⁴ Lois Potter, 'The Antic Disposition of Richard II', Shakespeare Survey 27 (1974), p.34.

production opens with Mowbray walking down a corridor to murder the Duke of Gloucester. In the stage production the first two scenes were reversed so as to emphasise the Duchess of Gloucester's complaint. In addition Richard betrayed himself. In Act 1 scene 3, at the lists in Coventry there was a real moment of terror for Richard when, after having pronounced his punishment on Bolingbroke and Mowbray, Bolingbroke urged Mowbray to 'Confess thy treasons ere thou fly the realm;/ Since thou hast far to go, bear not along/ The clogging burthen of a guilty soul' (198-200). Richard knew that his sentence of permanent exile on Mowbray was unfair and that he was protecting himself. The possibility that Mowbray might seize the opportunity to betray him in revenge was very real. McKellen's face registered total horror at this moment but it quickly dissolved into a cold, hard smile as Mowbray answered Bolingbroke: 'No, Bolingbroke, if ever I were traitor, /My name be blotted from the book of life' (1.3.201-2). In Act 2 scene 1 Richard was thunderstruck when Gaunt mentioned his brother Gloucester who he claimed was a witness that Richard 'respect[ed] not spilling Edward's blood'(131). It was clear that Gaunt knew of Richard's guilt and the king was shaken by this revelation and his seizure of Gaunt's 'plate, coin, revenues, and moveables' (161) was motivated by a desire to revenge this dangerous discovery as well as to punish Gaunt's audacity in criticising him.

McKellen's Richard did not allow any questioning of his authority. In Act 2 scene 1 he was stunned by York's rejection of his supremacy and his face hardened at York's expression of indifference towards him, 'Pardon me, if you please; if not, I pleas'd /Not to be pardoned, am content withal' (187-8). McKellen's Richard was petulant, mean-voiced and short-tempered, and sighed with impatience as Gaunt lamented that lessening Bolingbroke's banishment by four years will not advantage him

as 'My oil-dried lamp and time-bewasted light / Shall be extinct with age and endless night' (1.3.221-2). However, in Act 2 scene 1 there was a tantalising glimpse of the journey that Richard is to endure in the second half of the play. Gaunt described how Richard's grandfather, had he possessed the gift of prophecy, seeing what Richard would do to England:

... he would have laid thy shame,
Deposing thee before thou wert possess'd,
Which art possess'd now to depose thyself (106-8).

At the word 'depose' McKellen pulled his fur cloak closer around him and half buried his face in it, as if the touch of its luxuriance reassured him of his unassailable kingship whilst he also flashed angry eyes at Gaunt for so unsettling him.

The mask of divine royalty that Richard had been hiding behind began to crack on his return from Ireland. At the beginning of Act 3 scene 2 his eyes blazed with the momentary belief that Bolingbroke 'Shall see us rising in our throne the east' (50). At this moment McKellen paused and smiled and savoured this second of fantasy; then his face reverted to a blank as he desperately tried to hold on to a notion he was no longer confident in: 'Not all the water in the rough rude sea / Can wash the balm off from an anointed king' (54-5). He tried to hide behind posture, just as ceremony had been his mode of existence when he had ruled England as King, so he clung to another artificial attitude: 'For God's sake let us sit upon the ground / And tell sad stories of the death of kings' (154-5). This sentimental construction was destroyed as he yelped in pain at the news that his favourites, Bushy, Bagot and Greene, had made their peace, and was then crushed to learn that 'their peace is made / With heads and not with hands' (137-8).

The climax of this collision between Richard's past refuge in a ceremonial shell and his emerging humanity came in the deposition scene, Act 4 scene 1. The lines 'Give

me the crown. /Here, cousin, seize the crown' (180-1) were cleverly and effectively split into three. The first part was an order 'Give me the crown', receiving the crown he held it out to Bolingbroke 'Here, cousin', Bolingbroke came forward to take it, as he put his hand out for it McKellen added the last part of the line 'Seize the crown' which made Bolingbroke falter and bite his tongue as he realised that Richard was going to relish every minute and prolong it as much as possible. Bolingbroke's frustration was evident as he barely controlled his temper, 'I thought you had been willing to resign' (190). He clearly disliked Richard's theatricality and was bored by his excited expansion of the image of the buckets. The response to Bolingbroke's straightforward question, 'Are you contented to resign the crown?' (200), was 'Aye, no' in quick succession and then a pause as McKellen held the crown to his cheek and conveyed Richard's sensuous attachment to the trappings of kingship. His voice suggested resolution on the following 'no', but then he directly contradicted himself with a distant and faraway 'Aye' Richard then began the ceremony of his 'uncrowning' On 'Now, mark me how I will undo myself' (203) he put the crown on his head, then raised his hands and slowly took his crown off. Throughout this part of the scene Richard was in control; Bolingbroke had no choice but to be patient. McKellen removed the gold cloak that throughout the play had been a visual symbol of tragedy: 'As if this flesh which walls about our life /Were brass impregnable' (3.2.167-8). Richard's vulnerability was emphasised by the cloak looking like a carapace: it was the King's divine body, that now had been removed revealing him as man. The fear and panic with which Richard reacted to Northumberland's command to 'read a lecture' (4.1.232) of his offences 'against the state and profit of this land' (225) was painful to witness.

Richard's touching vulnerability was seen again in Act 5 scene 5. McKellen and Cottrell were interested in following Holinshed, who recorded that Richard attempted to fight off his murderers, wringing 'the bill' out of the hands of one of his eight murderers and proceeding to slay four of them with it. In the BBC televised recording McKellen throws the food and drink in anger at the Keeper, grabs a single-sided axe from the first murderer and kills him with it, and then fights off another two before Exton kills him with his sword from behind. Richard and Exton stand twinned while Richard prophesies 'That hand shall burn in never-quenching fire /That staggers thus my person' (108-109). McKellen then turns his head to see who his murderer is and there is a moment of intense eye contact between them as Richard quietly and simply tells him 'Exton, thy fierce hand /Hath with the king's blood stain'd the king's own land' (109-110). He moves off Exton's sword as he cries 'Mount, mount, my soul!' (111) It is a painful and a very human death.

McKELLEN'S VOCAL PERFORMANCE

McKellen delivered the lines at great speed and was accused of rattling off the speeches. His style is to highlight particular lines. For example in Act 5 scene 1 in Richard's speech to Northumberland McKellen emphasised three phrases: 'thou ladder' (55), 'too little'(61) and 'To pluck him headlong from the usurped throne'(65). Eric Shorter commended this peculiar style, saying that McKellen was able to 'plumb the meaning of words with all Richard's intellectual zest',⁵⁵ but the same critic also complained that he failed to deliver the poetry in the death cell scene. The tradition of Richard II as a lyrical part - expounded, for example, by Gielgud - was hard to shake off. The scene in the prison was consistent with the rest of the production; Richard

⁵⁵ Eric Shorter, Daily Telegraph, 7 November 1968.

paced 'rhythmically about the perimeter of his cell as if unconsciously harking back to his love of external form and ritual'.⁵⁶ In the BBC recording McKellen has a metal spoon which he hits against the iron bars of his cell as he attempts to 'hammer out' a comparison between the prison and the real world. When he hears music he beats out the rhythm with his spoon and then angrily bangs it when the time is broken. It provides a metronome effect to punctuate the lines where Richard describes how his 'sighs, and tears, and groans, /Show minutes, times and hours (57-58). The priority of the production, as indicated by the filmed version, was clearly not on the poetic set pieces, which had become the backbone of previous interpretations, but on charting Richard's painful realisation of his humanity. Robert Cushman, for one, did not agree with the dominant tone of the scene in the stage production and felt that McKellen denied Richard 'his final maturity' presenting him dying 'as self-dramatising as he lived.'⁵⁷

COMPARISON WITH THE RSC 1973 AND 1991 PRODUCTIONS

A legacy of the McKellen and Cottrell interpretation has been to show one way in the departure from lyrical Richards. Two productions that followed Prospect's lead were John Barton's production in 1973 and Ron Daniels's in 1991, both for the RSC. It is interesting to see how varied these interpretations of the text are in relation both to each other and to their 1968 originator. John Barton's 1973 production is in many ways the antithesis of the Prospect production, despite following Prospect's influence in moving away from a lyrical central performance. McKellen and Cottrell's successful break with the Montague tradition seemingly liberated the text, paving the way for other excitingly different interpretations. Three examples from Barton's production will

⁵⁶ Michael Billington, The Times, 5 November 1968.

⁵⁷ Robert Cushman, Spectator, 6 September 1969.

serve to illustrate how it differs from its 1968 predecessor and thereby from the Montague tradition. In Barton's production the focus of Act 4 scene 1 was the mirror. After Richard had smashed it, Bolingbroke placed the frame over Richard's head 'deliberately enough for [the audience] to see it pass from halo to crown, and from crown to noose' ⁵⁸ Later in Act 5 scene 5 the groom was revealed to be Bolingbroke and he held up the frame of the mirror between his face and Richard's, identical and yet opposite. Earlier in the scene both held the crown together and thus provided a 'conscious reminiscence' of the opening which began with the two actors (they alternated the roles of Richard and Bolingbroke) downstage 'consulting the prompt-book... turning upstage to hold the crown together - and freezing for moment until the Bolingbroke of the night dropped his hand'.⁵⁹ Thus the 'double role-playing'⁶⁰ was continually reinforced. In the Prospect production, in the deposition scene when Richard called for the mirror, Bolingbroke was embarrassed by Richard's vanity and his hysterical luxuriating in humiliation. There was no sense in this production that Richard and Bolingbroke were in any way balanced. In Barton's staging the decision to have two actors alternate the roles of Richard and Bolingbroke was justified in the programme notes by Anne Barton, who stated that:

Richard's journey from king to man is balanced by Bolingbroke's progress from a single to a twin-natured being. Both movements involve a gain and a loss. Each, in its own way, is tragic.

In the Prospect production there was no suggestion of the characters' journeys being parallel. The narrative journey was Richard's alone, and Bolingbroke was

⁵⁸ Peter Thomson, 'Shakespeare Straight and Crooked: a Review of the 1973 Season at Stratford', *Shakespeare Survey* 27 (1974), pp.143-154 (p.153).

⁵⁹ Thomson, p.152.

⁶⁰ Thomson, p.153.

certainly not a tragic figure. He despised superfluous ceremony and was more confident in his fitness to rule than any divine right. Bolingbroke's attitude to kingship was a practical one, there was no sense that he was becoming the 'twin-natured being' Richard had been, as was suggested by Barton's production. In staging Richard's murder Cottrell and McKellen went for psychological realism whereas Barton opted for stylisation. In Barton's production Richard's death was a 'theatrical set-piece, with Richard hoisted by his own chains some twelve feet above the stage and shot in the back by an arrow fired from upstage by Exton.'⁶² An effective display of conscious theatricality perhaps but lacking the painful desperation of McKellen's human king. Likewise in Barton's production the scene between Bolingbroke and his father became a 'philosophical discussion on the power of the imagination... far from a naturalistic representation of a talk between an old father and his newly-banished son',⁶³ the latter description being a good account of Prospect's intention.

The 1991 RSC production directed by Ron Daniels had strong parallels with Prospect's 1968 interpretation. Alex Jennings like McKellen was an 'extremely unlyrical Richard', a tyrant who 'made no journey towards discovery of the poetry of Richard's language later' but yet had a 'genuine affection for his wife in 1.4 marked by caresses'.⁶⁴ Anton Lesser's Bolingbroke, like Timothy West's, was 'strikingly unambitious'.⁶⁵ What was different was that the central tragic figure became Aumerle, 'the political innocent destroyed' rather than the usurped king, an interesting development on the experimental foundation of the Prospect production.

⁶² Thomson, p.153.

⁶³ Stanley Wells, Royal Shakespeare: Four Major Productions at Stratford-Upon-Avon (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977), p.71.

⁶⁴ Peter Holland, English Shakespeares (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1997), pp. 76-77.

⁶⁵ Holland, p.76.

CONCLUSION

It is important to recognise that the presentation of Richard was a collaborative achievement. Cottrell and McKellen worked together on the interpretation of the play. Cottrell went over to Ireland to consult with McKellen. They looked over the costume designs, talked and read the play together and formed their performance ideas. It is significant that each time McKellen has achieved particular success in a Shakespeare role it has been developed through close collaboration with the director. His intellectual involvement with a role is a vital part of his acting process.

McKellen's performance as Richard II was a theatrical phenomenon. It helped to put him on a pedestal of Shakespearean acting that the critics and the public have never allowed him to step down from. The vital fact about McKellen's work is that it was prodigious. It is typical of McKellen's modesty and his security in his position as a pre-eminent interpreter of Shakespeare that he is able to tell this story about his performance as Richard II:

Just as I was feeling rather pleased with myself, a letter arrived from an ex-critic, who analysed every detail in my supposedly innovative performance and said she had seen it all before, here and there, in Maurice Evans, Redgrave, Gielgud and John Neville.⁶⁶

Although McKellen tells this story against himself it reveals the standard to which he was now measuring up. Within seven years of his professional career he had gained his place in Shakespearean performance history and, surprisingly, this was in a touring production. In the Guardian, Philip Hope-Wallace declared that he thought McKellen gave 'a grand performance' He believed it to be 'Shakespearian [sic] acting in a great role which sends me in search of parallels back to the days of Swinley and the young

⁶⁶ Acting Shakespeare Programme 1988, p.6.

Gielgud.⁶⁷ A comparison with Gielgud is perhaps slightly ironic, given McKellen's anti-lyrical Richard, but also entirely appropriate as it is the language of Shakespeare that both actors make their priority. McKellen's Richard II was a combination of an older set of acting values based on language and verse speaking and a new robust daring bravado, allowing him to reject the audience's sympathy initially only to earn twice as much back as the play progressed. Ian McKellen set out to make Richard real, to help a modern audience understand Richard's belief in his own divine right, and to tell the tale of a man forced out of his protective royal shell to face his own mortality. It was the humanity of the character, unattractive and attractive qualities alike, that McKellen used to explain his divine royalty.

⁶⁷ Philip Hope-Wallace, Guardian, 5 December 1968.

HAMLET

INTRODUCTION - THE DRAWBACKS OF PLAYING HAMLET IN 1971

Ian McKellen's decision to perform Hamlet in 1971 was unfortunate and untimely. He put himself at several disadvantages. The acclaim for Richard II and Edward II meant that the critics' and audiences' expectation of his performance was out of proportion to what he could deliver. Irving Wardle in The Times commented that it was because McKellen's performance of Richard II had been so 'loaded with critical garlands' that when the reviewers came to Hamlet 'the idea seems to have taken root that he had been vastly oversold and it was time to put the boot in'¹ B.A. Young lamented that 'This is not the great Hamlet one would have deduced from Mr McKellen's Richard II; but it is the very good one suggested by his Edward II.'² When Young had reviewed Hamlet, on tour in Edinburgh, he had viewed the enterprise quite cynically as a money-making opportunity and commented that Prospect would have needed 'superhuman restraint' not to try to cap the success of the Richard II and Edward II double. He observed that they could not resist 'pairing off the one young classical actor who draws audiences like a pop star with the one Shakespeare play that never fails in the box office.'³ The attention and praise, even hyperbole, of the previous year meant that it was almost inevitable that McKellen would disappoint. Perhaps the most damning review that he received was that which denied that his Hamlet was 'anything special'⁴ Neither Richard II nor Edward II is so familiar to audiences and this was obviously to McKellen's advantage. Hamlet, however, is considered an important

¹ Irving Wardle, The Times, 6 August 1971.

² B.A. Young, Financial Times, 6 August 1971.

³ B.A. Young, Financial Times, 17 April 1971.

⁴ Evening Standard, 6 August 1971.

measure of new acting talent. Michael Goldman declares the role to be 'the ultimate validation of an actor's professional status' ⁵ The Birmingham Post stated that

There is a habit of expecting every production of Hamlet to be a revelation which is unjust when new productions of Hamlet are many but new theories about it more a matter of academic fidgeting than theatrical practicality' ⁶

This observation encapsulates the basis of all the problems and prejudices that McKellen's performance faced.

The other major disadvantage of deciding to perform Hamlet in 1971 was that there had been a glut of Princes of Denmark and McKellen's came at the end of it. B.A. Young warned readers in his Edinburgh review that, 'Just now, gorged with an excess crop of Hamlets, regular reviewers are probably not the most reliable of guides to yet another.'⁷ Alan Bates played Hamlet at Nottingham Playhouse and at the Cambridge Theatre in London just five months before McKellen played it at the same theatres. Trevor Nunn, who McKellen had hoped would direct him in the role, had directed Alan Howard for the RSC the year before. In an interview with Catherine Stott in February 1969 McKellen had commented: 'I badly want to play Hamlet soon, and obviously the place to play it is at Stratford and if Trevor Nunn was to direct me then I can't think of anything I would rather do.'⁸

Perhaps most importantly Nicol Williamson had been acclaimed for his interpretation in Tony Richardson's production at the Roundhouse and on tour in the USA in 1969. Irving Wardle claimed this to be the first performance he had seen 'that really escapes the shadow of Gielgud and annexes it as his own territory.'⁹ Harold

⁵ Michael Goldman, Shakespeare and the Energies of Drama (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972), p.74.

⁶ G.L., Birmingham Post, 25 March 1971.

⁷ B.A. Young, Financial Times, 17 April 1971.

⁸ Catherine Stott, Guardian, 10 February 1969.

⁹ Irving Wardle, The Times, 18 February 1969.

Hobson predicted that 'Mr Williamson's is a performance that will modify the whole tradition of Hamlet.'¹⁰ Before Hamlet, Williamson had been highly praised for his performance as Bill Maitland in John Osborne's Inadmissible Evidence and indeed one of the New York critics chose the headline 'Angry Young Hamlet' for his review.¹¹ The key to Williamson's interpretation was its modernity. Just as David Warner had redefined Hamlet as a modern politically aware student of 1965 so Williamson made the Prince of Denmark a current figure, an Osborne hero, a familiar character for the late 1960's. Russell Jackson has noted the similarity between Warner's and Williamson's interpretations: both were 'awkward ... not self-evidently the expectancy and rose of a fair state... both performances were simply too unprincely for many reviewers, but for some of the younger generation they showed that Hamlet could speak and feel with them.'¹² J.C. Trewin observed that the effect of Look Back in Anger, although immediate in terms of new writing for the theatre, was not felt in 'any fresh treatment' of the role at the time.¹³ The anger of young men first expressed in 1956 found its way into an interpretation of Hamlet thirteen years later. It is interesting that so little was made of this link with Osborne with regard to Bates' Hamlet as he had been in the original cast of Look Back in Anger. Williamson adopted a Midlands accent which made the text seem natural but sacrificed 'a sense of aristocracy' and 'a quality of intellectuality.'¹⁴ What he was able to do, however, was 'to emanate a sense of immediacy every second he [wa]s on stage', he gave the verse 'an emotional tone so specific that it len[t] a supersharp edge to the language'.¹⁵ Because the critics had seen

¹⁰ Harold Hobson, Sunday Times, 23 February 1969.

¹¹ Raymond A. Sokolov, Newsweek, 12 May 1969.

¹² Jonathan Bate and Russell Jackson eds, Shakespeare An Illustrated Stage History, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p.226.

¹³ J.C. Trewin, Five and Eighty Hamlets, (London: Hutchinson, 1987), p.94.

¹⁴ Henry Hewes, Saturday Review, New York, 12 April 1969.

¹⁵ Alan Bunce, Christian Science Monitor, 5 May 1969.

an actor so recently who redefined the role, who successfully expressed a Hamlet for the time, there was a danger that another attempt at this moment would be seen as superfluous and unnecessary. McKellen's performance as Hamlet was to a certain extent a casualty of this circumstance.

INTERPRETATION OF THE PLAY

Robert Chetwyn had directed McKellen as Henry V in 1963 and Elspeth Cochrane has stated that he and McKellen had 'talked about a time that they would do Hamlet together, even as far back as Ipswich'.¹⁶ So when the opportunity arose with Prospect McKellen, perhaps unsurprisingly, asked Chetwyn to direct him. Toby Robertson, the director of Prospect, does not seem to have wanted to direct McKellen: 'I had always planned to do it with Derek Jacobi'.¹⁷ Chetwyn has recorded how much McKellen and he collaborated on the interpretation: 'Ian used to come round to my flat for about three or four months beforehand and we really went through the text, word by word and talked over the meaning of it thoroughly.'¹⁸

The set, designed by Michael Annals, consisted of a wide staircase of six steps which divided the acting area into an upper and lower level with a series of mirrored columns at the back of the upper level. In his programme notes Chetwyn wrote that he hoped the mirrors 'make a visual statement that parallels the play's construction' He stated that in the play 'Shakespeare constantly opposes theatricality and reality - feigned madness, real madness; played death, real death; the facade and the fact.' In addition to this Chetwyn pointed out that the characters 'mirror' each other. This idea is expressed

¹⁶ Joy Leslie Gibson, Ian McKellen, (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1986), p.66.

¹⁷ Gibson, p.66.

¹⁸ Gibson, p.67.

by Jan Kott in his book Shakespeare Our Contemporary (published at least four years before the production):

In structural interpretations *Hamlet* is a drama of analogical situations, a system of mirrors, in which the same problem is in turn reflected tragically, pathetically, ironically and grotesquely: three sons who have lost their fathers, one after another, or Hamlet's and Ophelia's madness.¹⁹

Several critics found the set distracting, but it proved effective at certain moments in the production. Chetwyn in his programme notes expressed his desire to use the mirrors throughout the production to stress the 'oppressive nature of Claudius' court - which is characterised by spying' and so he had the court lurking behind the mirrored pillars making Hamlet aware that he was being watched in the nunnery scene. Hamlet also played hide-and-seek through the columns with Polonius, and characters appeared to be entering and exiting in different directions simultaneously. One of the most dramatic effects achieved by the mirrors occurred in the opening scene when old Hamlet's ghost appeared to be multiple; Chetwyn recalls 'the stage was covered with ghosts.'²⁰

One of the most significant elements of Chetwyn's personal input into the production was the presentation of the ghost. He has told Joy Gibson; 'I was brooding on the play one evening and I suddenly thought that there wasn't a real ghost but that it was all in Hamlet's mind. I rang Ian up and he was very excited about the idea.'²¹ The audience did see the ghost, made legion as it was reflected in the mirrored set, but McKellen faced the audience and saw him in his mind's eye. The ghost's voice was amplified. McKellen's view on the role of the ghost does not seem to have changed much since 1971: in 1980 he commented, 'When Hamlet meets the ghost it is

¹⁹ Jan Kott, Shakespeare Our Contemporary, (New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday & Co. 1966), p.71. Kott's book was first available in English in 1964.

²⁰ Gibson, p.67.

²¹ Gibson, p.67.

immaterial whether the audience believes in ghosts or not. The play is not about ghosts, it is about Hamlet's inner life, about his meeting his own conscience.'²² In the same year as his interview the idea was taken further: Jonathan Pryce's Hamlet, at the Royal Court, was 'possessed' by the ghost and spoke its lines. Anthony Dawson pointed out that this decision to present the ghost as being inside Hamlet poses a serious textual difficulty: 'If Hamlet is possessed, how is it that what the demonic spirit speaks turns out to be correct? If he is mad, is he also clairvoyant?'²³ This question remained unaddressed by McKellen and Chetwyn. Instead in his programme notes Chetwyn simply stated that this experience of the ghost is for Hamlet 'a tremendous metaphysical experience' a 'religious revelation', a 'visionary awareness' akin to the modern equivalent of 'mind expanding drugs' The idea was not fully thought through and the decision to have the ghost appear at the climax of the 'Mousetrap' lacked any real resonance. Unfortunately this presentation of the ghost also meant that no relationship between Hamlet and his father could be established. This was particularly regrettable as the recent 1970 RSC production directed by Trevor Nunn had explored this aspect to great effect.

Another idea that was key to the production's interpretation of the play, also highlighted in Chetwyn's programme notes, was the rejection of the notion that Hamlet delays. The director wrote that he could not 'accept Hamlet as a paralysed intellectual, incapable of acting'. Chetwyn believed that 'the idea that Hamlet has to prove the Ghost true or false, good or evil, must be taken seriously' and therefore justifies Hamlet spending time setting up his mousetrap. Kott similarly states 'He wants to know if his

²² Nationen, 7 March 1980.

²³ Anthony Dawson, Shakespeare in Performance Hamlet (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p.164.

father has really been murdered. He cannot trust the Ghost, or any ghosts for that matter.²⁴ This rationalisation from Chetwyn seems at odds with an interpretation of the ghost as Hamlet's conscience. He argued that the reason for Hamlet chastising himself for delaying is due to his 'sense of time' becoming 'dislocated' as he faces 'the depth of Elsinore's corruption... as well as the darkest parts of his own being.' In his book Shakespeare and the Energies of Drama (published a year later than the Prospect production, in 1972), Michael Goldman suggests that the question posed by the play is 'not "why does Hamlet delay, but why does the play delay - why are we delayed?"'²⁵ Goldman asserts that 'reason and action are not opposed' in the play but that for most of it 'they fail to coalesce as either we or the characters would like them to.'²⁶ So a pattern of 'stop-action sequences' occur throughout Hamlet until the climax when 'unambiguous action' is possible. Hamlet's struggle starts when the ghost asks him to be a revenger, his problem is how 'to fully unite action and reason, to find a revenge which is both internally and externally satisfying'.²⁷ At the centre of this difficulty is the issue of sincerity. Goldman posits the idea that it is 'the obvious sincerity of Fortinbras, Laertes, and the First Player' that 'leave Hamlet irritated and envious.'²⁸ Goldman links this quest for honesty to age:

In an earlier chapter I pointed out that Hamlet seems to be about eighteen at the play's beginning and thirty near its end... it is interesting that the two ages often mark a great change in a man's understanding of sincerity. At eighteen the imperative is not to live a lie. By thirty, one realises how hard it is to be certain one isn't.²⁹

²⁴ Kott, p.62

²⁵ Goldman, p.88.

²⁶ Goldman, p.82.

²⁷ Goldman, p.92.

²⁸ Goldman, p.91.

²⁹ Goldman, p.91.

McKellen and Chetwyn's characterisation of Hamlet anticipated Goldman's view in that they saw Hamlet as being younger at the start of the action. Hamlet's age did concern McKellen. In an interview in September 1969 McKellen stated that his immediate ambition was to play Hamlet before he reached 30; the gravedigger's line that indicates Hamlet's age as thirty was cut. It seems that both Chetwyn and McKellen saw the character as much younger. In an interview in Norway, in 1980, when he was touring his one-man show, McKellen said that the play is about 'a young person's search and that is why this play has always fascinated young people'³⁰ It is also clear that Chetwyn and McKellen in line with Goldman rejected that idea of delay replacing it with the sense that Hamlet does not perform his revenge immediately because he needs time to mature. Although the programme notes establish that, the thought behind this idea was confused, the presentation of the ghost contradicting Chetwyn's rationale of delay in the play. With Goldman it is a maturity that results in Hamlet not trying to 'force a significance upon his actions' and so be sincere; for Chetwyn and McKellen it was an emotional maturity that enabled Hamlet to carry out the role of the revenger. In his programme notes for Acting Shakespeare McKellen commented that Chetwyn and he decided that 'Our Hamlet was a boy who knows exactly what has to be done but lacks the manly resources to do it. He grows up, until finally he is ready and the readiness is all.'³¹ This is much more clearly expressed than Chetwyn's programme notes, perhaps pointing to the benefit of hindsight and an extra nine years of performing Shakespeare. It is only fair to point out that Ray Seaton identified this particular narrative in the production at the time; Seaton wrote: Hamlet's 'doubts, fears, obsessions and

³⁰ Nationen, 7 March 1980.

³¹ Acting Shakespeare programme 1988, p.6.

meanderings are growing pains, rather than moral cowardice.’³² As with his Richard II, McKellen’s Hamlet undertook a journey of personal development. Benedict Nightingale described his Hamlet as achieving spiritual growth through suffering which finally gave him the strength to revenge. He saw the performance as a movement in three parts: firstly Hamlet was ‘lost’ in grief for his father’s death, ‘a shocked, rather weak boy’; then came ‘a long period of increasing mental chaos... he feigns mad, and perhaps *is* mad’; and finally he returned to Elsinore with ‘a new maturity and dignity... his avenger’s role accepted, all thinking done’³³ This observation hits upon a common theme that runs through McKellen’s early Shakespeare performances: his performance as Hamlet, as with his Richard II was in part a response to suffering.

Chetwyn’s idea to present Gertude as an alcoholic, proved to be extremely effective. It made her last exchange with Claudius particularly powerful: ‘Claudius’s injunction to her not to drink from the poisoned goblet thus became a routine request, automatically disobeyed.’³⁴ A similar effect was achieved in Peter Hall’s production of Hamlet in 1994 but with the character of Claudius - presenting Claudius as an alcoholic is more usual. When Michael Pennington’s Claudius, who was ‘often drunk, always reaching for a glass of whisky or red wine’, was killed by Hamlet he was sliced down his backbone which provided an appropriate stage picture ‘leaving Claudius slumped like a drunk in the gutter as the wine poured down from a very large goblet.’³⁵ In Chetwyn’s production the relationship between Claudius and Gertrude became more effective when John Woodvine took over the role from Ronald Lewis on the transfer of the production to London. Woodvine played the King as a ‘hard, well-masked villain’,

³² Ray Seaton, Wolverhampton Express and Star, 29 April 1971.

³³ Benedict Nightingale, New Statesman, 7 May 1971.

³⁴ Frank Marcus, Sunday Telegraph, 15 August 1971.

³⁵ Peter Holland, English Shakespeares (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.218, p.220.

an improvement on Lewis' 'booming prototype.'³⁶ However it was Faith Brook's Gertrude and Susan Fleetwood's Ophelia who formed the most moving connection. In his programme notes Chetwyn claimed that Gertrude and Ophelia are linked by the fact that neither of them can face reality. In the production they were presented as being 'temperamentally sisters... both of them have to be happy; they cannot take ugliness, or suffering' ³⁷ Ophelia was presented as finding refuge in madness: Gertrude in drink.

As in Jonathan Miller's production for the Oxford and Cambridge Shakespeare Company in the same year, Chetwyn made the part of Osric more political, both productions thereby following the example set by Peter Hall at the RSC in 1965. The line in which Hamlet describes him as a 'water-fly' (5.2.82) was cut and he was portrayed as a dangerous spy in the pay of the King who shadowed the Prince throughout, only challenging him directly in Act 5 scene 2. He overheard Hamlet's plan to 'catch the conscience of the King' (2.2.601) and he handed Fortinbras the crown in the final scene of the play. He was a creature of expediency ready to serve the new king.

The production was political, in the sense that it showed Claudius' regime as ruthless and systematically oppressive. In the duel Claudius himself snatched up the sword with the envenomed point and gave it to Hamlet in order that Laertes may also be fatally wounded and therefore not betray the conspiracy. The idea of Claudius turning on Laertes in an attempt to silence the truth and hide his guilt has appeared in numerous productions: Marvin Rosenberg records that 'when Gielgud's Claudius started to move against Laertes, Hamlet himself stopped him'.³⁸ McKellen's Hamlet

³⁶ Irving Wardle, The Times, 6 August 1971.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Marvin Rosenberg, The Masks of Hamlet, (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1992), p.896.

was fairly vicious in his murder of Claudius stabbing him in the back as ‘an extra precaution’³⁹, having already wounded him with the poisoned rapier and forced the ‘poisoned goblet down his throat.’⁴⁰

In Chetwyn’s production Fortinbras appeared to be less interested in the tragedy of the dead bodies in front of him than in seizing the crown. Tony Richardson had cut the final part of the last scene from his production in 1969, ending with Horatio’s valediction: ‘Good night, sweet prince,/ And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest (364-5) - a theatrical tradition that Olivier had adopted for his film in 1948. This tradition, so favoured by nineteenth-century producers, lessens the political framework of the play and deprives the audience of the opportunity to compare the princely qualities of Hamlet with those of Fortinbras and assess the truth of the latter’s claim that Hamlet would have ‘had he been put on, /To have prov’d most royal’ (5.2.402-3). It also denies the fulfilment of Hamlet’s prophecy that ‘th’election lights/ On Fortinbras’ (5.2.360-1). Goldman argues that the last scene is the ‘great clarifying release’⁴¹ that the whole play has been building up to; in the final physical clashes ‘the purpose of playing is achieved; acting and being are one’⁴² and Fortinbras is part of this pattern. The entry of this martial character at the end of the play is to provide ‘a final unambiguous discharge of energy. Fortinbras, who has a soldier’s simple sense of what is appropriate, orders a peal of ordnance shot off. The air has been cleared.’⁴³ Politicized twentieth-century productions have presented Fortinbras as a cruel and bloody foreign invader, often murdering the Danish courtiers, but as Rosenberg points

³⁹B.A. Young, *Financial Times*, 17 April 1971.

⁴⁰ Emrys Bryson, *Nottingham Evening Post*, 24 March 1971.

⁴¹ Goldman, p.88.

⁴² Goldman, p.90.

⁴³ Goldman, p.90.

out this interpretation makes a ‘hypocrisy of Fortinbras’ civilized remarks.’⁴⁴ It is perhaps not surprising that Richardson decided to end his production with Horatio’s valediction rather than allowing Fortinbras to claim his ‘rights of memory’ (5.2.394) as his interpretation was based on a Hamlet who represented a new generation, critical of the ‘Establishment’ and cynical about power. It would have lessened the moral status bestowed on Williamson’s Hamlet to see that his sacrifice was worthless as Fortinbras simply re-establishes the status quo. Nor was Richardson interested in the political nature of the play. Chetwyn did not believe that Hamlet delays, so he presented Fortinbras as being able to do with ease what Hamlet struggled to do until the final scene, that is, ‘through action to make sense of life’.⁴⁵

McKELLEN’S PERFORMANCE

McKellen’s Hamlet was a confused mixture of modern, hippyish teenager and romantic, flamboyant poet-swordsman. McKellen wore a leather jacket and a medallion around his neck; and had long flowing hair; one critic thought that he was ‘relating his most unregal Prince to the present decade’s hippies.’⁴⁶ The costume appears to have been designed to suggest a degree of modernity but also to identify Hamlet as an outsider as the rest of the cast wore an assortment of fur-trimmed Elizabethan costumes, although the production lacked any real sense of period, as twelfth century arms and armour were seen alongside Sam Brownes of the First World War. McKellen characterised Hamlet as an adolescent having ‘outbursts of temper’.⁴⁷

The passion was loud and furious. He was ‘unusually ready with his dagger’.⁴⁸ His opening line, ‘A little more than kin, and less than kind’ (1.2.65), was shouted

⁴⁴ Rosenberg, p.907.

⁴⁵ Goldman, p.93.

⁴⁶ L.G.S., Stage, 12 August 1971.

⁴⁷ John Barber, Daily Telegraph, 6 August 1971.

⁴⁸ B.A. Young, Financial Times, 17 April 1971.

angrily at Claudius. After seeing the ghost he rolled on the ground in hysterics, and he was similarly excessive in the Closet scene. In contrast he danced with delight at the Players' arrival. McKellen presented Hamlet as a juvenile, from 'his first startled response to the gun salute to the royal toast'⁴⁹, to messing around before the start of the Mousetrap, when he stood on a stool and shot an invisible arrow, in an imitation of 'the Eros statue.'⁵⁰ Claudius patronised him. In the same scene when Hamlet made his joke about Brutus's 'Capitol crime', Claudius 'smile[d] patronisingly and secretly motion[ed] to the court to titter appreciatively'⁵¹ At the end of this scene, when pointing out the cloud shaped like a whale to Polonius, McKellen did not turn his head in the direction he was pointing and Polonius agreed with him without taking his eyes from Hamlet's face. Hamlet was aware that he was being manipulated and controlled like a child. The climax to this was his being put in a strait-jacket after he had killed Polonius. McKellen was still in it when he delivered his soliloquy at the end of Act 4 scene 4 'How all occasions do inform against me'

Unfortunately this adolescent display was made up of flamboyant excesses which resulted in McKellen being kept outside of the character. There was too much unsubtle physical signposting of the lines: 'a music-hall imitation of a man walking downstairs to illustrate the thought of walking into his grave',⁵² in Act 4 scene 2, when McKellen delivered his speech to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern describing them as sponges, his 'tongue first thrusts out his cheek, then makes moist, squeezed noises',⁵³ and in Act 3 scene 1 McKellen demonstrated to Ophelia how women 'jig' and 'amble'. Thus the emotion he invoked was always running alongside the language rather than

⁴⁹ Irving Wardle, The Times, 6 August 1971.

⁵⁰ Emrys Bryson, Nottingham Evening Post, 24 March 1971.

⁵¹ The Times, 6 August 1971.

⁵² B.A. Young, Financial Times, 6 August 1971.

⁵³ Benedict Nightingale, New Statesman, 7 May 1971.

through it. Eric Shorter summed up the sterility at the centre of the performance: 'The actor makes great sense of all he has to say. He does not, however, make me care.'⁵⁴ John Barber believed that McKellen's Hamlet maintained throughout the performance an 'ironical awareness of the emotional weakness that keeps him always on the verge of tears.'⁵⁵ An example of this was his exit at the end of Act 3 scene 4 when, carrying the corpse of Polonius on his back, he blew goodnight kisses at his mother. However, the Evening Standard reviewer thought that the 'aching humanity of the character ha[d] been replaced by a furtive, self-centred egotism.'⁵⁶ The implication is unclear as to whose ego - Hamlet's or the actor's - prevented the character from being sympathetic. Generally it lacked the humour that makes the role so attractive to an audience.

Not only did the performance fail to connect with the audience but there was also little sense of an emotional involvement between Hamlet and the other characters. The only character that McKellen's Hamlet did engage with was Gertrude. However, there was some confusion as to whether there was any intended sense of an Oedipal agitation in the portrayal of this relationship. Maurice Weaver, in the Manchester Daily Telegraph, disputed the idea, claiming that McKellen's Hamlet was 'not one of your namby-pamby Oedipus neurotics'⁵⁷, but other critics thought that Hamlet's habit of burying his head in his mother's lap was indicative of unhealthy sexual feelings. She clearly treated him like a child, tousling his hair as she exited at the end of Act 1 scene 2.

This sense of confusion was also felt in the presentation of Hamlet's madness, real or feigned, which was sketchy. The reviewer in the Glasgow Evening Citizen

⁵⁴ Eric Shorter, Daily Telegraph, 16 April 1971.

⁵⁵ John Barber, Daily Telegraph, 6 August 1971.

⁵⁶ Evening Standard, 6 August 1971.

⁵⁷ Maurice Weaver, Manchester Daily Telegraph, 28 July 1971.

thought that he kept 'well to this side of sanity'⁵⁸, whereas the Guardian reported that McKellen played Hamlet as a man 'almost overwhelmed by madness', that there was 'a constant tension between the "antic disposition" and an actual descent into mania.'⁵⁹ Some critics thought that he overplayed the madness. One reviewer thought that his Hamlet was simply neurotic and concluded that this was no surprise as he had just played the two 'notoriously neurotic monarchs, Richard II and Edward II' ⁶⁰

Chetwyn allowed McKellen 'maximum freedom', which resulted in a performance that lacked a cohesive intellectual structure - and more disastrously was 'fired almost entirely from within'.⁶¹ Peter Ansorge felt that what linked McKellen's and Bates' interpretations of Hamlet was 'the fact that both productions had been literally star-struck built for and around the whims of the main protagonist.'⁶² The headline for Benedict Nightingale's review was 'Acting Big' and the reviewer for the South China Morning Post claimed that McKellen was turning back the clock 'about to do a Wolfie and ... revive the old and heinous concept of star parts in Shakespeare.'⁶³ Both critics focus on McKellen's grand acting style, old-fashioned in its virtuosity, showy, going against the current trend for understatement and ensemble.

McKellen's failure to engage with the role meant that there was no sense of his personal vision and it appears that Chetwyn's lack of control contributed to the vagueness. The contradictory responses to Hamlet's relationship with Gertrude and the confusion over his madness, as outlined above, indicate that Chetwyn failed to impose a strong effective directorial line. The general consensus seems to have been that

⁵⁸ N.S., Glasgow Evening Citizen, 21 April 1971.

⁵⁹ Guardian, 6 August 1971.

⁶⁰ G.L. Birmingham Post, 25 March 1971.

⁶¹ Irving Wardle, The Times, 16 April 1971.

⁶² Peter Ansorge, Plays and Players, October 1971, p.28.

⁶³ NYTS, South China Morning Post, 11 September 1971.

McKellen's performance was made up of small individual thoughts on lines or speeches but that he lacked an overall conception of the role. B.A. Young felt that there was no 'consistent personality' and any personality that did emerge was 'Ian McKellen rather than that of Hamlet.'⁶⁴ The lack of an all-embracing vision was true not just of McKellen's Hamlet but of the production as a whole. This weakness was perhaps particularly obvious given the nature of the central character. Goldman argues that the actor playing Hamlet has a very specific problem 'assuming he is competent to execute the incredibly many separate "bits" the play allows him' and that is 'to control them, to focus them, to find an overall conception in which each has its place, and to give a meaningful smoothness to his transitions.'⁶⁵ This is not only the challenge of playing Hamlet but also the essence of the role. McKellen was seemingly not successful in solving this problem and received little help from his director. This failure in the McKellen/Chetwyn relationship is instructive. It illustrates partly why McKellen's work with Trevor Nunn has been so successful: it is because Nunn provides very tight, very specific contexts for McKellen's performances; there is always a definite unifying vision in Nunn's direction.

Perhaps the absence of nobility, which did not prove to be an issue with reviewers who appreciated Nicol Williamson's performance, but which critics objected to in McKellen, was due to his recent revelation that he is very talented in portraying kingship. Certainly it appears that the critics expected a very aristocratic prince from McKellen and were bewildered by the heavily ironic self-dramatising teenager that they were presented with instead.

⁶⁴ B.A. Young, *Financial Times*, 17 April 1971.

⁶⁵ Goldman, p.75.

McKELLEN'S VOCAL PERFORMANCE

The soliloquies were delivered in a spotlight, while the rest of the stage (apart from the mirrored location of the ghost) was dark and the other actors on stage froze. This underlined the depiction of the ghost as a part of Hamlet's conscience. 'To be or not to be' was described as being delivered as 'low vacant murmurings',⁶⁶ although one critic thought that McKellen's pause after the opening line of the soliloquy indicated that Hamlet was considering what it means to be human: 'It means reacting to events with self-awareness and an acceptance of the consequences. The pause is eloquent, dramatic and conclusive'⁶⁷ The reviewer for the Scotsman stated that McKellen delivered all the soliloquies 'in a puzzled plaintive tone'⁶⁸

TEXTUAL CUTS AND EMENDATIONS

Critics objected strenuously to the textual changes. Many of them were simply the rewriting of unfamiliar words or difficult and confusing phrases into clear modern English so that the 'union' Claudius throws into the cup in the last scene became a 'pearl', 'My cousin Hamlet and my son' (1.2.64) became 'My nephew Hamlet and my son' After the Mousetrap Hamlet exclaimed 'O Damon dear, the world has fallen apart' instead of 'O Damon dear/ this realm dismantled was/ of Jove Himself' (3.2.275-7). This is an inaccurate translation; as T.J.B. Spencer notes the meaning seems to be that Hamlet is 'still thinking of his father whose kingdom was usurped by a peacock (Claudius)',⁶⁹ 'dismantled' meaning 'taken from' not 'fallen apart' Hamlet's advice to the Players was also cut; it is interesting to note that these lines are part of McKellen's one-man show. The main reason for the changes was practical and pragmatic. The

⁶⁶ Guardian, 6 August 1971.

⁶⁷ Ray Seaton, Wolverhampton Express and Star, 29 April 1971.

⁶⁸ Scotsman, 15 April 1971.

⁶⁹ William Shakespeare, Hamlet, ed. by T.J.B. Spencer (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1980), p.287.

production was not designed for the West End but for touring and the audiences it was targeted at were British schoolchildren and interested Europeans. It was assumed that many of these would not be familiar with the text, so the paramount concern was for clarity of narrative. J.C. Trewin missed this point entirely when he presumed the minor editing was done for the benefit of the 'lazy listener'.⁷⁰ One damaging change which does not seem to be justified by the desire for clarity was the alteration of 'fishmonger' to 'fleshmonger' in Act 2 scene 2. This destroyed the meaning of the exchange, as the arbitrariness and inappropriateness of calling Polonius a 'fishmonger' which at first seems to be part of Hamlet's new adoption of an 'antic disposition' suddenly turns into a seering truth, 'To be honest as this world goes, is to be one/ man picked out of ten thousand'(178-9). The sexual innuendo that the change to 'fleshmonger' suggests is unnecessary and wrongheaded, although the emendation is not without scholarly support: Harold Jenkins, in his New Arden edition, provides contemporary Elizabethan quotations which link fishmongers and venery and he claims it 'is certainly right to say that a fishmonger could be a wencher'.⁷¹ The other change that seems ill-advised is the excision of the ghost's six line speech in Act 3 scene 4 where he speaks of Hamlet's 'blunted purpose'. Benedict Nightingale criticised this cut because it made 'the old chap's return entirely pointless.'⁷² Nightingale saw it as a result of Chetwyn's desire to fit the play around his view that Hamlet does not delay. An emendation that caused conflicting responses was in Act 2 scene 2 where Hamlet's 'rogue and peasant slave' soliloquy was moved to directly after the Player King's 'Pyrrhus' speech, allowing a much more immediate connection between Hamlet and the Player. However, this

⁷⁰ J.C. Trewin, *Five and Eighty Hamlets*, p.155.

⁷¹ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. by Harold Jenkins, (London: Methuen, 1982), p.465.

⁷² Benedict Nightingale, *New Statesman*, 7 May 1971.

disrupted the architecture of the scene. In his Oxford edition of the play G.R. Hibbard comments that the 'convention of the soliloquy is employed in an unusual fashion here'⁷³ because it voices ideas that have been thought through earlier in the scene but which could not be expressed until Hamlet was alone. The soliloquy is, as John Dover Wilson describes it, 'a dramatic reflection of what has already taken place.'⁷⁴ Robert Speaight writing in Shakespeare Quarterly thought that the transposition was a mistake as it left the scene without a climax 'for which the only substitute was an eavesdropping Osric whom Hamlet chases off stage',⁷⁵ while John Barber thought that it was 'a brilliant gimmick' ⁷⁶

CONCLUSION

Critics questioned whether this Hamlet advanced McKellen's career. Frank Marcus commented that 'from the point of view of his development I consider his Hamlet to have been a complete waste of time.'⁷⁷ The reviewer for the Cambridge News, seeing the production at Nottingham Playhouse, believed that 'this performance marks an advance for Mr McKellen as a classical actor, for it removes many of the mannerisms that were evident in Richard II and Edward II'⁷⁸, however, his was a lone voice.

The decision to bring the production to London was perhaps ill-advised. McKellen had already suffered from the adverse criticism of various national reviewers who had travelled either to Nottingham or Edinburgh. When the production was re-reviewed in London, he endured the further disadvantage of competing directly with

⁷³ William Shakespeare, Hamlet, ed. by G.R. Hibbard, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p.233.

⁷⁴ John Dover Wilson, What Happens in 'Hamlet', (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935), p.142.

⁷⁵ Robert Speaight, Shakespeare Quarterly, Vol 22 (1971), p.363.

⁷⁶ John Barber, Daily Telegraph, 6 August 1971

⁷⁷ Frank Marcus, Sunday Telegraph, 15 August 1971.

⁷⁸ Cambridge News, 26 March 1971.

Nicol Williamson, Alan Howard and Alan Bates all of whom had played the role in London within the previous eighteen months. His performance was always going to be judged against his Richard II. The tragedy of McKellen's Hamlet is that it was badly timed, the direction was weak and the overall purpose of the production as a touring vehicle for Britain and Europe was never recognised. In an interview in 1981 McKellen explained his approach to acting Shakespeare which informed his Hamlet in 1970:

I don't play to the critics who are coming to their tenth Hamlet this season and who are likely to be interested in what I do that's different, something that may illuminate a corner of the play they haven't noticed before. No, my commitment is to the audience who don't know anything about Hamlet at all.⁷⁹

This is a noble sentiment, although a little naive, and reflects McKellen's defensive attitude towards professional critics. The ideal is, of course, a performance that satisfies the novice and the experienced theatregoer. McKellen's Hamlet was a confused mixture of ideas and his performance failed to fulfil his own directive for clarity; he is not, however, to blame for this. Perhaps more to the point is the Observer critic's desire for the future: 'One would like to see him return to the part again in a couple of years, under stricter direction. He's too important a talent to let run wild, as here.'⁸⁰ Sadly this never happened, although Chetwyn did direct McKellen again in 1979 as Max, in the premiere of Martin Sherman's play Bent. The later collaboration was hugely successful.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Shakespeare Quarterly, Vol. 33(1982), pp.135-141 (p.139).

⁸⁰ Observer, 6 August 1971.

⁸¹ The production, despite the reluctance of the Royal Court to stage it, due to its gay subject matter, 'played to 95% box office and transferred to the Criterion Theatre': Colin Chambers, Peggy (London: Nick Hern Books, 1997), p.288.

PART 1: KING LEAR - ACTORS' COMPANY (1974)

INTRODUCTION

In 1973 the Actors' Company, which McKellen set up with Edward Petherbridge (in 1971), toured two productions: Chekhov's The Wood Demon and Congreve's The Way of the World. The company had disbanded at the end of the tour due to financial pressure, and because the actors felt the need to undertake more lucrative work temporarily. The company re-assembled in order to take the two plays to the Edinburgh Festival. After this they agreed to do a season at the Brooklyn Academy in New York (as part of a three and a half month British Theatre Season). They took the same two plays but added King Lear and Knots, an adaptation of the works of R.D. Laing by Petherbridge, to the repertoire. They then repeated this season at the Wimbledon Theatre. McKellen played Edgar in King Lear.

INTERPRETATION OF THE PLAY

King Lear was directed by David William who was praised, by several critics, for not imposing 'some bizarre theory of his own'¹ on the play and instead 'telling Shakespeare's tale.'² J.C. Trewin was delighted by the production which he believed was best described as 'old fashioned [sic] Shakespeare in which players of the first excellence are allowed to interpret the author's text without the pathetic belief that such-and-such a device may provide some sort of "relevance."'³

The production's programme notes reflected William's uncomplicated approach. In the programme there was a potted performance history of the main role: Tate, Macready, Irving and 'notable twentieth-century Lears' including Randle Ayrton,

¹ What's On in London, 29 March 1974.

² Irving Wardle, The Times, 22 March 1974.

³ J.C. Trewin, Birmingham Post, 23 March 1974

John Gielgud, Laurence Olivier and Paul Scofield. Opposing critical opinions on the 'performability' of the play were quoted: A.C. Bradley versus Harley Granville-Barker and William concluded that since the Second World War King Lear has 'tended to displace Hamlet as the Shakespearean tragedy in which society sees its own moral landscape most significantly reflected.' W.B. Yeats' poem 'Three Movements' was also printed in the programme. The current 'moral landscape' of the play that William's appeared to be suggesting in his production was described in Yeats' poem. The poem is divided up into three two line verses. The first movement refers to 'Shakespearean fish', the second to 'Romantic fish' and the third to the fish 'that lie/ Gasping on the strand.' This last image depicts twentieth-century society as having been driven away from its natural element to a hostile world, in which it is struggling to breathe. A third element completed the programme notes: an extract from Peter Alexander's Shakespeare's Life and Art in which he defends the psychology of the plot of King Lear. In the printed extract the storm is described as 'a device to lay bare the inner structure and workings of the king's mind.'⁴ It appears, from the choice of excerpts in the programme, that William aimed to present a sympathetic Lear who 'does not plead that age is faultless, but only asks for it the charity that all states need.'⁵ He seems to have seen Lear as a current figure struggling to breathe in a society contemptuous of weakness.

SET AND COSTUME

The set designed by Alan Barlow and Brenda Hartill matched the unfussy simplicity of the director's approach. Curtains made out of plaited cord strings were

⁴ Peter Alexander, Shakespeare's Life and Art (London: James Nisbet, 1939), p.169

⁵ Ibid.

flown in 'to suggest a tent door opening or interiors'.⁶ These were supplemented by a few props. The world of the play was Ancient Briton established by the cast wearing an assortment of fur garments. Robert Eddison, who played King Lear, was described as looking like 'Blake's Ancient of Days.'⁷

McKELLEN'S PERFORMANCE AS EDGAR.

In an interview in 1976 McKellen commented on his characterisation of Edgar. As Mad Tom he had removed all his clothes and appeared naked (something most of the critics commented upon) as he felt that:

Edgar's story is about getting himself right down to his basics - to the basic of his nature, symbolised by taking his clothes off and then gradually building himself up to the state of a man who, by the end of the play, is fit to take over the kingdom in place of Lear. It exactly mirrors Lear's development which is to have everything and gradually to strip everything off.⁸

In his programme notes for Acting Shakespeare McKellen claims that the nakedness 'was a simple image to counterpoint the impenetrable obscurity of Edgar's language.'⁹

The New Yorker thought that McKellen's Edgar was 'wary, protective, magnetic',¹⁰ and in London, John Barber praised his 'lovely boyish candour' but continued 'this player has no gift for an assumed accent, so that his disguise is simply confusing.'¹¹ The Guardian critic agreed, feeling that McKellen failed to 'distinguish between Edgar's role-playing and his real self.'¹² The reviewer for Plays and Players, however, found his performance to be extremely effective commenting that he 'provided the evening with its intensity and its dynamics' and declaring it to be 'a

⁶ Irving Wardle, The Times, 22 March 1974.

⁷ John Barber, Daily Telegraph, 22 March 1974.

⁸ Pat Garratt, Woman's Journal, 1976.

⁹ Acting Shakespeare programme 1988, p.11.

¹⁰ New Yorker, 18 February 1974.

¹¹ John Barber, Daily Telegraph, 22 March 1974.

¹² Guardian, 23 March 1974.

virtuoso performance in its theatricality, but also one with a well-defined and understood character at its core.’¹³

CONCLUSION

Generally the critics felt the production was ‘lucid and straightforward’¹⁴ and, while the New Yorker believed that this gave the actors room ‘to explore and portray their characters without being smothered’,¹⁵ the critic for Plays and Players found it ‘regrettably lacking in inspiration’.¹⁶ Irving Wardle summarised the strength and weakness of the production thus: ‘If it fails to ignite in the full tragic conflagration, it is intensely alive in straight dramatic relationships.’¹⁷ Being a lyrical actor it is not surprising that Robert Eddison was praised for his vocal performance. J.C. Trewin commented that in Eddison’s performance ‘you never hear a line blurred or a syllable misplaced.’ Trewin also praised Eddison for giving Lear an ‘intellectual splendour’, he enjoyed the central performance in which ‘we can see the thought growing in the mind before it is expressed with the authority of a speaker matched to his dramatist.’¹⁸ However, the widespread opinion was that, although Eddison was effective as a haughty, narcissistic king, he was unable to scale the emotional heights the grandeur of the role demands. He was most moving in the closing elegiac scene which Wardle claimed he had ‘never heard spoken more beautifully.’¹⁹

¹³ Plays and Players, April 1974.

¹⁴ What’s On in London, 29 March 1974.

¹⁵ New Yorker, 18 February 1974.

¹⁶ Plays and Players, April 1974.

¹⁷ Irving Wardle, The Times, 22 March 1974.

¹⁸ J.C. Trewin, Birmingham Post, 23 March 1974.

¹⁹ Irving Wardle, The Times, 22 March 1974.

McKellen sums up his own performance as being ‘nothing remarkable’²⁰ I suspect that with Edgar (as perhaps with Kent in 1990) the truth is ‘he might have done better to try his hand at the romantic villainies of Edmund.’²¹

PART 2: KING JOHN - RSC (1975)

INTRODUCTION

It was John Barton’s production of King John that had prompted Irving Wardle and John Barber (among other critics) to welcome the simplicity of William’s production of King Lear. They delighted in its freedom from directorial fussiness and bright ideas. However, fate decreed that McKellen would become part of Barton’s ‘director’s theatre’ production of King John, albeit only briefly.

In January 1975 McKellen took over the role of The Bastard from Richard Pasco when John Barton’s Royal Shakespeare Company King John opened at the Aldwych. In a letter to the author McKellen has stated: ‘I don’t know why Richard Pasco withdrew from King John but as I began working for the RSC playing leading roles, I was happy to display a company spirit by taking over from him in a supporting part.’ McKellen’s acceptance of the role may have been influenced by the prospect of renewing his collaboration with Emrys James who was playing King John. In the RSC’s 1974 production of Dr Faustus, also directed by John Barton and performed at the Edinburgh Festival and then at the Aldwych, McKellen had played Faustus and James, Mephostophilis. In an interview with the Birmingham Post in February 1975 McKellen

²⁰ Acting Shakespeare programme 1988, p.11.

²¹ What’s On in London, 29 March 1974.

commented: 'I hope the partnership will continue. I am fairly besotted with Emrys James, as an actor.'²²

DR FAUSTUS - McKELLEN'S PERFORMANCE AS FAUSTUS

For Marlowe's play John Barton had confined the action of the play to Faustus' study and had used puppets for the parade of the Seven Deadly Sins, Helen of Troy and the Good and Bad Angels, all of which reinforced the idea that the narrative was taking place in Faustus' head.

McKellen gave a very busy performance as Faustus. There was constant movement, 'leaping about for a precious book, nudging the servants of Lucifer for some reaction to his activities, gleefully hugging himself at his own cleverness, or thrashing about in fearful agony as he prepares to meet his doom'²³ Michael Billington thought McKellen's peculiar style of acting 'in which his frame seems to be possessed by some emotional Dybbuk' was particularly suited to this interpretation of Faustus as a 'bushy-haired peasant scholar whose arching cat-like body is full of yearning lusts' while at the same time also being 'a tormented over-reacher suddenly prey to fits of rational sadness'²⁴ Irving Wardle thought that the strength of McKellen's performance lay 'in its periodic returns to a clear-sighted view of his predicament.'²⁵

DR FAUSTUS - THE PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN McKELLEN AND JAMES

William Tydeman claimed that the bond between McKellen's Faustus and James' Mephostophilis was not in evidence 'partly because McKellen's Faustus was conceived as making meaningful contact with no one.'²⁶ However, Caren Meyer, who

²² Birmingham Post, 1 February 1975.

²³ Milton Shulman, Evening Standard, 6 September 1974.

²⁴ Michael Billington, Guardian, 6 September 1974.

²⁵ Irving Wardle, The Times, 6 September 1974.

²⁶ William Tydeman, Doctor Faustus Text and Performance (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1984), p.66.

saw the production at the Aldwych, disagreed and stated that; ‘with beautiful irony McKellen’s writhing, restless, crazed human being is all along set off against Emrys James’s saintly devil’s emissary Mephostophilis’.²⁷ James’ performance was certainly the opposite of McKellen’s. He is described as being ‘cool, ironical and unblinking’,²⁸ chilling in that he was imperturbable. Harold Hobson felt that ‘the flames of hell are not so vivid as the resigned recollection of eternal bliss suggested by the subdued repose of Mr James’s suffering serenity’.²⁹ Irving Wardle suggested that the bond between the two characters was expressed, with James’ Mephostophilis being ‘ironically submissive to his temporary master’ while also being ‘capable of singing him gently to sleep’.³⁰ McKellen seems to have found in James an actor whose understated style complemented his own passionate intensity, an actor whose strength was stillness and quietness rather than his own fearless thundering. James, whom Benedict Nightingale called a ‘notable specialist in thinly smiling villains’,³¹ may have fascinated McKellen because of his effective economy.

BARTON’S TEXT FOR KING JOHN

The production of King John was an adaptation of the Shakespeare play with around 600 lines of the text written by Barton himself. The other sources Barton used were the anonymous Troublesome Reign of John, King of England and Bale’s King Johan. In an interview in 1977 Barton commented on his reworking of the Shakespeare text, ‘I don’t necessarily approve of what I did - it was simply the way the instinct

²⁷ Caren Meyer, Evening News, 6 September 1974.

²⁸ Michael Billington, Guardian 6 September 1974.

²⁹ Harold Hobson, The Sunday Times, 1 September 1974.

³⁰ Irving Wardle, The Times, 6 September 1974.

³¹ Benedict Nightingale, New Statesman, 13 September 1974.

went'.³² The reviews of the production were mainly concerned with evaluating Barton's emendations and commentating on whether he had a right to interfere with Shakespeare in this way. Those critics who believed that tampering with the text was wrong disliked it, but those who found the Shakespeare play lacking in dramatic interest applauded the visual intensity of Barton's reworking. Overall the production was commended for its visual effectiveness and Barton did succeed in creating an interesting entertainment. The reasoning behind the alterations was a desire to create a more satisfactory play in terms of theatrical appeal. However, most critics did not feel that the changes achieved the clarity Barton desired. Robert Smallwood felt that Barton underestimated the audience and Shakespeare when he added a gloss of extra synonyms to the word 'commodity' in the Bastard's soliloquy in Scene 3 (Act 2 scene 1 of Shakespeare's play): 'Or in your vulgar, thus: Expedience, /Self-interest, Policy, the Common Weal'³³ Peter Thomson lamented that the original Shakespeare play which is 'fascinating in part for its mediaeval residues' had simply been 'glossed over by a sophisticated political cynicism'.³⁴ Richard David argued that the perspective on King John in all three plays is very different making conflation of the texts extremely difficult: 'In Bale's play the king is a hero and martyr... In The Troublesome Reign this knight in shining armour has become a devious politician, ...but no question is really made of his legitimate right to be king. Shakespeare in his King John destroys that legitimacy, deliberately and unequivocally'.³⁵ In addition the style of each play is distinct.

³² Guardian, 3 August 1977.

³³ Robert Smallwood, 'Shakespeare Unbalanced: The Royal Shakespeare Company's King John', Deutsche Shakespeare - Gesellschaft West Jahrbuch, 1976, pp.79-99 (pp.84-5).

³⁴ Peter Thomson, 'The Smallest Season: The Royal Shakespeare Company at Stratford in 1974', Shakespeare Survey, Vol 28 (1975), pp.137-148.

³⁵ Richard David, 'The Director Clarifies' in Shakespeare in the Theatre, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), pp. 164-189 (p.175).

SET AND COSTUME

The set and costumes were simple and seemed to be aimed at presenting a non-specific time and place for the play. They were also used symbolically. The set comprised of a series of curtains 'white, black, gold or gaily flowered'³⁶ which were drawn as the scene demanded. The stage was raked and narrowed to a point upstage where it was met by 'an inversely sloping "ceiling"'.³⁷ The roof was 'created by a giant cross and star shapes, it is at once a crucifix, flag and the sky' and the cross motif was also to be found on the 'chasuble-like garments worn by the French and English soldiers.'³⁸ Most of the costumes were brown ensembles with jerkins suggesting an indefinite past. However, Constance rummaged for a will in her handbag and at the end of the first half the stage was 'covered in small crosses like a World War Two battlefield in Northern France.'³⁹ The eclectic nature of the costumes and props defied any exact period.

HOW BARTON'S INTERPRETATION OF THE PLAY AFFECTED THE CHARACTER OF THE BASTARD

Barton manipulated all three texts to produce a play that supported his own opinion that politics is inherently dishonest. This reading conflicted with Shakespeare's presentation of the character of The Bastard whose 'discovery of a personal moral integrity in the corrupt world in which he has to survive' is 'the heart'⁴⁰ of the play. This necessitated Barton's giving The Bastard an interpolated speech in which he stated

³⁶ Russell Vandenbroucke, 'The London Theatre: 1973-1974', *Drama & Theatre*, Vol 12, 1974, pp.14-19.

³⁷ Peter Thomson, 'The Smallest Season: The Royal Shakespeare Company at Stratford in 1974', *Shakespeare Survey*, Vol 28 (1975), pp.137-148.

³⁸ Russell Vandenbroucke, 'The London Theatre: 1973-1974', *Drama & Theatre*, Vol 12, 1974, pp.14-19.

³⁹ Garry O'Connor, *Plays and Players*, Vol 21, May 1974.

⁴⁰ Smallwood, p.93.

his corruption: 'I have sworn allegiance to a corrupted king/ And now belike I am myself corrupt' in order to demonstrate 'the fact that he, too, was sullied by the mire that surrounded him.'⁴¹ It was felt that the optimism of the final lines of Shakespeare's play was lost because rather than being a true and heartfelt statement from the Bastard the words were read from an old book which he found under a Christmas tree upstage. In addition Pandulph's peace initiatives, contrary to Shakespeare's play, had been rejected. Although Harold Hobson did not agree with this viewpoint, he believed that as the text reached 'its highest point of bombast' McKellen's Bastard threw 'aside the provocative confidence... and speaks his final towering words with a calm assurance ... He lays his hand upon the Prince's shoulder on a dark and empty stage, and one knows that despite the danger and temptation to despair something may still be saved'.⁴² However, for the 1975 production the decision to use the same actor to play the roles of Prince Arthur and Prince Henry did suggest a pessimistic view of the future, furthermore the Bastard exited, whistling which added a feeling of uncaring indifference.

The character of the Bastard is often seen primarily as a commentator on events, a 'safety-valve' for the audience, who expresses 'our contempt of hypocritical pomposity'.⁴³ However, in Barton's production this function of the character was undercut by the fact that the other characters were 'aware of their own absurdity'.⁴⁴

James' characterisation of King John also meant that The Bastard of Shakespeare's play was largely lost - especially so in the second half when the role of

⁴¹ Geraldine Cousin, *Shakespeare in Performance King John* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), p.82.

⁴² Harold Hobson, *The Sunday Times*, 19 January 1975.

⁴³ Smallwood, p.94.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

The Bastard was diminished by the enlargement of John. Barton added two scenes with King John in the second half of the play: the submission to Pandulph and his poisoning at Swinstead Abbey. In Shakespeare's play Acts 4 and 5 are dominated by The Bastard. The characterisation of King John also affected the Bastard's role earlier as at the beginning of the play he ignored the Bastard during their quarrel, Thomson felt that this was due to the director's desire to sacrifice character to unity of theme, 'I take it that the presence of an effective politician would have undermined the directorial masterplan.'⁴⁵ The conflict between Austria and the Bastard was also played down. In addition The Bastard began the 'Commodity' speech in the corner downstage left and 'was given a lightly mocking follow-spot for his cross to centre'.⁴⁶

PASCO'S PERFORMANCE AS THE BASTARD

In his review of the 1974 production Irving Wardle referred to the role of the Bastard as 'usually the play's most actor-proof part' but criticised Pasco's presentation of the Bastard, starting 'in country-bumpkin style developing to hollow patriotic rhetoric'⁴⁷ However, B.A. Young thought that despite the character being initially portrayed with a 'bucolic voice' in handcuffs, nobility was added 'drop by drop' until by his final line 'his carriage is the equal of his rank'.⁴⁸ Michael Billington described the Bastard as starting off as 'Tony Lumpkin' and ending as 'the voice of England'.⁴⁹ Wardle believed Pasco to be 'too sensitive' an actor to be able to 'convey the presence of a man going along for the ride in a corrupt society, and accidentally achieving a sense

⁴⁵ Peter Thomson, 'The Smallest Season: The Royal Shakespeare Company at Stratford in 1974', Shakespeare Survey, Vol 28 (1975), pp.137-148.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Irving Wardle, The Times, 21 March 1974.

⁴⁸ B.A. Young, Financial Times, 21 March 1974.

⁴⁹ Michael Billington, Guardian, 30 March 1974.

of vocation'.⁵⁰ Richard David likewise concluded that Pasco was 'not ideally cast... and in early performances showed himself not altogether comfortable in it; but he had grown into it well as the season advanced.'⁵¹ Peter Thomson felt that 'Pasco accepted John's inanities like a gentle older cousin, never threatening to "deaf our ears", and much too passionless to *hate* Austria.'⁵² Garry O'Connor commented, 'Although I disliked Richard Pasco's performance as Faulconbridge to begin with, it does establish a consistency and thoroughness which had exacted from one by the end a form of grudging admiration.'⁵³ Russell Vandenbroucke judged Pasco's performance to be 'marvellous' and considered 'the sudden doubts that he has about the legitimacy of John's claim to the throne, doubts about that man to whom he has been unflinchingly loyal' to be 'beautifully conveyed'.⁵⁴

McKELLEN'S PERFORMANCE AS THE BASTARD

As McKellen was taking over a character already created in rehearsal and performance his personal contribution was limited. The production had been performed 65 times in Stratford and was given only 11 performances in London. Harold Hobson appreciated the charismatic partnership of McKellen and James: 'The admirable foil to the breezy heartiness of the great McKellen's early Faulconbridge is Emrys James's sly and irrepressible King John.'⁵⁵ McKellen's performance as the Bastard was also praised by Robert Cushman, who found him 'ringingly attractive' and felt that the Bastard's honesty seemed 'in this jingling world, such an anachronism. Mr McKellen himself

⁵⁰ Irving Wardle, The Times, 21 March 1974.

⁵¹ Richard David, p.263.

⁵² Peter Thomson, 'The Smallest Season: The Royal Shakespeare Company at Stratford in 1974', Shakespeare Survey, Vol 28 (1975), pp.137-148.

⁵³ Garry O'Connor, Plays and Players, Vol 21, May 1974, pp.38-40.

⁵⁴ Russell Vandenbroucke, 'The London Theatre: 1973-1974', Drama & Theatre, Vol 12, 1974.

⁵⁵ Harold Hobson, The Sunday Times, 19 January 1975.

seems somewhat old-fashioned in this context; to put it another way, his is the best acting in the play.’⁵⁶ J.C. Trewin believed that ‘McKellen can grow as the Bastard should into the spirit of England.’⁵⁷ However, John Barber thought that he made ‘a jaunty but unconvincing Bastard’⁵⁸ and Irving Wardle lamented that although the ‘part... has passed from Richard Pasco to Ian McKellen; it is still played as a Pistol-like bumpkin [therefore] one must ascribe this weird reading to the director.’⁵⁹

CONCLUSION

The Bastard was McKellen’s first Shakespeare role with the RSC. His confidence in John Barton stemmed from a shared academic approach to the text: Barton had directed McKellen before, at Cambridge, as Tuzenbach in The Three Sisters and in 1959 Barton had cast McKellen as Justice Shallow in the two Henry IV plays which he directed for the Marlowe Society. Successful acting partnerships and successful relationships with directors have been the building blocks of his career and McKellen’s motivating desire to continue working with Barton and James is characteristic. He had been reluctant to join the RSC after his disastrous introduction to large-scale theatre companies with the National in 1965. John Barton and Emrys James were the incentives that finally won him over and persuaded him to do Dr Faustus and then King John. Due to his performance as The Bastard McKellen was gently incorporated into the company and the following year was offered and accepted three leading roles at Stratford.

⁵⁶ Robert Cushman, Observer, 12 January 1975.

⁵⁷ J.C. Trewin, Birmingham Post, 10 January 1975.

⁵⁸ John Barber, Daily Telegraph, 11 January 1975.

⁵⁹ Irving Wardle, The Times, 11 January 1975.

ROMEO AND JULIET

INTRODUCTION

McKellen had been wooed unsuccessfully by the Royal Shakespeare Company for seven years. He joined the company in 1974 to play the title role in Dr Faustus at the Edinburgh Festival and at the Aldwych in London before a tour and (as has been noted) he stepped in to play the Bastard in King John. However, it was not until 1976 that the RSC was able to entice him to commit to a season at Stratford and London, playing in three productions. In an article he wrote at the time McKellen explains why he had refused the RSC for so long:

After five years working on tour and in provincial companies I was convinced by, say, 1970, that I wanted to continue as part of the experimenting and thriving theatre which challenged the main establishment of London and the big subsidised companies. I thought of theatre-people as traditional rogues, peasant slaves and vagabonds, travelling whence their audiences live and work.¹

This romantic view of the acting profession was contradicted by a more pragmatic, very different and refreshingly egocentric admission by McKellen that the offer of three leading roles at Stratford coincided with a feeling of frustration with the Actors' Company and fulfilled his desire to be the star. Out-and-out leading roles were what he was interested in. A big attraction was that he would be working with Trevor Nunn, who was to direct him as *Romeo and Macbeth*. They had acted together while undergraduates at Cambridge and the potential for a successful partnership between actor and director must have been anticipated by both.²

Romeo was not a role that McKellen was eager to play. He had actually avoided it for some time. In an interview, in 1976, he commented that he had turned down the

¹ Ian McKellen, 'A distant, fabled place', The Times, 9 October 1976.

² The programme states that the production was directed by Trevor Nunn 'with Barry Kyle.' The extent of Kyle's contribution is unclear.

role 'a great deal and for a number of reasons. One of which was, I thought I was too old. Another I thought he was too boring a young man. And I've not liked the Juliets that I've been offered.'³ McKellen's concern about his age stems from his own experience at Stratford as a schoolboy in the 1950's. He has written about his dislike of mature actors and actresses playing teenagers:

Charity has grown with age. But to a teenager the maturity of the juveniles at Stratford was upsetting. Romeos, Juliets, Hamlets, Malcolms, Olivias always seemed more like parents, uncles and aunts than youthful heroes and heroines.⁴

There was one performance which proved the exception to this disappointing rule: the young McKellen fell in love with Peggy Ashcroft as Imogen. The memory of Ashcroft's interpretation is branded on McKellen's brain and it showed him the possibility of 'an actor's technical triumph over the odds of age, freeing an inner spirit.'⁵ Despite his reluctance to play Romeo because he was 'too old for the boy by fifteen years', he knew that 'great acting' could resolve this problem.⁶ McKellen's paramount concern for the audience to believe in the reality of the character he is playing determines his obsession with his own physical relationship with the part.

McKellen was also persuaded to play Romeo because he liked the accompanying package: Macbeth (opposite Judi Dench), Leontes in The Winter's Tale, (one of his favourite plays) and at last a Juliet he approved of - Francesca Annis. McKellen found that 'Romeo put in that context didn't seem so bad.'⁷ Although accepting the part was not a wholly positive decision it did become much more so: 'When rehearsals started, for the first time, I became excited by the part and now [early 1976] I'm thrilled to bits, and relieved that Trevor Nunn has at last persuaded me to do

³ Pat Garratt, 'The best actor of his generation?', Woman's Journal, 1976.

⁴ McKellen, 'A distant, fabled place', The Times, 9 October 1976.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ McKellen, 'A distant, fabled place', The Times, 9 October 1976.

⁷ Pat Garratt, 'The best actor of his generation?', Woman's Journal, 1976.

it.’⁸ He stated in an interview with the Observer that he had never seen ‘any actor bring it off.’⁹ Here was his chance to change that.

SET

The set was a wooden Elizabethan inn-yard designed by John Napier assisted by Chris Dyer. The basic design was permanent, common to all the season’s productions in the main house. Romeo and Juliet opened the season and so gave the critics and the public their first glimpse of the newly re-modelled stage and auditorium. Although the design was based on twentieth-century ideas of the structure of an Elizabethan theatre, the company strenuously denied that this was any attempt to reconstruct the Globe. Trevor Nunn commented:

This stage certainly isn’t a reconstruction and makes no attempt to be nostalgic about past ages. Simply, with little money, it is the best we can do to express our belief in a theatre of imagination; actors on a bare platform conjuring the audience with language and nothing else.¹⁰

The stage projected 16 feet into the auditorium in an attempt to negate the effect of the proscenium arch structure. There were two raised balconies upstage which bent round, stopping at the wall of the proscenium arch. The balcony and dress circle were clad in recycled wooden boards so as to blend in with this stage structure. There was a staircase on either side which linked the stage to the upper areas. Two critics questioned whether this exercise had saved money, speculating about the cost of the re-designed stage for the Roman plays in 1972, which had included expensive machinery which had now apparently been removed to accommodate this new simplified wooden set. However, the RSC claimed that the new design was ‘revenue producing and has enabled us to bring down expenditure on each production.’¹¹ Certainly very little

⁸ Pat Garratt, ‘The best actor of his generation?’, Woman’s Journal, 1976.

⁹ John Walker, ‘Stage Hero’, Observer Magazine, 21 March 1976.

¹⁰ Trevor Nunn, ‘Back to Stage One’, The Sunday Times, 28 March 1976.

¹¹ Stratford Herald, 2 April 1976.

was spent on props. A bed and a couple of stools made up most of the list for Romeo and Juliet. The re-designed stage seems to have sprung equally from the artistic desire to bring the audience and actors closer together and the financial considerations which required that expenditure be kept to a minimum. There was criticism that the wooden set could not convey the heat and the allegedly essential 'Italian' passion which fuels the play.

The production increased the authenticity of the Elizabethan set by simulating daylight throughout the performance; the torches in the play remained unlit. The lighting was almost unvaried throughout; in Act 1 scenes 4 and 5 the night atmosphere was created with 'thistle' gobos.

A general drawback was that the set was not entirely audience-friendly and more than one critic expressed sympathy for the people sitting in the balconies at the back of the stage, condemned to watch the backs of the actors' heads. Only David Waller as Friar Lawrence was praised for remembering that they were there and directing some of his lines to them. Most of the actors, at least in the first production in this space, failed to rise to the challenge of acting in the round. Some critics found the audience sitting in these seats distracting as they pulled focus from the actors on the stage. The new design of the stage, an exercise to increase the intimacy of the audience and players, seems often to have worked against itself, creating instead a sense of remoteness.

COSTUME

The Elizabethan simplicity of the set was reflected in the costumes, McKellen was dressed in midnight blue hose and doublet and Francesca Annis in a plain dress of dull burnt orange with a white background. McKellen's blue costume was considered to

be 'as near as you can get to blue jeans in a 17th-century ambience'.¹² J.M. Maguin noticed that when Juliet met Paris at Friar Lawrence's cell she was wearing a 'stately orange-red outfit' whose colour was 'ironically a near match to that of the hose worn by Paris' and that 'this tailoring of fate [was] both discreet and impressively effective.'¹³ Generally the costumes were not used symbolically. The Chorus wore blue denim jeans, making him a link between the modern audience and the Elizabethan play.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LOVE AND DEATH IN THE PLAY

The Prologue's opening description of Romeo and Juliet's love being 'death-mark'd' (1.1.9) prepares the audience for the interplay of love and death motifs that run through the play. Love and death are inextricably linked; Death is described as a lover several times. Juliet hearing of Romeo's banishment laments:

Poor ropes, you are beguiled,
Both you and I, for Romeo is exiled.
He made you for a highway to my bed,
But I, a maid, die maiden-widowed.
Come, cords. Come, Nurse, I'll to my wedding bed,
And death, not Romeo, take my maidenhead! (3.2.132-7)¹⁴

Capulet, finding Juliet dead on the morning of her wedding, laments to Paris that Death has 'lain with thy wife. There she lies,/ Flower as she was, deflowered by him (4.5.36-7)'. Romeo's final speech in Act 5 scene 3 echoes Juliet's and Capulet's image of death:

Ah, dear Juliet,
Why art thou yet so fair? Shall I believe
That unsubstantial Death is amorous,
And that the lean abhorred monster keeps
Thee here in dark to be his paramour? (5.3.101-5)

¹² B.A. Young, *Financial Times*, 4 April 1976.

¹³ J.M. Maguin, 'The 1976 Season of the Royal Shakespeare Company at Stratford', *Cahiers Elisabethains*, No.10, Octobre 1976, pp. 85-95, (p.87).

¹⁴ Nunn cut lines 134 and 135 from this speech.

Roger Stilling sees this speech of Romeo's as 'the real tour de force of love-death interplay' in Romeo and Juliet. He describes Romeo and Juliet's final kisses: Romeo's 'Thus with a kiss I die'(5.3.120) and Juliet's 'I will kiss thy lips./ Haply some poison yet doth hang on them'(5.3.164-5) as 'the compression of love, death and joy as far as it will go.'¹⁵ The love/death theme is mostly realised through Romeo and Juliet. In Act 1 scene 5 when Juliet is waiting to find out if Romeo is married she declares: 'If he be married, /My grave is like to be my wedding bed'(133-4). In Act 3 scene 2 Juliet, anticipating the arrival of Romeo and the consummation of their marriage, asks night to 'Give me my Romeo. And when I shall die,/ Take him and cut him out in little stars'(21-2). Her enjoyment of Romeo is seen as a prelude to her death and also to his.

INTERPRETATION OF THE PLAY

It was this theme of love and death that Nunn and Kyle highlighted in the production. They focused on the irony of the tragedy, presenting the lovers achieving the final consummation in the tomb. The spectre of death hovered over the action from the beginning. The foreboding of Romeo's death was emphasised in Act 1 scene 4. When he voices his misgivings about going to the Capulet party Romeo warns that he anticipates some 'vile forfeit of untimely death'(111). McKellen paused after the word death; he was as Olivier had been 'authentically clairvoyant'¹⁶ at this point. There was also an unexpected chilling moment in Act 2 scene 4. The scene opens with Romeo's friends meeting and discussing his whereabouts, Romeo having successfully given them the slip the previous night. The atmosphere is light and languid, and modern productions often present Mercutio nursing a hangover in this scene. Benvolio assures

¹⁵ Roger Stilling, Love and Death in Renaissance Tragedy (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976), p.74.

¹⁶ Anthony Holden, Olivier (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1988), p.88. Holden is quoting Audrey Williamson.

Mercutio that Romeo will answer Tybalt's challenge. Mercutio's reply is 'Alas, poor Romeo, he is already dead!' (12) Michael Pennington delivered the line seriously so that for a second the true possibility of this hung in the air and the audience along with Romeo's friends believed it. The feeling of doom and the reality of death, the expectation of the tragedy to unfold, was never very far away.

The emphasis on death meant that Romeo was presented as a tragic figure from the start. Textual cuts were made to accommodate this. In Act 1 scene 1 the more complicated and clever portions of Romeo's wordplay were cut. These linguistic displays indicate that his love for Rosaline is not authentic as he is still able to intellectualise it. Romeo's ability to detach himself enough to be witty about it suggests that there is a degree of self-conscious artificiality. The directors wanted McKellen's Romeo to be a doomed presence from the beginning and therefore his identity as a melancholy lover was presented at face value and not sent up. The promptbook script cuts accordingly:

Bid a sick man in sadness make his will.
Ah, word ill urged to one that is so ill! (201-2)

and

O, she is rich in beauty; only poor
That, when she dies, with beauty dies her store (214-5)

and

These happy masks that kiss fair ladies' brows,
Being black, puts us in mind they hide the fair.
He that is stricken blind cannot forget
The precious treasure of his eyesight lost (230-3).

In Act 1 scene 4 Romeo's witty riposte to Mercutio, 'I am too sore empienced with his shaft/ To soar with his light feathers' (19-20), was lost. This may have been an attempt to reduce the tendency to self-indulgence that Shakespeare hints at through Romeo's language in the first half of the play. There is a sense in which Shakespeare initially

presents Romeo as merely thinking emotion. However, after meeting Juliet he feels the emotion of love for the first time. So there should be a distinct difference between the Romeo who believes he is in love with Rosaline and the Romeo who really does fall in love with Juliet. By cutting the lines that suggest Romeo's self dramatisation and false melodramatic emotion the production lost the subtlety of Shakespeare's characterisation and left McKellen with the difficult task of trying to convince the audience that his feelings for Juliet were new and real.

The desire to present Romeo as ill-fated, and truly 'star-crossed' can also be seen in the presentation of Mercutio's death. The production was openly theatrical and there was an emphasis on the drama rather than the poetry. For some critics, the staging of Mercutio's death was an example of the production favouring showy flamboyance at the cost of the integrity of the text. Mercutio's death was a joke gone tragically wrong and its theatricality suited the character; it also caused the audience to gasp in horror a second after they had been laughing and furthered the presentation of Romeo as a victim of circumstances. The promptbook indicates that Mercutio was unable to accept Romeo's refusal to answer Tybalt's challenge. He laughed at Romeo and Benvolio had to pull Romeo away from Mercutio when he started to lose his temper, 'O calm, dishonourable, vile submission' (72). Mercutio initiated the fight with Tybalt slapping him in the face with his glove as he concluded his challenge, 'Make haste, lest mine be about your ears ere it be out' (80); just as Tybalt had slapped Romeo in the face with his glove earlier in the scene when he called him villain. Romeo attempted to intervene, coming down the stairs imploring, 'Gentle Mercutio, put thy rapier up' (82). Mercutio and Tybalt then exchanged several thrusts, circled each other as Romeo urged them to stop, and then Tybalt attacked Mercutio, who retreated upstage left but then hopped

downstage left and jumped into Tybalt's arms and kissed him. Romeo came towards them and as he implored, 'Hold, Tybalt! Good Mercutio!' (89) he grabbed Mercutio and Tybalt then stabbed Mercutio in the back. Mercutio moved across to Romeo to deliver his curse on 'both houses' (91), he then hugged Benvolio who sheathed his sword and as he held Mercutio asked 'What art thou hurt?' (93) as if he had felt the wound or the blood. Mercutio bent over in pain: 'I am peppered, I warrant, for this world' (99) and then crossed to the centre of the stage swinging his sword in defiance as he repeated his curse 'a plague a'both your houses' (99). All the company on stage - Benvolio, Abraham, Balthasar and Gregory - moved over to assist Mercutio who began to falter. Only Romeo remained isolated downstage left, helpless and guilty as Mercutio blamed him 'I was hurt under your arm' (103). Mercutio was finally dragged off right by Benvolio, Abraham and Gregory. Mercutio's provocation of Tybalt had an edge of violence but the taunting was not meant to end in death. Romeo's part in the death was magnified in this treatment: Mercutio had been in control, he had known what he was doing but Romeo had interfered. This made Romeo even more tragic. Circumstances always worked against his happiness, he was really a doomed character in this production. Everything he touched ended in death; his love for Mercutio and his love for Juliet were finally consummated in death. Richard David, however, disliked this interpretation of Mercutio's death because it robbed the play of its irony:

If Mercutio's death is self-invited, Romeo cannot blame himself for it, and a major irony in the scene disappears. The irony is that Romeo cannot reveal the good motive that he has for refusing to fight Tybalt, but that purely motivated refusal, misunderstood, is the very engine that destroys his friend and, out of that, himself.¹⁷

¹⁷ Richard David, 'A Pair of Star-Crossed Lovers', *Shakespeare in the Theatre*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), pp.106-126 (p.116).

It can be argued, though, that the staging of Mercutio's death heightened Romeo's guilt because there was an element of comedy and of showy theatrical bravado in Mercutio's demeanour. He trod a thin line between laughter and a violent, malicious earnestness and there was always an opening for him to escape. The fight could have dissolved into comedy at any moment and appeared to be doing so with Mercutio's kiss but Romeo prevented this and halted the diffusion of tension and reminded Tybalt of the cause of the fight and so encouraged the stabbing. This staging of Mercutio's death has a precedent, in Franco Zeffirelli's 1960 production at the Old Vic, when Alec McCowen's Mercutio, a youthful exhibitionist with an immature attachment to Benvolio, 'engaged Tybalt in a fight by teasing him to amuse the crowd. Mercutio the wit, the intellect, played at duelling until Romeo dashed in and caused a fatal accident'¹⁸ One of the advantages of this style of playing is that Mercutio does not compete with Romeo as a romantic figure and the energy of the love story is not lost when he dies.

As I have argued, Romeo was presented not so much as a romantic figure as a tragic one. The production's presentation of the male relationships in the play added to the doomed atmosphere, contributing a feeling of uncertainty and misgiving which sprung from their distrust of romantic love. Romeo and his friends were on the cusp of manhood. Falling in love with Juliet was Romeo's initiation into the adult world of heterosexual relationships. The other male characters, especially Mercutio, remained in the insecure world of adolescence. The volatile emotions of their immaturity always threatened to be disruptive. In Act 2 scene 4 Romeo called to his friends while still offstage. Mercutio deliberately pretended to be upset and when Romeo came towards

¹⁸ Jill L. Levenson, *Shakespeare in Performance Romeo and Juliet* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), p.98.

him he recoiled as if he smelt from not having washed, 'O flesh, flesh how art thou fishified! (38) and the others Benvolio, Gregory, Abraham and Balthasar all obliged Mercutio by joining in the joke and coughed loudly as if being choked by the smell. This emphasised the childishness of the young men who play with danger and death, and their fear of the threat that romantic love poses for the male friendships. There was tension between Romeo and his friends caused by his finding a love greater than his love for them. In the same scene Romeo joins in with Mercutio's word games. Romeo wins with 'O single-soled jest, solely singular for the silliness'[sic] (63). There was a prolonged pause after this line as Mercutio wracked his brains to match it with a witty reply and the pause also allowed a moment of unspoken understanding between Mercutio and Romeo of the value and need for male comradeship. A similar instant came after Romeo's joke about the word 'broad', which 'added to the goose, proves thee far and wide a broad goose' (83) before Mercutio reproached him with 'Why, is not this better than groaning for love? (84) there was a pause as they were silently reconciled and the barrier of romantic love came down. Harold Hobson interpreted these signs as an indication of the characters' homosexuality. He observed that 'Romeo kisses Friar Lawrence with more gusto than he does Juliet' and that generally the male members of the cast 'keep their distance from the women and reserve their hugs and kisses for each other.'¹⁹ At one point Mercutio did thrust his bottom toward Romeo but Peter Holding felt that it was as much 'a schoolboyish flouting of propriety as it was a sign of homosexual repression'²⁰ Hobson went as far as to suggest that the production's interpretation of the play was that the tension of the drama arises from a homosexual

¹⁹ Harold Hobson, *The Sunday Times*, 4 April 1976.

²⁰ Peter Holding, *Romeo and Juliet Text and Performance* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), p.60.

community 'condemned to act out heterosexual love lives.'²¹ There is textual evidence to support the interpretation that Mercutio's friendship with Romeo is homosexual. Joseph Porter cites Mercutio's three references to Romeo's phallus (1.4.28, 2.1.29,38) as an 'index of the sexual dynamics' between them and sees in Mercutio's threat to bite Romeo's ear (2.4.77) a 'subliminal trace of sexual desire'²² However, in the production, Mercutio was played as a witty comic character, who revelled in being the entertainer of the male group rather than as a tortured homosexual which Hobson seems to suggest. It is more likely that the male characters were not meant to seem homosexual but rather as youths becoming aware that their relationships were being rivalled by a different kind of love. In this reading Mercutio, in particular, was frightened of losing the safety of the community of friends he had around him. The characterisation of Romeo as a tragic figure was further heightened by his being torn between his long standing, familiar love for his friends and his new, unfamiliar love for Juliet. Romeo was shown at a precarious time in his emotional life. The tragedy for him was that the dangers prove fatal.

This emphasis on the play as tragedy meant that the production got stronger as the play progressed. Consequently one of the main weaknesses was the series of scenes between Romeo and Juliet. McKellen and Annis were better in scenes with other characters rather than with each other. Annis's finest moment was considered to be in Act 3 scene 5 when Juliet defies her father's wish that she marry the County Paris, and McKellen was thought particularly effective in Act 3 scene 3 with Friar Lawrence. Although J. M. Maguin wrote that in the first balcony scene McKellen kept a 'perfect

²¹ Harold Hobson, *The Sunday Times*, 4 April 1976.

²² Joseph A. Porter, *Shakespeare's Mercutio: His History and Drama* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), p.156-7.

balance between physical exhilaration and loving silence',²³ most considered him to have been too neurotic and Annis to have been too breathy and too restrained in her expression of the emotion of the role, which she confined in a strait-jacket of formal, earnest, classical acting. Frank Marcus was not convinced by the relationship between Romeo and Juliet: 'The magnetic attraction, the compulsion to fuse, is lacking'.²⁴ The balcony scene was also hampered by McKellen's affectations of youth: he flapped his arms as if ready for take-off when he explained that he had entered the garden with the help of 'love's light wings' (2.2.66). Perhaps the couple's best scene together was that in the tomb (Act 5 scene 3). As was said of Gielgud, McKellen's Romeo, 'never warm[ed] up to Juliet till she [wa]s cold'²⁵

The staging of this scene did not satisfy everybody although its emotional intensity did not fail to move. The final scene was heavily cut. As Juliet's family monument was under the stage Tybalt's body was not seen and therefore all reference to it was removed. Robert Speaight objected to this staging:

If Juliet's beauty is to make Capulet's funeral vault 'a feasting presence full of light', she *must* be visible on her bier; to fetch her up from the trap was too reminiscent of Hamlet and Laertes fighting over Ophelia's corpse.²⁶

Francesca Annis was lying in the trap under the stage. McKellen climbed down into it and lifted her up for the audience to see, on his line 'O my love, my wife' (91). He then carried her out of the trap and downstage as if by taking her out of her grave he could resurrect her, the poignancy of Romeo's lines on which McKellen performed this stage action was fitting: 'Thou art not conquered' (94). Romeo's ironic realisation that 'Beauty's ensign yet/ Is crimson in thy lips and in thy cheeks'(95) led him to stand up

²³ *Cahiers Elisabethains*, p.88.

²⁴ Frank Marcus, *Sunday Telegraph*, 4 April 1976.

²⁵ James Agate, *Brief Chronicles*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1943), p.215.

²⁶ Robert Speaight, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol 28 (1977), p.188.

with Juliet, holding her up against his body as if he tantalisingly, at any moment, may discover that she is alive. He asks her 'Why art thou yet so fair?' (102) the audience could almost believe she was going to answer him. Juliet was not lying dead and motionless in a grave, she was standing up, Romeo and Juliet were softly dancing around the stage. As McKellen moved across the stage holding Juliet close to him, they were now truly lovers. On his resolution to stay with Juliet and 'never from this palace of dim night/ depart again' (106-107) he sank down with her at the edge of the trap, his feet hanging over the side: a visual reminder that Romeo is about to join the dead in the family mausoleum. He sat with Juliet draped across his body, cradling her on his lap and took out the bottle and the paper with the poison he had bought from the mountebank. He drank, where the text indicates, after his toast to Juliet, 'Here's to my love!' (119) His last few lines were delivered almost joyously, 'more epithalamium than elegy'.²⁷ The promptbook then states that after McKellen spoke his last line, 'Thus with a kiss I die' (120) he fell and Juliet fell on top of him, her hand falling and touching his face. However, the audience and the critics all remember that as Romeo kissed Juliet she stirred and her hand, which was behind his head, pulsed, the wrist relaxed and the fingers moved and she began to return to consciousness. (See Figs. 2 and 3) It was a matter of a second rather than minutes that divided the lovers from happiness and condemned them to tragedy. Even though the production had prepared the audience for this outcome, this moment tantalisingly offered hope. J. M. Maguin wrote that this scene was dominated by 'the ache of constant physical contact between the corpse and the living body of the lover.'²⁸ The hand flutter could be seen as a flagrantly romantic

²⁷ Holding, p.62.

²⁸ Cahiers Elizabethains, p.88.

imposition but the general reaction to it confirmed that it was a magical moment of theatre.

A.C. Sprague describes a similarly teasing moment in Olivier's performance in 1935:

[It] was Mr Olivier's idea... of having Romeo dying stretch out his hand toward Juliet, whose hand, as she stirred in her sleep, almost touched, but did not quite touch his.²⁹

The text does not have Juliet waken for twenty-seven lines after Romeo's death. The tragedy of Romeo committing suicide just before Juliet wakes up has proved unbearable for some audiences and the missed chance of a dialogue irresistible to some actors. In Garrick's 1750 adaptation of the play, Juliet wakes just after Romeo has drunk the poison but he does not die for another sixty-three lines or so, giving him time to bring Juliet 'from the tomb' and tell her that he has taken poison because he thought she was dead. The dialogue between them is full of anguished confusion as initially Juliet's 'senses are unsettled' and then Romeo 'raves' as he is overcome by the venom.³⁰ Juliet is left uncertain as to whether the Friar was true or not. In a recent film adaptation of the play, *Romeo + Juliet*, directed by Baz Luhrmann (1997), Leonardo di Caprio's Romeo is lying with his Juliet on her bier; he throws his head back to drink the poison; the supine Juliet opens her eyes at this second so witnessing his action. She is still in a confused state and she has no sense of the implication of what he has done; she looks puzzled and reaches out for him, and at her touch he turns to her. They look into each others eyes: there is a moment of terrible awareness and despair before he dies. In this interpretation they achieve an awful second of union. The 1976 RSC production

²⁹ A.C. Sprague, *Shakespeare and The Actors: the stage business in his plays (1660-1905)*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1944), p.319.

³⁰ William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, with alterations, and an additional scene by David Garrick 1750 (London: J. and R. Tonson and S. Draper Cornmarket Press, 1969) pp.65-66.

was more effective as the tragedy of Romeo was increased by his ignorance of Juliet's counterfeit. Billington succeeded in summing up the production's strength and weakness: 'Although this version is decidedly shaky in its evocation of love, it memorably shakes hands with death.'³¹

The decision to focus on the tragedy from the beginning meant that the first half of the play would necessarily be less effective than the second. Janet Adelman, in Male Bonding in Shakespeare's Comedies, comments that:

The play seems to begin securely in a comic realm... The bantering love and competition between Romeo and Mercutio seems safely of this realm, even when it suggests dissolution of friendship threatened by Romeo's ... love of women... the play turns... tragic at the moment that Romeo's new loyalty to women graphically destroys the old male bond. Mercutio's death signals the end of the comic realm.³²

Anthony Dawson agrees with Adelman:

There is a comic tonality to the initial conception of character and situation, and a comic flair to much of the play's language, with a shift to darker tones in the second half. Many of the motifs present in the first half reappear in the second in a minor key.³³

This explains why the production had to cut some of Romeo's lines in the first scene and also why it only became effective once the tragedy of the play began. The 'comic realm' of the play's first two acts was denied, and consequently the presentation of the lovers was weak because the context for their 'comedy' courtship was missing. The exception to this was the balcony scene which was directed so as to provoke laughter.

³¹ Michael Billington, Guardian, 3 April 1976.

³² Janet Adelman, 'Male Bonding in Shakespeare's Comedies' in Shakespeare's "Rough Magic" edited by Peter Erickson and Coppelia Kahn (Newark: University of Delaware Press; London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1985) pp.73-103 (p.80-81).

³³ Anthony Dawson, Watching Shakespeare: a playgoers' guide (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), p.139.

McKellen recalls, 'One happy matinee, Francesca Annis and I managed to get 27 intentional laughs in the balcony scene' ³⁴

McKELLEN'S PERFORMANCE

McKellen's main concern about playing Romeo was his age. He himself believes that he 'came to it too late' ³⁵ He was 36 when he played it and the headline of the Oxford Mail's review was 'Mature Lovers at Stratford'.³⁶ Michael Billington thought that McKellen was 'compensating' for his maturity by 'overstressing the lead's moonstruck teenage rapture.'³⁷ The Oxford Mail similarly commented that McKellen 'tries hard to convey impetuous youthful athleticism but with his bounding gait and costume suggests rather a cross between Nureyev and Norman Wisdom.'³⁸ He looped himself round the pillars and took his entrances and exits at a run. He also had his hair curled so as to appear more boyish, and this was accentuated in the early scenes by a handkerchief which he bound round his head. An example of McKellen trying to communicate the adolescent physicality of the character was his pushing Benvolio away at the end of Act 1 scene 1. Romeo is rejecting Benvolio's advice to 'examine other beauties' (228). McKellen used a familiar childish strategy to represent Romeo's teenage response. He pushed Benvolio out of his space rather than argue his point as an adult.

Paradoxically one of the difficulties of playing Romeo may have encouraged McKellen to accept the challenge. He was aware that the poetry Romeo is required to speak makes the part too difficult for a young actor: 'Unless you can appreciate that language and have had some experience in dealing with it, you're unlikely to bring out

³⁴ Acting Shakespeare programme 1988, p.12.

³⁵ Robert Cushman, Observer Magazine, 29 January 1978.

³⁶ Don Chapman, Oxford Mail, 2 April 1976.

³⁷ Michael Billington, Guardian, 3 April 1976.

³⁸ Don Chapman, Oxford Mail, 2 April 1976.

what is fascinating about the play.³⁹ In a similar vein, Kenneth Branagh in his autobiography comments that: 'Romeo had always been a difficult part... conveying his virility and youthful energy as well as the gradual access to the poetic feeling is a difficult process.'⁴⁰ When John Gielgud and Laurence Olivier alternated the roles of Romeo and Mercutio in 1935, they each emphasised a different aspect of Romeo's character. Gielgud accentuated the poetic, lyrical elements in the role while Olivier's performance was physical, impetuous and full of vibrant sexual energy. W.A. Darlington claimed that Olivier's young lover was so 'impassioned' that in the balcony scene it was hard to believe that he wouldn't have 'swarmed up a pillar and taken Juliet in his arms.'⁴¹ McKellen tried to combine the two natures in the one character as Shakespeare does. He was very physical; he displayed frenzied athleticism; he made sudden jerky movements and displayed neurotic tendencies. Yet the re-designed stage meant that the focus was on the language and relied on the actors' imaginations to communicate it.

McKellen's interpretation was based on the idea that Romeo is mad, that 'he's a suicide case - he can't reconcile the enormity of love with the business of having breakfast and being nice to people'⁴² Peter Whitehouse felt that the 'evening becomes not so much a story of love and hate as the development of contagious madness'.⁴³ Richard David commented that: 'The lover of Rosaline first entered in a black cloak, with dress as disordered as Hamlet's when he frightened Ophelia.'⁴⁴ McKellen took his cue from Romeo's description of love in the first scene where he refers to it as 'A

³⁹ John Walker, 'Stage Hero', *Observer Magazine*, 21 March 1976.

⁴⁰ Kenneth Branagh, *Beginning*, (London: Chatto & Windus, 1989), p.173.

⁴¹ W.A. Darlington, *Daily Telegraph*, October 1935.

⁴² Robert Cushman, *Observer Magazine*, 28 January 1978.

⁴³ Peter Whitehouse, *Sunday Mercury*, 4 April 1976.

⁴⁴ 'A Pair of Star-Crossed Lovers', *Shakespeare in the Theatre*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), pp.106-126, (p.116).

madness most discreet'(193). The promptbook indicates that McKellen paused after the word 'madness', allowing the character as well as the audience to consider the aptness of this description. Germaine Greer points out that an Elizabethan audience would have recognised from Benvolio's and Montague's description of his behaviour in Act 1 scene 1 that Romeo is suffering from melancholy or love madness.⁴⁵ Polonius believes that Hamlet's madness has sprung from 'neglected love' and that Ophelia's rejection of him has caused his lunacy. Olivier described his stage Romeo as the 'younger brother' to his stage Hamlet⁴⁶ McKellen had played Hamlet in 1971 so perhaps it is not surprising that something of the Dane was present in his distracted Romeo. Several critics agreed with Dick Murray that 'In the early scene I had the feeling that he was confusing the love-sick Montague with the mad Hamlet'⁴⁷ Irving Wardle was perceptive in linking McKellen's Hamletian interpretation of Romeo with the underlying dynamic of the production as a whole:

At the risk of appearing obsessive I would say that the shadow of Buzz Goodbody's Hamlet overhangs this production... in the extension of polarities between life and death.⁴⁸

Goodbody's production of Hamlet had been performed at the Other Place, in the previous season. Colin Chambers states that in this production the 'contradictions Hamlet felt, which for him defined the limit of theory and practice, were the social roots of his 'madness' and that 'betrayal was a key theme in the production made all the more intense because it sprang not just from friends but from family' also it was 'a self-mocking production, full of surprising and often neglected humour'.⁴⁹ This description

⁴⁵ Germaine Greer, '*Romeo and Juliet*' Shakespeare in Perspective, ed. by Roger Sales, Vol. 1 (London: Ariel Books BBC, 1982), pp. 17-24 (p.18).

⁴⁶ Laurence Olivier, On Acting, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1986), p.197.

⁴⁷ Dick Murray, Northampton Chronicle and Echo, 3 April 1976.

⁴⁸ Irving Wardle, The Times, 5 April 1976.

⁴⁹ Colin Chambers, Other Spaces: New Theatre and the RSC, (London: Eyre Methuen; TQ Publications. 1980), pp.65-66.

of the emphasis in Goodbody's Hamlet on socially induced madness, family betrayal and 'neglected humour' could be applied to the 1976 Romeo and Juliet.⁵⁰ Perhaps it is not surprising that Wardle linked the two productions. However, it wasn't simply that McKellen was reprising his own Hamlet in the disguise of Romeo but that the emphasis of the production on death and Romeo as a 'man marked for destruction from the outset'⁵¹ meant that McKellen's Romeo could share Hamlet's sentiments:

The time is out of joint. O cursed spite,
That ever I was born to set it right (1.5.196-7)

McKELLEN'S VOCAL PERFORMANCE

McKellen did not please everybody with his vocal performance. Irving Wardle complained of his 'imposed contortions of slurred and staccato speech intended to convey extreme emotions' However, he did go on to praise 'the sense of a racing pulse and hysterical fury, particularly as death approaches.'⁵² J. C. Trewin lamented that he did not find 'Romeo's passion in Ian McKellen's mannered voice with those indulgent changes of tempo'⁵³ There were exceptions and the passionate desperate delivery of 'Oh I am fortune's fool'(3.1.136) was considered effective. It is interesting to note that Olivier was also criticised for spoiling Romeo's poetry by adopting a clipped, staccato delivery which caused him to gabble the words. In his review James Agate wrote:

In his delivery he bought off a two-fold inexpertness which approached virtuosity - that of gabbling all the words in a line and uttering each line as a staccato whole cut off from its fellows.⁵⁴

Buzz Goodbody and Terry Hands had set-up and run Theatre-Go-Round which would second RSC actors on their days off and travel around the Midlands presenting Shakespeare in modern dress at ad hoc venues.

⁵⁰ Due to her death Trevor Nunn 'took charge of the final rehearsals' of Goodbody's Hamlet: Colin Chambers, Other Spaces: New Theatre and the RSC, p.253.

⁵¹ Herbert Kretzmer, Daily Express, 2 April 1976.

⁵² Irving Wardle, The Times, 5 April 1976.

⁵³ J.C. Trewin, Birmingham Post, 2 April 1976.

⁵⁴ James Agate, Brief Chronicles, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1943). p.209.

COMPARISON OF 1976 PRODUCTION WITH 1973 RSC PRODUCTION

The 1976 production of Romeo and Juliet was well received on the whole although McKellen drew very mixed reviews. It is interesting that the 1976 production was criticised on the same grounds as the previous RSC production of the play. This was in 1973, when Terry Hands had directed Timothy Dalton and Estelle Kohler in the title parts. It divided the critics. B.A. Young called it 'very fine',⁵⁵ and Harold Hobson found it 'the most fascinating and suggestive we have seen for years',⁵⁶ but Milton Shulman concluded his review 'As far as I was concerned this was no way to begin a Shakespearian [sic] season at Stratford on Avon [sic].'⁵⁷ Michael Billington commented:

I respect Mr Hands' attempt to give a feeling of inexorable doom to an unsatisfactory play, but I think the attempt is vitiated by under-casting and a constant feeling of eccentric sensationalism.⁵⁸

Benedict Nightingale agreed with Billington, calling the interpretation 'original and arresting' with the potential to be 'very impressive' if the performances which he found to be 'shaky or erratic' succeeded in time to 'enlarge and deepen'.⁵⁹ The lovers in the 1973 production failed to communicate any 'feeling of physical desire between them',⁶⁰ likewise McKellen and Francesca Annis as Juliet lacked 'magnetic attraction'.⁶¹ Both Dalton and McKellen were accused of playing Romeo as if he were Hamlet and both sets of lovers were criticised for not being convincingly young enough. Neither production had any feeling of the Italian heat. Finally, and perhaps crucially, in both productions the love of Romeo and Juliet was not presented as the driving force of the

⁵⁵ B.A. Young, Financial Times, 29 March 1973.

⁵⁶ Harold Hobson, Sunday Times, 1 April 1973.

⁵⁷ Milton Shulman, Evening Standard, 29 March 1973.

⁵⁸ Michael Billington, Guardian, 29 March 1973.

⁵⁹ Benedict Nightingale, New Statesman, 6 April 1973.

⁶⁰ Frank Marcus, Sunday Telegraph, 1 April 1973.

⁶¹ Frank Marcus, Sunday Telegraph, 4 April 1976.

play. It was overwhelmed in 1973 by a 'vicious, corrupt, decadent society'⁶² which gave the lovers no chance of survival; in 1976 the focus was 'on hate rather than on love' making the lovers 'more than ever the helpless victims of ungovernable political forces'⁶³ Any sense of the play's narrative being a journey of young love from innocence to experience was sacrificed to a sombre view of the violent society around them which made a romantic performance from either pair of actors playing the lovers very difficult. Hands in 1973 seems to have deliberately directed Kohler and Dalton to present Juliet and Romeo as anti-romantic. The 1973 promptbook indicates that, when at the Capulet ball, in Act 1 scene 5, Kohler's Juliet kissed her cousin Tybalt, she was sexually knowing and, that when Juliet and Lady Capulet laughed at the Nurse's story in Act 1 scene 3, it revealed 'the shared awareness of two adult women, unembarrassed by their sexuality'⁶⁴ Dalton's Romeo stabbed Tybalt in the groin. He was screaming and then continued screeching 'hacking and digging away at his body'⁶⁵ - hardly the behaviour of a hero. Hands' decision in 1973 to present the lovers in an unsympathetic light upset those whose views on the play are that it is about 'the sovereignty of juvenile passion'⁶⁶ Milton Shulman raged:

A production of Romeo and Juliet that seems deliberately designed not to provoke a single gulp, sigh or tear must take some sort of record for theatrical perversionists.⁶⁷

Nunn and Kyle did not flout the public's and the critics' expectations of the play as obviously as Hands had done. However, as I have already pointed out, the fact that both productions were criticised for the same perceived weaknesses indicates that they

⁶² Michael Billington, *Guardian*, 29 March 1973.

⁶³ Herbert Kretzmer, *Daily Express*, 2 April 1976.

⁶⁴ Holding, p.53.

⁶⁵ Benedict Nightingale, *New Statesman*, 6 April 1973.

⁶⁶ Germaine Greer, *Shakespeare in Perspective*, ed. by Roger Sales, p.17.

⁶⁷ Milton Shulman, *Evening Standard*, 29 March 1973.

shared the same basic premise. This premise may have been determined by the politics of the seventies, a time when youth was not seen as being innocent. The student 'upheavals of 1967-70... produced a real sense of shock in the older generation'.⁶⁸ 1970 marked the beginning of a swing towards a more repressive society. The optimism of the 1960's gave way 'to an altogether grimmer mood... the appeal to social order coincided with a perceptible change in the political and economic climate which helped to reinforce the feeling that a period of excess had to be brought to an end.'⁶⁹ Perhaps a more conventional romantic approach to Romeo and Juliet appeared to be naive and old-fashioned in its suggestion that 'the star-crossed lovers' are the light in an otherwise dark world, innocent even in their misjudged suicides, with a chance to overcome and reconcile the families feud. Although, Nunn did 'give full weight to the reconciliation'⁷⁰ presenting a previously violent Capulet, finally subdued. While Hands went for an out and out anti-romantic reading, Nunn and Kyle found the romance not in love but in death. In 1976 the lovers were 'half in love with easeful Death'⁷¹ and the climax of their passion was the dance in Act 5 scene 3 when Romeo courted the dead Juliet.

CONCLUSION

Given the interpretation of the play, not surprisingly, there was a general feeling among critics that the production was much stronger in the second half, that McKellen and Annis were more effective as their characters matured and developed, and that the elegiac atmosphere at the end of the production was more exciting than the earlier scenes. Perhaps one of the best achievements of this production was to make the ending

⁶⁸ Robert Hewison, Too Much: Art and Society in the Sixties 1960-75 (London: Methuen, 1986), p.155.

⁶⁹ Hewison, p.180.

⁷⁰ Dawson, p. 137.

⁷¹ John Keats 'Ode to a Nightingale', verse vi, line 52.

moving and not a 'clumsy contrivance' of plot or 'dramatic convenience'.⁷² It successfully dismissed any doubts that the plotting of the play might rely too much on accidents, and made the audience feel that the accidents that occur are 'an inescapable part of life'.⁷³ This is rather ironic. As Dawson points out, few critics 'would deny that the second half of the play is harder to keep going than the first'.⁷⁴

McKellen does not seem to have ever arrived at a clear notion of who Romeo was. He failed to find a modern equivalent for his Romeo and consequently it was confused and physically frenetic without achieving a strong intellectual purpose. Romeo is a difficult part to get right, as many actors have testified; he is not a thinker, nor is he a man of action, his purpose is simply to be in love and to die for that love. Perhaps McKellen could not relate to this personally. His confusion was communicated to the audience and only when clarity was provided by Romeo's strong purpose to die did McKellen become effective and moving.

McKellen has commented that by the time the production reached London, after a long season at Stratford and Newcastle-upon-Tyne, he was 'much better for the experience' and that he 'ended up quite satisfied with my farewell to juvenile roles'.⁷⁵

⁷² Michael Billington, *Guardian*, 3 April 1976.

⁷³ Irving Wardle, *The Times*, 5 April 1976.

⁷⁴ Dawson, p.130

⁷⁵ *Acting Shakespeare* programme 1988, p.12.

THE WINTER'S TALE

INTRODUCTION

The Royal Shakespeare Company's 1969 season at Stratford had been Trevor Nunn's first as its Artistic Director. While Peter Hall had been in charge several seasons had been constructed to emphasise Shakespeare's work in a particular genre, such as the comedies and the histories. Nunn adopted this idea, and his first season focused on three late plays: Pericles, The Winter's Tale and Henry VIII. These productions were complemented by Twelfth Night and The Merry Wives of Windsor, 'to remind us that Shakespeare was a dramatist of many moods and continuous development.'¹ Nunn's 1969 production of The Winter's Tale had proved a notable success. In several respects his 1976 season proved to be a time for re-assessment. The re-designing of the main theatre, the desire for simpler sets and a minimum of props was indicative of a desire to go back to basics, stripping everything back to its bare essentials. This prevailing atmosphere influenced Nunn to make the decision to direct two plays which he had directed before: Macbeth and The Winter's Tale. He appears to have been inspired by a desire to hone his past productions, leaving out any self-indulgent theatrical fussiness and revealing the heart of the text in as simple and direct a way as possible. As will be shown in the next chapter the production history of the 1976 Macbeth began effectively with the 1974 production. Likewise the 1976 Winter's Tale drew heavily on Nunn's 1969 production. It is important to note that the 1976 production was a collaborative effort between John Barton and Trevor Nunn: the director credit in the programme, 'John Barton with Trevor Nunn,' suggests that Barton's influence was primary.

¹ Robert Speaight, 'Shakespeare in Britain', Shakespeare Quarterly, Vol 20 (1969), pp.184-189.

SET, COSTUME - AND LEGACY OF 1969 PRODUCTION

In 1969 Christopher Morley had designed the set for The Winter's Tale. The production opened with a Renaissance man spinning in a glass box: 'a heroic emblem transformed to that of Time's fool'.² Sicilia was a huge white nursery dominated by a white rocking horse: 'a tabula rasa on which life proceeds to scrawl its ugly message.'³ Anthony Curtis described it as 'white-winter-purity-sterility'⁴ This white landscape could suggest either intense heat or intense cold, a dual possibility which allowed the audience to read a number of metaphors into it. Some critics thought that the Freudian symbolism was too 'heavy-handed' in its suggestion that Leontes' jealousy was 'a psychotic condition, a complex which ...had its roots in childhood'.⁵ The 1976 production, designed by Di Seymour, gave the play an unequivocal winter setting. Considering the Scandinavian treatment of Sicilia in 1976, Richard David argued that the heat of Sicilia is an important ingredient of the play, as it is a country 'where at least sudden and violent jealousies are traditionally normal'.⁶ However, in his introduction to the New Penguin edition of the play, Ernest Schanzer argues that it is a tale about winter, 'the winter which Leontes creates within him and around him.'⁷ The legacy of the hot/cold dichotomy of 1969 can be seen in the economy with which the 1976 production moved from Sicilia to Bohemia. In 1969 Bohemia had been characterised by a contrasting red setting. In 1976 the set remained the same but the lighting indicated the warmer climate and change of country.

² Irving Wardle, The Times, 16 May 1969.

³ Irving Wardle, The Times, 3 July 1970.

⁴ Anthony Curtis, Financial Times, 3 July 1970.

⁵ R.P. Draper, The Winter's Tale Text and Performance, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1985), p.54.

⁶ Richard David, 'Two Comedies Translated', Shakespeare in the Theatre, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p.222.

⁷ William Shakespeare, The Winter's Tale, ed. by Ernest Schanzer (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1969), p.9.

One of the main features of the set was a 'panoramic screen of diagrammatic folk images' which was 'laced through the timber uprights encircling the stage and lit either coldly from the front or warmly from behind.'⁸ (See Fig.5) This simple, effective design reinforced the continuity of the narrative and supported the directors' views of the play's cyclical shape. It did have its detractors: Michael Coveney objected to the stage being 'closed off for half of the play by curtains covered in child-like hieroglyphics'⁹ The hieroglyphics were not simply decorative elaboration. The literal interpretation of the play's title combined with the Elizabethan understanding of a 'winter's tale' as a fantastic tale (often a ghost story) provided the basic mood of the production. The text supports this reading as Mamillius decides to tell a sad tale that is 'best for winter', 'one/ of sprites and goblins' (2.1.25-26). The set providing Mamillius's surroundings was seen to be the inspiration for his tale. In Act 2 scene 1 the promptbook records how the opening line of his story was inspired by the primitive drawings on the screen, Mamillius pointed out a man with a spear as he said 'There was a man' (28). When he continued 'Dwelt by a churchyard' (30) the lady attendants laughed, prompting Mamillius to 'tell it softly' (30) to his mother only. The screen which Mamillius pointed at told the story of the play, in a series of cave-like paintings. Thus the story he is about to tell is that of the play, and Leontes is the 'man' of the opening line.

The costumes fitted with the Scandinavian setting. In Sicilia the court wore long gowns with fur trimming, quilted jackets and oriental-style snow boots with seams up the middle. In Bohemia the rustics wore similar gowns, braided rather than edged with

⁸ Irving Wardle, *The Times*, 5 June 1976.

⁹ Michael Coveney, *Plays and Players*, August 1976, p.29.

fur. Perdita wore a long loose white dress and Florizel a brown tunic with padded arms, leather laces from his pumps crisscrossed his lower legs.

Generally, the resonances provided by the Scandinavian setting were favourably received. Harold Hobson saw it as futuristic, a set from science fiction: 'It looks forward, not backwards: into, in fact, the new ice age'¹⁰ Irving Wardle saw what the directors' were aiming at and concurred that the Scandinavian setting was particularly appropriate to the structure of the play, as it 'supplies a a strong framework for the play's rhythm: a long dark night followed by an unclouded summer'¹¹ The programme notes included discussion of the solstices of the North pole; the extremes of both can be seen as parallels to the two halves of the play. However, not everybody found the setting helpful. Robert Speaight thought that it was a 'gratuitous absurdity' and that 'the shearing of sheep was implausible in a landscape where no sheep could have pastured'.¹² Opinion was also divided over a barren tree on stage, which disappointingly did not blossom in the Bohemian scenes. The image of a blasted tree was perhaps borrowed from Waiting for Godot, indicating the directors' emphasis on the non-realistic nature of the play. Wardle thought the tree signified 'The sterile mortality of the two kings, redeemed through their children's union'.¹³

Richard David raised a very important question about the set's validity in the context of the re-designed 'Elizabethan' main house. Having achieved great flexibility, why did the directors then restrict the space by giving the production such a specific location? He pointed out that surely one of the reasons for the re-designing of the theatre was to ensure that the productions did not need a set, as had been exemplified

¹⁰ Harold Hobson, Sunday Times, 6 June 1976.

¹¹ Irving Wardle, The Times, 5 June 1976.

¹² Robert Speaight, 'Shakespeare in Britain, Shakespeare Quarterly , Vol. 28 (1977), pp. 184 -189 (p.188).

¹³ Irving Wardle, The Times, 5 June 1976.

by the first play of the season, Romeo and Juliet. The vindication of this movement towards greater simplicity and sparsity was realised by Macbeth, which followed at the Other Place. David sensed a danger that directors were beginning to see the 'surest way of discovering a play's relevance is always to take to the magic carpet or the Time Machine.'¹⁴ In the same season Much Ado About Nothing had been set in colonial India. However, the Scandinavian setting for The Winter's Tale does not seem to have been simply an attempt to make the play accessible to a modern audience. The directors appear to have been looking for an image which would present the play's structure as cyclical, rather than emphasise a division into two halves, and the solstices of the Baltic proved to be an effective solution.

INTERPRETATION OF THE PLAY

Nunn had achieved unity between the two halves of the play in 1969 by casting Judi Dench as both Hermione and Perdita (this had been anticipated by Pericles, in the same season, directed by Terry Hands, in which Susan Fleetwood played both Thaisa and Marina). Michael Billington recognised that in 1976 'Barton's overall aim seem[ed] to be to stress the play's underlying unity' and that the production pointed up the 'parallel tyranny of Leontes and the intemperate Polixenes,' and that 'there [was] a dreamlike element about both the accusations of adultery against Hermione and her daughter's love for the king's son.'¹⁵ Richard David believed that the directors succeeded in bringing 'this difficult play under control' by presenting it as 'a fairy-story, but one with symbolic meanings'¹⁶ In the Stratford Herald Gareth Lloyd Evans called it a 'parable'¹⁷ In direct contrast Benedict Nightingale thought that the directors' purpose

¹⁴ Richard David, Shakespeare in the Theatre, p.227.

¹⁵ Michael Billington, Guardian, 5 June 1976.

¹⁶ Richard David, Shakespeare in the Theatre, p. 222.

¹⁷ Gareth Lloyd Evans, Stratford Herald, 11 June 1976.

was 'to distinguish sharply between the two halves of the play. The first shows us a dark, ailing and in some ways evil world ... the second presents us with youth, hope, reconciliation even joy.'¹⁸ Sheridan Morley agreed: 'This time we are faced with two almost entirely unconnected plays.'¹⁹ Michael Coveney felt it was the fault of the production that it appeared to lack any coherent structure or 'any forceful ideas about unlocking the magical and celebratory in the play with stage images that match the poetry.'²⁰

Gareth Lloyd Evans thought that the production's main theme was the message that 'regeneration can grow out of degeneration'.²¹ This fusion of the text, the directors' vision of the play and its structure and stage images, which Coveney claimed the production lacked, was achieved most strikingly by the staging of the famous stage direction 'Exit pursued by a bear' In the 1969 production Nunn had 'opted for a huge and terrifying animal'²² which reared up, 'some twelve feet tall,'²³ dwarfing Antigonus. The effect was heightened further by the use of stroboscopic lighting. In 1976 Barton and Nunn chose to give the bear 'a mythological rather than a realistic dimension'²⁴ An actor, John Nettles, came on wearing a bear mask. The promptbook indicates that on Antigonus' line 'This is the chase' (56) the bear put his right arm around Antigonus and dragged him to the left, and they exited off stage left as Antigonus cries 'I am gone for ever!' (57) Benedict Nightingale made it sound very undynamic and ritualistic: 'a grim gentleman wearing an animal mask and brandishing human skulls, looms over the frozen Antigonus who mutters "This is the chase" and allows himself to be ushered

¹⁸ Benedict Nightingale, *New Statesman*, 11 June 1976.

¹⁹ Sheridan Morley, *Punch*, 23 June 1976.

²⁰ Michael Coveney, *Plays and Players*, August 1976, p.29.

²¹ Gareth Lloyd Evans, *Stratford Herald*, 11 June 1976.

²² Draper, p.70.

²³ Hilary Spurling, *Spectator*, 23 May 1969.

²⁴ Draper, p.70.

off'.²⁵ He also noted that the same actor later appeared as Time with 'yellowish jowls and droopy whiskers' carrying the bear mask in his hand. Both Time and the Bear were seemingly meant to represent Death. The image of the bear also appeared earlier, in Mamillius's childish games. The promptbook does not corroborate the critic who suggested that Mamillius played a hunting game with all his father's guests. However, in Act 2 scene 1 one of Hermione's ladies put a toy bear on the sofa and in Act 1 scene 2, the promptbook indicates that when Hermione told Leontes that Polixenes and herself will await him in the garden and prepared to exit, Polixenes 'takes bearskin off sofa and puts it on Herm[ione]'s shoulders.' This extension of the bear 'forwards and backwards'²⁶ as David referred to it, gave the narrative a sense of cycle and unity. The references to the bear continuously reminded the audience of time and death. As Nightingale commented, 'Time can be a destroyer and can be a creator, or so Barton would have us remember, with his emphasis on cyclical change, decay and renewal.'²⁷ As Schanzer points out the structure of the two halves of the play is the same: Leontes and Hermione are seen to be happy and in love as are Perdita and Florizel. There is a sudden violent eruption which disturbs the happiness and peace, Leontes' jealousy and Polixenes' anger, and then both these narratives are united and healed in the final scene. Barton and Nunn were not arbitrarily trying to create unity, but were emphasising a structure inherent in the text.

THE PRESENTATION OF LEONTES' JEALOUSY

One of the innovations of Nunn's 1969 production had been the presentation of Leontes' jealousy as 'a condition of the story'.²⁸ The lack of any clear textual

²⁵ Benedict Nightingale, *New Statesman*, 11 June 1976.

²⁶ Richard David, *Shakespeare in the Theatre*, p.222.

²⁷ Benedict Nightingale, *New Statesman*, 11 June 1976.

²⁸ Irving Wardle, *The Times*, 16 May 1969.

motivation for Leontes' sudden outbursts always presents directors of the play with a challenge. There are several possible dramatic solutions. Leontes can appear to be upset from the opening of the play, indicating that his jealousy has begun before the play. This interpretation, however, requires that Leontes' 'opening remarks are ironical, without clear indication in the dialogue'²⁹ or the actor must deliver his lines with a bitterness that the audience notice but not the other characters. Both of these approaches result in 'the theatrical situation' becoming 'unduly strained'.³⁰ Patrick Stewart played the part along these lines in the 1981 production at the RSC:

His twisting of Polixenes' arm behind his back, as if to 'force' him into staying a little longer in Sicilia, and his roughly 'affectionate' treatment of Hermione, could be seen as evidence that he was already deeply disturbed by what the audience were subsequently to recognise as jealousy.³¹

Directors who decide not to present Leontes as jealous from the beginning have to pinpoint the precise moment of the origin of his jealousy. There are several options. One might present Leontes' line, referring to Hermione's success in persuading Polixenes to stay, 'At my request he would not' (1.2.87) as an aside, spoken to suggest that 'a cloud has passed over his mental heaven'³² Or the change in his mood could be identified earlier by having Leontes overhear Hermione's conversation with Polixenes about 'sin', allowing Leontes to misinterpret the meaning and think that Hermione is referring to adultery with Polixenes. Shakespeare's text perhaps suggests that the turning point comes with Leontes' narrative of his courtship of Hermione:

Three crabbed months had soured themselves to death
Ere I could make thee open thy white hand
And clap thyself my love (102-4).

²⁹ Draper, p.17.

³⁰ Ibid., p.17.

³¹ Draper, p.59.

³² Draper, p.16.

This language seems at odds with the subject matter and betrays an undercurrent of violent bitterness which anticipates the imminent jealous outburst and lends the ensuing tirades a credibility. In his introduction Schanzer notes that 'Friend' in Elizabethan usage commonly means lover, so that Hermione's reponse to this new dangerous mood of Leontes is unfortunate:

Why, lo you now, I have spoken to th'purpose twice:
The one for ever earned a royal husband;
Th'other for some while a friend (106-8).

This 'paralleling of the two occasions', Schanzer argues, and the 'sight of her again opening her white hand and giving it to Polixenes, as indicated by Leontes' exclamations of 'Too hot, too hot!' (108), provide the reason for his sudden change of temperament.³³

In 1976 Barton and Nunn used the same approach in presenting Leontes' jealousy as Nunn had employed successfully in 1969. Leontes' suspicions were unjustified and Hermione had 'not a scrap of flirtatiousness in her.'³⁴ The opening sequence was played lightly, a family happily enjoying time together. In 1969 Nunn had similarly opened the production with Leontes 'cavorting innocently with his wife, his son and his old school-chum'³⁵ The onset of the jealousy was established by a lighting change. In 1969 the lighting for the opening scenes was suggestive of a 'sunny radiance' and suddenly it changed to a stroboscopic cold 'blueish light',³⁶ and the rest of the cast were frozen while Leontes spat out his invective. Each of Leontes' outbursts was introduced by this dramatic lighting change, the flickering light 'conveying the subjective distortion'³⁷ of his mind. Hermione and Polixenes also performed a slow

³³ Schanzer, p.24.

³⁴ Harold Hobson, *Sunday Times*, 6 June 1976.

³⁵ Benedict Nightingale, *New Statesman*, 23 May 1969.

³⁶ Hilary Spurling, *Spectator*, 23 May 1969.

³⁷ Draper, p.58.

motion mime illustrating the actions Leontes was seeing in his diseased imagination: 'Hermione's voice becomes salacious, inviting, and Polixenes wolfishly strokes her pregnant stomach'.³⁸ This highlighted the unrealistic nature of his fervid hallucinations and marked the transition from reality to nightmare. In 1976 Barton and Nunn also marked Leontes' tirades with a lighting change, darkening the stage around him. The slow motion mime, however, was not employed. This was an example of Nunn's refining process. Gareth Lloyd Evans thought that 'The raison d'être of Leontes' jealousy is provided in his cry to Hermione - "Your actions are in my dreams" and its extent is in what Polixenes says of him - "I saw his heart in's face" '³⁹ Leontes' jealousy was not provoked it was an innate weakness. Richard David comparing the jealousy of Claudio in *Much Ado About Nothing* (the second play to open in the main house in the 1976 season), stated that Leontes' jealousy is much more central to the play, but is 'even less accountable than Claudio's. It seems external to him, to fall like a sudden cloud-shadow across a nature that, from what we see and are told of him at the beginning of the play, appears open and sunny' ⁴⁰ Billington identified 'the key' to the interpretation of Leontes: ' "I am a feather for each wind that blows" and he suddenly switches from demonic tyranny ... to the pathos of a man destroyed by his own sexual fantasies.'⁴¹

McKELLEN'S PERFORMANCE

McKellen was extremely effective in communicating both the comedy and the pathos inherent in the role. When Leontes was presented with his baby daughter in Act 2 scene 3 the promptbook indicates that Paulina 'puts baby on his lap'. Billington

³⁸ Benedict Nightingale, *New Statesman*, 23 May 1969.

³⁹ Gareth Lloyd Evans, *Stratford Herald*, 11 June 1976.

⁴⁰ Richard David, *Shakespeare in the Theatre*, p.222.

⁴¹ Michael Billington, *Guardian*, 5 June 1976.

recorded how McKellen's Leontes reacted: 'he lifts up his curled white knuckled hands above his head as if fearing contamination'.⁴² As he became more incensed McKellen held the baby out to Antigonus ordering him to 'Take up the bastard!' (75) the promptbook indicates that then there was a pause as Antigonus failed to comply, so prompting McKellen, still left holding the baby at arms length, to repeat 'Tak't up, I say' (76). As Antigonus prepared to take the baby from him McKellen added 'Give't to thy crone' (76). However, this reference to Paulina provoked a response from her and she ordered her husband not to take the baby from Leontes. Utterly exasperated, McKellen turned to another member of his court and jeered at Antigonus 'He dreads his wife' (79). Thus McKellen presented an image of Leontes as a ridiculous hysteric, frightened of a harmless baby, trying to play pass the parcel with it but finding that no one else will join in and becoming increasingly frustrated but at a loss as to what to do with the child. He remained holding it until he finally exploded: 'This brat is none of mine/ It is the issue of Polixenes/ Hence with it, and together with the dam/ Commit them to the fire' (92-5), whereupon he put the baby on a pouf downstage left and Paulina picked her up. The audience were then encouraged to laugh at Leontes as Paulina proceeded to show off the baby to the lords who gathered round her to see the 'copy of the father: eye, nose, lip'(99). His unnatural rejection of his baby was blind stupidity and his childish refusal to accept the obvious truth made him a comic figure in this scene. The scene was given a further, more serious resonance at the end. As the baby was carried out of Leontes' sight, Mamillius entered through the centre of the stage right screens. This gave Leontes resolve 'No, I'll not rear/ Another's issue' (191-2) an added pathos. McKellen vented his anger by kicking the pouf upstage and

⁴² Michael Billington, *Guardian*, 5 June 1976.

dragging the carpet upstage, as if by re-arranging the furniture he could re-arrange his life. Mamillius made his way across the stage to Leontes as the fourth lord entered with news of Cleomenes and Dion. Leontes crouched down to receive Mamillius. After Leontes had delivered his orders for Hermione's trial he left the stage carrying Mamillius in his arms. This sentimental image of Leontes and his son lent the scene, which previously had been to a large extent comic, a tragic dimension. It also prepared the audience for Mamillius' sudden death in the following scene, and made it more moving as the audience had been given a recent memory of the child's vulnerability. The audience saw Leontes being a loving father, tender to his son, while simultaneously claiming that while his wife and the boy's mother lives his 'heart will be a burden to me' (205). His obvious love for his son made his recent rejection of his daughter even more deluded and saddening. He was clearly a man afflicted by a sickness but not completely de-humanised by it, the hope of his recovery before any real harm was done was tantalisingly presented, only to be completely destroyed in the scene following.

McKELLEN'S VOCAL PERFORMANCE

McKellen was generally praised for his speaking of the part. The characterisation appears to have been largely vocal: 'His strained delivery and controlled mannerisms suggest a neurotic indulging a masochistic perversion.'⁴³ Coveney thought the part 'ideally suited to his temperament and verse-speaking abilities'⁴⁴ and David commended the 'exquisitely sensitive reading with every twist and turn of the meaning made clear, appearing deeply felt as in a dream, the logical connection between cause and feeling somehow dislocated'⁴⁵ Lloyd Evans observed:

⁴³ John Barber, *Daily Telegraph*, 5 June 1976.

⁴⁴ Michael Coveney, *Plays and Players*, August 1976, p.29.

⁴⁵ Richard David, *Shakespeare in the Theatre*, p.223.

‘McKellen’s Leontes cannot square delusion and actuality and his facial expressions always confirm this.’⁴⁶ McKellen found a way of delivering the speeches with ‘poisonous eloquence pausing long enough to drive home the pictures of “Sir Smile” and the spider-tainted drink, without breaking the headlong flood of the verse.’⁴⁷ Billington claimed that he had never ‘seen the Sicilian scenes so convincingly played’ and that McKellen suggested a man seething with sexual anguish ‘spitting out words like “sluiced” and “bedswerver”’⁴⁸ The effectiveness of McKellen’s vocal performance was not merely technical but informed by emotion: ‘McKellen plucks words out of the air and having assessed their weight, shape and colour, gives them a new and graceful flight. It is this which partly makes the last scene so magical and affecting. I shall not forget his long ‘Oh’ after ‘Goddess’ when he first beholds Perdita.’⁴⁹ Only Nightingale thought that there was something missing at the heart of the performance: McKellen did not ‘give the impression of a man whose stomach is being eaten away by an acid that reason, sense and all the usual alkalines cannot check - and that’s what Shakespeare demands in those pleasantly, embarrassingly intimate passages at the play’s start’ Nightingale believed McKellen only managed to show ‘an exterior grief and not an internal laceration: a man wounded in the head and heart, not one mutilated in the abdomen, bowels and groin’⁵⁰

PRESENTATION OF THE FINAL SCENE (Act 5 scene 3)

The majority of the critics found McKellen to be most moving in his change in the second part of the play. Barber praised his discovering ‘a winning simplicity in the

⁴⁶ Gareth Lloyd Evans, Stratford Herald, 11 June 1976.

⁴⁷ Irving Wardle, The Times, 5 June 1976.

⁴⁸ Michael Billington, Guardian, 5 June 1976.

⁴⁹ Gareth Lloyd Evans, Stratford Herald, 11 June 1976.

⁵⁰ Benedict Nightingale, New Statesman, 11 June 1976.

old king, sane and bitterly repentant of his cruelty'⁵¹ and Coveney thought that 'McKellen's transformation after the interval from hot-headed avenger to penitent recluse is admirably done.'⁵² The 1976 production improved on that of 1969 in its presentation of the final scene. The doubling of Hermione and Perdita had ruined the magical atmosphere of the reconciliation in 1969 as the audience was distracted by waiting to see the sleight of hand that would enable Judi Dench to leave the stage as Perdita and return as Hermione's statue. This was achieved by Paulina pulling a curtain across the statue. It was also spoilt by the statue being wheeled on, in 'one of those panelled and mirrored boxes favoured by prestidigitators who liked to fool the credulous that lush assistants are being sawn in two before your very eyes.'⁵³ No such crudity existed in 1976. Robert Speaight, writing in Shakespeare Quarterly declared that he had never seen the final scene 'better managed': 'By placing Hermione in a corner, downstage, and brilliantly lit, the amazed spectators were not obliged to turn their backs on her'⁵⁴ David concurred: the placing of Hermione far downstage left was a 'bold stroke' by the directors as they risked 'dispelling the whole illusion', but the advantage was that 'it enabled the audience to see, full face, the reactions of Paulina's visitors, as they entered from the back of the stage.'⁵⁵ The promptbook records the effective staging of this scene. Paulina led Leontes, Perdita, Florizel, Polixenes and Camillo on from the right, fifteen lines were cut from the opening twenty, moving the action on at a pace and increasing the tempo to match the emotional temperature. Paulina drew the curtain that hid Hermione, the lines referring to Leontes' silence were also cut. McKellen only moved slightly downstage struck into amazement by the sight.

⁵¹ John Barber, Daily Telegraph, 5 June 1976.

⁵² Michael Coveney, Plays and Players, August 1976, p.29.

⁵³ Peter Roberts, Plays and Players, July 1969, pp.30-32

⁵⁴ Robert Speaight, Shakespeare Quarterly, Vol 28, p.189.

⁵⁵ Richard David, Shakespeare in the Theatre, p.225.

When Paulina orders for music to play to stir the statue, McKellen communicated a natural apprehensiveness, Paulina had to take hold of his hand and lead him towards Hermione, this made Paulina's gentle rebuke 'Nay, present your hand' (107) very human and Leontes and Hermione touched hands, this physical union provoked Leontes wondrous exclamation 'O, she's warm' (109). There was then a prolonged pause (in place of the following three lines which were cut) as reality began to take over from the world of dreams and nightmares. As Paulina presented Perdita, Hermione very slowly turned to her daughter as if afraid that if she turned too quickly Perdita would vanish, then finally embraced her at the end of her speech:

For thou shalt hear that I,
Knowing by Paulina that oracle
Gave hope thou wast in being, have preserved
Myself to see the issue (125-8).

After McKellen had spoken the final line of the play 'Hastily lead away', the rest of the cast exited leaving Hermione and Leontes alone on stage. They embraced and kissed; then breaking from Hermione, McKellen pointedly looked at the tree. The final stage picture was of marital unity and loving harmony, but the tree was a reminder to Leontes of the 'winter' that had ravaged him and threatened to destroy all that had just been restored to him. The delicate playing of the scene, the cutting of lines to provide room for silence, the sparsity of movement, the precision of physical touch made the scene credible and touchingly human. One critic confessed to tears. Billington commented that it was 'the feeling of a good man afflicted by sudden sickness that makes the final reconciliation scene deeply moving'.⁵⁶ There is an argument that, by presenting Leontes' jealousy as an illness, directors diminish the play because they are taking away

⁵⁶Michael Billington, Guardian, 5 June 1976.

his responsibility for his actions. McKellen mitigated this by enriching the play with an anguished portrayal of suffering humanity.

PRESENTATION OF THE TRIAL SCENE (Act 3 scene 2)

There were criticisms of the trial scene. Richard David thought that it was trivialised, reduced ‘almost to a pow-wow before the chief’s wigwam’, in which everybody squatted on the floor - making it ‘far too tribal and nomadic a court for the solemn arraignment to which Leontes subjects the daughter of the Emperor of Russia’.⁵⁷ However, he accepted that the staging, ‘though not theatrically satisfactory, solved a particular theatrical problem’ which was the need for the actors to be in central fixed positions in order to make their speeches. Moreover, he acknowledged Marilyn Taylerson’s need, as Hermione, to address an onstage audience, finding it ‘awkward and unnatural to address her protestation to the audience and therefore it was necessary for the other actors to sit so as not to ‘mask’ her’.⁵⁸ A moment shared by both productions in the ‘trial’ scene was the possibility of a reconciliation after the oracle proves Hermione’s innocence. Reviewing the 1969 production on its transfer to London in July 1970, Irving Wardle commented that at this moment Hermione ‘breaks down and opens her arms to Leontes’.⁵⁹ Similarly the promptbook of the 1976 production records that just after Leontes’ reaction to the news of his son’s death - ‘Apollo’s angry, and the heavens themselves/ Do strike at my injustice’ (3.2.143-4) Hermione ‘reaches out to Leontes but faints on block’ This image of a wife reaching out to comfort her husband, to be united in their grief for their son, added to the real sense of a husband and wife re-uniting in the final scene. The trial scene also serves as

⁵⁷ Richard David, *Shakespeare in the Theatre*, p.224.

⁵⁸ Richard David, ‘The Art of the Theatre’, *Shakespeare in the Theatre*, p.12.

⁵⁹ Irving Wardle, *The Times*, July 3 1970.

an example of Nunn seeking to reduce the theatricality of his productions. Although the staging of the trial in the 1969 production was generally considered extremely effective there was one false note. Leontes suffered a stroke on hearing the news of his son's death and he carried the physical effects of it, a limp and a speech impediment, for the rest of the play. These obvious signs were symbols of a possible divine retribution, a physical correlative for his mental illness and of his need for punishment. This idea was not used in the 1976 production and McKellen conveyed the range and depth of Leontes' human suffering in his vocal presentation of the lines. (See Fig.4)

CONCLUSION

The production was a 'very considerable theatrical success'⁶⁰ John Barber ended his review with the comment: 'Given a more varied pace this must be one of Stratford's great successes'⁶¹ However, it did not transfer to London with the season's other main house productions. In a letter to the author McKellen states: 'Unlike the other main productions of the 1976 Stratford season, The Winter's Tale was not part of the RSC's first season at Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, nor did it transfer to the Aldwych Theatre in London. It had been directed by Barton, Kyle [sic] and Nunn, and perhaps between them, they were dissatisfied with their work. Compared with other productions, it was not a crowd-pleaser.' In his Acting Shakespeare programme notes he seems to be quite bitter about the whole production:

For reasons never explained, the production had three directors, who divided up the scenes for rehearsing. I cannot invent a metaphor ridiculous enough to describe the confusion this caused. The play was botched.⁶²

⁶⁰ Draper, p. 75.

⁶¹ John Barber, Daily Telegraph, 5 June 1976.

⁶² Acting Shakespeare programme 1988, p.12.

The decision not to transfer The Winter's Tale seems to have had to do with the play's lack of popularity rather than any perceived deficiencies in the production.

The legacy of this production and its 1969 predecessor was to demonstrate the 'essential stageworthiness' of the play, 'while also demanding that it be taken seriously.'⁶³

The 1976 production was also a more personal success for Nunn, who was able to improve on his original and crystallise and clarify his direction in ways that anticipated his new vision for Macbeth. In McKellen's Shakespeare career his performance as Leontes is notable for the absence of any criticism of mannerisms, and the fact that his vocal performance was considered to have been extremely effective. The difficult soliloquies gave him the opportunity to practise the skill of combining meaning and emotion and one suspects that the favourable reviews countered the blows to his self confidence that criticism of his Romeo may have caused.

⁶³ Draper, p.75.

PART 1: MACBETH

INTRODUCTION

The 1976 production of Macbeth ‘achieved legendary status in its own lifespan’¹ The last stage performance of the production took place at The Warehouse, in London, on 18th February 1978. The success of the production led to it being filmed for Thames Television in 1978.² The intimacy of the RSC’s studio space, The Other Place³, where the production opened, brought out the best in McKellen’s acting. He had often been accused of being too mannered, adding unnecessary ‘physical and vocal flourishes’⁴, but in Macbeth he replaced these with acting that was ‘reflective, natural’⁵, and he pared down his stage business. The restraint of the performance was very effective. If Richard II earned McKellen his reputation as a brilliant Shakespearean actor, then Macbeth consolidated it. He won the Plays and Players Award for Best Actor of the Year.

THE LEGACY OF THE 1974 PRODUCTION

The history of the 1976 production begins in 1974 with Trevor Nunn’s previous Macbeth for the RSC, presented on the main stage at Stratford. It may well be that part of the reason why the 1976 production was such a triumph was that Nunn learned from the 1974 production. He took from it the elements that were successful and stripped

¹ Colin Chambers, Other Spaces: New Theatre and the RSC (London: Eyre Methuen; TQ Publications, 1980), p.69.

² Colin Chambers believes; ‘The Thames TV programme which was not simply a recording but especially recreated for the small screen, could not capture the power and excitement felt in the theatre’, Other Spaces: New Theatre and the RSC, p.69.

³ A former ‘storage shed ... made of corrugated iron and seating about 140 people’, Colin Chambers, Other Spaces: New Theatre and the RSC, p.252.

⁴ J.W. Lambert, Sunday Times, 12 September 1976.

⁵ Ibid.

away the cumbersome sets and stagey effects, relying instead on the ability of his actors to communicate the meaning through Shakespeare's language.

An important feature of the earlier production was John Napier's set, suggestive of the interior of a cathedral and dominated by a huge crucifix (inverted during Duncan's murder). There was a table which also functioned as an altar. The set reflected Nunn's overall interpretation of the play as, essentially, a conflict between good (Duncan) and evil (Macbeth): Christianity was set against Satanism. The strong religious associations of the set lent the action a definite framework, and the world of the play was easily identifiable to the audience. The banquet scene became a Last Supper, the guests sitting round the 'altar' drinking out of one chalice which was passed from one to another. Irving Wardle felt that the production owed something to the Macbeth directed by Peter Hall in 1967, when Paul Scofield played the title role: 'this Trevor Nunn production ... builds on the unsatisfactory Hall-Scofield version to present Macbeth as a Christian tragedy'⁶ Nunn's division of the characters into good and evil making its action a straightforward conflict, was successful up to a point, but most critics felt uneasy with the contrast between the simplicity of this idea and the portrayal of a complex relationship between Macbeth and his wife. In his review of the 1974 production, Benedict Nightingale identified Nunn's main themes as religious and sexual. Nicol Williamson and Helen Mirren successfully conveyed to the audience the passionate relationship of their characters. Nightingale believed that Nunn was suggesting that Macbeth's motive for killing Duncan is to protect his own male ego and keep his wife interested in him. Michael Coveney also felt this strong sexual bond: 'On

⁶ Irving Wardle, The Times, 30 October 1974.

returning home, the Macbeth of Nicol Williamson is easy prey for his wife's seductive advances... The pact is sealed in an erotic embrace.'⁷

Apart from the set which did not please most critics, there was one specific 'visual gaffe' ⁸ For their first entrance the witches flew onto the stage, for their first entrance, hanging from a chandelier. J.C. Trewin wrote:

We first see the Weird Sisters perched on a candelabrum; it is difficult, I realise, to bring any marked sense of awe and majesty to the trio in contemporary theatre, but I have seldom known the Sisters to be so tedious as they are now.⁹

This sums up the general verdict, that despite obvious theatrics it seemed that the true atmosphere of evil was absent. Moreover, the design concepts could not make up for a lack of detailed exploration of the text. Coveney felt that the text suffered because Nunn was too concerned with 'externalising the play's imagery in broader, more visual terms' ¹⁰ This was perhaps typified by Macbeth blowing out a candle on speaking the line 'Out, out, brief candle!' (5.5.23).

The 1976 production took place in a much less fully defined world. Good and evil were not as easy to identify and the emphasis was shifted in favour of a concentration on the central relationship.

SET

When the 1974 production transferred from the main house in Stratford to the Aldwych in London, Nunn made one hugely important change. The set was jettisoned in favour of 'a magic circle around which the company await[ed] their calls, bringing on with them such furniture as they require[d].'¹¹ Nunn seems to have been greatly

⁷ Michael Coveney *Plays and Players*, December 1974, pp.18-19.

⁸ Irving Wardle, *The Times*, 30 October 1974.

⁹ J.C. Trewin, 'That Scottish Play', *The Illustrated London News*, Vol 283, January 1975, p.69.

¹⁰ Michael Coveney, *Plays and Players*, December 1974, pp.18-19.

¹¹ B.A. Young, *Financial Times*, 6 March 1975.

influenced by Buzz Goodbody's production of Hamlet, at The Other Place in 1975, which he took over. His decision to adopt a rough setting for Macbeth on its London transfer may have been prompted by Goodbody's partiality for austerity. In 1976, Nunn, again with the designer John Napier, took the idea further: a circle of packing crates formed the set in the small studio space of The Other Place - which in any case could not accommodate elaborate stage designs. A black circle was painted on the bare wooden floor and in front of the back wall of the stage was a pair of rectangular wooden flats with a thin gap between them for the actors to use as an exit. The 'magic circle' allowed the actors the freedom to create the atmosphere of the play.

The intimacy of the space itself was a major factor in the creation of the atmosphere. The audience, seated on three sides, only a few rows deep, were so close to the actors they could almost 'taste' the blood, and were as much caught up as the characters themselves in the events as they happened. Once inside the auditorium there was no escape, no chance of distancing oneself from what one was witnessing. McKellen commented that the confined space made the effect of the production on the audience 'properly alarming':

One priest queued for a returned ticket again and again, so that he could sit at our feet, discreetly holding out his crucifix to protect us from the evil summoned up in the stifling air of The Other Place.¹²

Richard David enthused:

The immediacy, to Macbeth, of the dead Banquo could be felt because Macbeth's 'Never shake thy gory locks at me' could be an extreme agony yet hardly more than whispered, and because his final assault, with dagger, upon the 'horrible shadow, unreal mockery', was both hysterically wild and minutely controlled. This jaggedness of movement and gesture, like a tremor that, although violent as measured on the seismograph, is

¹² William Shakespeare's *Richard III*, Ian McKellen and Richard Loncraine (London: Doubleday, 1996), p.9.

yet strictly contained within the narrowest limits of time and space, characterised the whole production.¹³

Playing straight through without an interval increased the intensity of the experience for the audience.

COSTUME

The general costume was an assortment of dark uniforms: tunics and trousers tucked into knee-length boots. There was no sense of a particular period. The costumes of the protagonists echoed their spiritual, moral allegiances. Macbeth wore a black shirt with black trousers tucked into black knee-length boots, and Lady Macbeth a black dress and black head-scarf. Duncan was dressed in a white robe, Lady Macduff wore a white dress and head-scarf. In Act 4 scene 3 Malcolm was also in white. The visual contrast between Duncan, in a long, white gown, with a large crucifix round his neck, and Lady Macbeth, in black, as she led him by the hand into her castle (in Act 1 scene 6) was extremely effective: goodness being betrayed by evil.

There was only one expensive item of costume - the robe of kingship which resembled a cope and was white with gold encrustations. It stood out due to the richness of fabric and design and it also had a symbolic function. It symbolised good kingship, being first associated with Duncan. Duncan was dressed in it at the end of Act 1 scene 4, in it, complete with crown and sceptre, he bestowed the title of Prince of Cumberland upon his son, Malcolm, making him officially the heir to the throne. As Duncan was dressed in his royal finery Macbeth stood close by, greedily eyeing the robe and crown, the witches' words working in his brain. When he wore it for his own coronation his hunger was fed. In the 1974 production there had been three

¹³ Richard David, 'The Parties Themselves, The Actors', *Shakespeare in the Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p.87.

coronations; Duncan's, Macbeth's and Malcolm's. In the 1976 production only Macbeth's was staged, in a ritual presented before Act 3 scene 1. The robe was bought on stage as Macbeth and Lady Macbeth entered downstage right. Lady Macbeth stopped at the edge of the circle while Macbeth continued and knelt in the centre. The robe was then placed on his shoulders and from upstage Ross crowned Macbeth and handed him the sceptre. This was all that was needed to indicate the change in the balance of power that had now taken place. Macbeth's bloody ascent to power made these symbols of royalty empty of meaning when he assumed them. The robe was hung up on one side at the back of the stage throughout the play as a reminder of what was being fought for. Duncan was the rightful king, legally and (more importantly) morally. He was the spiritual head of Scotland as well as its secular leader.

INTERPRETATION OF THE PLAY

As the costumes indicated, the concept of the play as a battle between good and evil was still present in the 1976 production. The opening suggested that a straightforward contest between the two forces was beginning, as Duncan's piety was set directly against the evil of the witches. At the opening the witches entered the circle and then Duncan was helped to a prayer stool where he knelt and muttered prayers in Latin. These were gradually drowned out by the witches' wailing, which rose to a high-pitched scream and was then stopped by the crash of the thunder-sheet. However, as in 1974, the 1976 production balanced this simplicity with complex characterisations of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. Despite the costumes Macbeth and Lady Macbeth were not pure evil. Gareth Lloyd Evans wrote:

Throughout the production the characters remained essentially human because there was a mixing apparent in all of them of good and evil. Lady Macbeth's fidelity and love were as apparent as her ruthlessness.¹⁴

¹⁴ Gareth Lloyd Evans, *Shakespeare Quarterly* Vol 28 (1977), p.194.

Nunn's interpretation of the play can be seen clearly in the presentation of Lady Macbeth. The casting of Judi Dench in the role of Lady Macbeth might at first have seemed eccentric.¹⁵ At this point in her career she was seen as a warm, gentle comedienne: she was also playing Beatrice in Much Ado About Nothing in the Royal Shakespeare Theatre. Now she was cast in a role traditionally seen as requiring a degree of hardness, an element of robust masculinity. However, it was her very quality of humanity that Nunn wanted. She made Lady Macbeth believable, because she communicated warmth, love, and femininity. She was not the remote, sexy, evil demi-witch that some productions have created. This last description is closer to Helen Mirren's performance in 1974. Asked about the character of Lady Macbeth, Judi Dench has commented:

What Shakespeare intended was not at all a strong, imperious, rather frightening lady to come walking on - I think he needs a very feminine person to come on, who actually has a great passion for her husband and is tremendously ambitious for him.¹⁶

Anthony Dawson advocates the interpretation of Lady Macbeth that Dench portrayed:

The important thing is to maintain a sense of the humanity of the characters, to avoid turning Lady Macbeth (especially) into a fiend... we should not get the sense she is calling upon spirits with whom she has a familiar relationship. Rather, this is a new, bold and horrifying departure for her.¹⁷

Dench's Lady Macbeth was not a monster but recognisably human, not a psychopath but a wife obsessed with her husband, desperate for him to fulfil his potential. She

¹⁵ Nunn may have been influenced by the fact that McKellen and Dench had a personal and professional relationship before their partnership in Macbeth. In 1967 they appeared at Oxford Playhouse together in The Promise by Alexei Arbuzov. Dench played Lika and McKellen Leonidik, a poet in love with her. They were reunited at the RSC in 1975 in a production of Too Good To Be True directed by Clifford Williams.

¹⁶ Shakespeare Superscribe, ed. by Myra Barrs (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1980), p.43.

¹⁷ Anthony Dawson, Watching Shakespeare: a playgoers' guide (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), p.200.

invoked evil spirits to help her achieve what she had already realised is necessary, the murder of Duncan. She knelt centre stage, in the middle of the circle and started her satanic prayer:

Come, you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here
And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full
Of direst cruelty (1.5.38-41).

She knew what she was doing and taking fright, got up off her knees and ran downstage. She had to steel herself to continue her invocation. Once she had summoned up courage and resolution, she knelt again and completed the speech. Dench believed that an audience must be able to recognise themselves in the Macbeths. They must realise that ambition can lead humans to commit murder. She commented that Lady Macbeth 'is a creature to pity. Of course, it's her comeuppance but you should say at the end, "There but for the grace of God could go anybody" if you think ambition is that important.'¹⁸ Michael Billington recognised Nunn's intention in making the audience believe that the Macbeths were 'not monsters but recognisable human beings willing themselves to evil and disintegrating in the process.'¹⁹

Nunn focused the whole of the play on the relationship between the Macbeths. The play was the narrative of their marriage: initially passionate, united in their purpose to fulfil Macbeth's potential, they were unable to cope with the guilt of Duncan's murder and withdrew into their private mental hells, isolated and lonely in their shared despair. The production made clear the intensity of the Macbeths' physical, sexual relationship. In Act 1 scene 5 when Macbeth returned home she appeared to mother him. Lady Macbeth was facing downstage, she turned, rushed towards him and they

¹⁸ Gerald Jacobs, *Judi Dench - A Great Deal of Laughter* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1985), p.88

¹⁹ Michael Billington, *Guardian*, 14 September 1977.

embraced. Throughout the scene they remained in a close embrace. Lady Macbeth's speech which begins, 'O never/ Shall that morrow see!' (59) was spoken without any break in Macbeth's constant hungry kissing of her. At the end of the scene she commanded him 'Leave all the rest to me' (71) and led him off stage by the hand like a meek schoolboy. He was powerless in his great physical need for her. The excitement of danger and fear fired their sexual passion.

In Act 1 scene 7, when Macbeth urged his wife to 'Proceed no further in this business' (31), he crossed over to console her but she moved in front of him, throwing off his embrace. She asked 'Was the hope drunk/ Wherein you dressed yourself?' (35-36) with bitter contempt. She exhorted him to 'Be so much more the man' (51) as he moved upstage right, and she pursued him and grabbed his arm crying out '... their fitness now/ Does unmake you' (53-54). They were physically very close when she poured into his ear the image of dashing her baby's head. As she finished her speech, Macbeth was totally overcome: he hugged her from behind, which she recognised as surrender, and her acceptance of this physical contact, denied earlier, signalled to Macbeth that she realised his capitulation. She turned to face him (See Fig.6) and as they held each other there was a tangible sexual energy which was expressed in a passionate kiss. The promptbook does not indicate when they broke their embrace. The next stage direction comes at the end of the scene, and indicates that Lady Macbeth crossed upstage and hugged Macbeth from behind and that they exited in an embrace.²⁰ As in Act 1 scene 5 she spoke as Macbeth covered her lips in kisses, he shook his head as she announced that the deed should be done 'When Duncan is asleep' (61) he tried to stop her with soft 'shushes' as if he was trying to soothe a crying baby. But his passion

²⁰ In the television version they remain in the frontal embrace for the whole of Lady Macbeth's speech starting, 'We fail! But screw your courage to the sticking place' (59-60).

increased as she revealed her plot to put the guilt upon Duncan's 'spongy officers' and reached a climax as he exploded with sexual energy; 'Bring forth men-children only! (72).

In his 1974 production Nunn had pinpointed the moment when the disintegration of the Macbeths' relationship began. He retained this detail in the 1976 production. In Act 3 scene 1 Macbeth asks the lords to leave him alone, 'To make society the sweeter welcome' (42). The lords exited, bowing as they did so. Lady Macbeth watched them leave but made no move herself. When they had left she crossed downstage to Macbeth and was stunned when he shunned her. She turned and exited upstage right. As she exited Seyton appeared, Seyton nodded at her, went past her and crossed towards Macbeth. Macbeth was facing upstage and witnessed their meeting. This was the moment that marked the beginning of the breakdown of their marriage: Seyton replaced her as Macbeth's confidant.

Nunn used their respective exits to outline the narrative of their unification in their joint resolve to commit the deed and their subsequent disintegration as they failed to cope with the guilt and evil of it. In Act 1 scene 5 Lady Macbeth was resolved on the murder of Duncan, but Macbeth was less assured and consequently it was she who led him off stage by the hand. In Act 1 scene 7 Lady Macbeth finally succeeded in convincing Macbeth of the need for Duncan's murder and he ended the scene as determined as her in their joint purpose, they exited together in an embrace. After the murder Macbeth was destroyed by fear and guilt, and the knocking at the gate did not stir him, Lady Macbeth could not rouse him from his thoughts, and had to pull Macbeth off the stage with her arm round his neck, pushing her shoulder against his, careful not to touch anything with her bloody hands. She had to exit alone in Act 3 scene 1. After

the banquet scene she had reached the limit of her inner and physical strength, there was no hope of regaining any meaningful understanding with Macbeth, and the murder of Banquo had cemented their separation. Lady Macbeth rose from her stool at the end of the scene but she was unable to walk and fell down. Macbeth picked her up and half dragged her off stage.

McKELLEN'S PERFORMANCE

McKellen's personal connection with Macbeth was based on a strong opinion as to what sort of man he would be today:

Of course, he's a brave and famous warrior, a sort of mixture of Mohammed Ali and Moshe Dayan in one. He's the man who saved Scotland at the beginning of the play - he was the great golden boy, there was nothing that he couldn't achieve, he was everybody's favourite. He tried to control fate with the aid and encouragement of the witches, who seemed themselves to have some control over fate.²¹

McKellen's location of a contemporary parallel to Macbeth manifested itself in a performance that was effective in its intellectual modernity. The real power of the performance was its sense of psychological realism. Gareth Lloyd Evans believed that for McKellen's Macbeth his 'greatest struggle was with a human conscience, not with supernatural solicitings; and his hell was his imagination.'²² Michael Billington claimed that 'the key metaphor in this production was dissimulation',²³ the struggle between the public performance and the private reality. Macbeth was driven by the need to find the continual energy required to ensure that the mask did not slip and the 'false face' did not reveal 'what the false heart doth know' (1.7.82).

McKellen suggested that part of Macbeth's public mask was an adopted, protective, ironic attitude to life. This was communicated by a faint smile that flitted

²¹ Barrs, p.41.

²² Gareth Lloyd Evans, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol 28 (1977), p.194.

²³ Michael Billington, *Guardian*, 14 September 1977.

across his mouth at several points in the production. The first time was in Act 1 scene 3 when Banquo, repeating the witches' promise to Macbeth, reminded him 'You shall be king' (85). Macbeth's response 'And Thane of Cawdor too, went it not so?' (86) was accompanied by a fleeting smile and a short laugh. He gave Lady Macbeth the same smile at his coronation as he paraded in his robe, crowned and sceptred. She was the only person who could share the irony of his power with him. His smile became broader and more desperately set as the action progressed. He smiled as he recalled the witches' promises to him in Act 5 scene 5 and gripped the voodoo-like dolls, the witches had given to him, to his chest. Macduff's revelation in Act 5 scene 6 that he was 'from his mother's womb/ Untimely ripped' (54-5) was Macbeth's death blow, the interior man was killed at this moment, his protective shell of irony was completely destroyed. He only fought Macduff because he hated the idea of having 'To kiss the ground before young Malcolm's feet' (67). At this thought Macbeth also smiled but there was no trace of any emotion behind it. His eyes were dead; it was the mechanical, practised ironic response to life that he had always relied upon but it no longer had any meaning.

McKellen gave the audience glimpses of the pressure Macbeth felt at having to maintain his public mask. In Act 2 scene 1 Macbeth was unnerved firstly by the presence of Banquo and Fleance. Both soldiers quickly pulled out their daggers in aggressive defence before they had established each others' identity. Macbeth covered his nervousness with hearty patting of Banquo's shoulder as he wished him 'Good repose the while'(29). As Banquo exited, one of Macbeth's servants entered. (Nunn had delayed his entrance from line 9 until this point.) The servant entered upstage right as Macbeth stood facing downstage, then crossed to stage left of Macbeth who started, startled by his sudden appearance. Annoyed at allowing the mask of composure to slip,

Macbeth barked his instructions. In the Thames Television film Macbeth begins to remove his coat and the servant crosses, unseen, to help him. Macbeth jumps round at the sudden physical presence of the servant, but manages to stay in control and allows the servant to do his duty and remove his coat.

In the stage production, the sequence which best revealed Macbeth's skill at dissembling was probably that in Act 3 scene 1 where he persuades two men to murder Banquo by pretending it was Banquo and not his 'innocent self' who had held them 'under fortune'. He claims that Banquo is a threat to his life and that he can 'With bare-faced power sweep him from sight' (118) but is inhibited because of 'Certain friends that are both his and mine' (120). McKellen delivered this speech with a seeming heartfelt sincerity which the audience could both admire for its brazenness and condemn for its dishonesty.

Macbeth's public mask lay in tatters at the end of the banquet scene (Act 3 scene 4). He was a pathetic sight, perched on the stool that Lady Macbeth had finally managed to force him onto, vacantly waving goodbye to the lords as they took their leave, both he and they equally shocked and bewildered by the night's events.

If the banquet scene marked the disintegration of Macbeth's public mask his treatment of the servant in Act 5 scene 3 was the disintegration of a private mask underneath which lay the embryo of a psychopath. Nunn increased the audience's shock at Macbeth's lack of self control by making the servant in this scene a young boy. The boy entered to deliver his news of the English force but before he could speak Macbeth crossed over to him and dragged him onto a box as he cursed him 'The devil damn thee black, thou cream-faced loon!' (11) Macbeth kicked the box the boy was standing on as he barked 'What soldiers patch?' (15) and his anger increasing, 'What soldiers, whey-

face?' (17), then suddenly, without warning, he drew his dagger and cut the boy's face. The boy lifted his hands to his face in horror and pain and jumped off the box managing at last to deliver his message.

In complete contrast to the dangerous violence that existed in the heart of this man the audience were also given a glimpse of the sorrow and pain in his soul. Macbeth's questioning of the doctor in Act 5 scene 3,

Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased,
Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow,
Raze out the written troubles of the brain (40-2),

was not a request for help for his wife but a desperate plea for himself, a final hope that life could begin again. The pain that McKellen communicated at this moment was an example of the main character's very human suffering which the production sought to reveal. The grief of Macbeth was recognised by the doctor whose response referred to the masculine pronoun 'Therein the patient/ Must minister to himself' (45-6) indicated that he understood that Macbeth was referring to himself.²⁴ These two manifestations of the interior man coming so close together gave the audience a sense of the complex, suffering, violent, unpredictable human that McKellen was presenting as Macbeth.

McKellen's ability to communicate the introspection of the role is a quality that several critics praised. Gareth Lloyd Evans commented that he can 'use the inward-looking aspect to depict defeat or defense or doubt or intellectual probing'.²⁵ One moment of stage business imprinted itself on the mind above everything else as evidence of this. Michael Billington described it:

Before the murder of Duncan, McKellen raises his right hand vertically with the wrist defiantly curling: after the crime, the daggers rattle in his

²⁴ Richard David disagrees and takes the opposite view claiming that there was 'no yearning reference... to his own condition.' *Shakespeare in the Theatre*, p.94

²⁵ Gareth Lloyd Evans, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol 28 (1977), pp.193-195, (p.193).

shaking hands (a sound I shall remember till my death) and he gazes at his undulating bloodstained mitts as if they belong to some alien body.²⁶

Irving Wardle saw this as the key to McKellen's Macbeth, a man unable to reconcile himself to the crime he has committed: 'he stands staring at his blood-dripping hand as if it were a detached object.'²⁷ (See Fig.7)

The promptbook records the movement and build up of this effective piece of stage business. In Act 2 scene 2 Macbeth, having killed Duncan, entered upstage and walked into the playing area backwards, but still looking at where he had come from as if he could still see Duncan. Then he turned to face Lady Macbeth and the audience, revealing for the first time his bloody hands and the daggers. Lady Macbeth gasped in horror as he raised the daggers and moved towards her as if trying to stab her. This provoked the cry 'My husband', (13),²⁸ Lady Macbeth stopped him, stood in front of him facing upstage, as he held the daggers and looked down to his right. As Macbeth related the guards' prayer - 'One cried "God bless us" and "Amen" the other,/ As they had seen me with these hangman's hands' (26-7) - he held out his hands in front of him. Lady Macbeth took charge. She ordered Macbeth to go and wash, picked up his coat and put it round his shoulders. Then she remembered the daggers and shook him by the lapels: 'Why did you bring the daggers from the place?' (48) Macbeth refused to take them back, protesting 'I'll go no more./ I am afraid to think what I have done;/ Look on't again I dare not'(50-1). As he spoke he shook, which caused the daggers, in his hands to clink against each other. Lady Macbeth's 'Tis the eye of childhood/ That fears a painted devil' (54-5) was delivered as she snatched the daggers from him and exited.

²⁶ Michael Billington, *Guardian*, 14 September 1977.

²⁷ Irving Wardle, *The Times*, 14 September 1977.

²⁸ Dench's delivery of the line was in direct contrast to Helen Mirren's delivery of the line in the 1974 production when it was a jubilant cry of delight and pride that Macbeth had done the deed.

When the knocking started Macbeth, startled, cried 'How is't with me when every noise appals me?' (58) and extended his left hand stage right. He looked at his hands which he held in front of his face. Then they seemed to attempt to 'strangle' him 'What hands are here! Ha - they pluck out mine eyes!' (59) At the end of the scene, as Macbeth and Lady Macbeth exited, she pushed him out using her shoulder. Both of them were wary not to touch anything with their bloody hands. Nunn wanted the audience to remember not so much Duncan's murder as the murderers' reaction to it: Lady Macbeth's practicality and cool-headedness in replacing the daggers and ensuring that they leave no trace of blood and the shaken Macbeth staring, unbelieving, at his hands.

These hands symbolised the murder, and throughout the rest of the production Macbeth kept on looking at them, as if still seeing the blood that had stained them. In Act 2 scene 3 when Macbeth admitted to slaying the grooms he drew his dagger and it was this action rather than the confession that caused Lady Macbeth to faint. The production was permeated by the symbolism of daggers and hands, and the sense of the psychological impact of the murder on both Macbeth and his wife. Lady Macbeth's attempts to wash off the blood she can still see on her hands in the sleepwalking scene (Act 5 scene 1) was an extension and an intensification of the psychological state that they were both in. In Act 5 scene 5 as Macbeth cried out, 'I have supped full with horrors;/ Direness, familiar to my slaughterous thoughts,/ Cannot once start me' (13-15) he held out his right hand and he looked at it to see that it was shaking. Nunn altered and transposed Angus' lines to Lennox 'Now does he find [sic] / His secret murders sticking on his hands (5.2.16-17), but clearly could not cut them (although a lot of the scene was omitted) because of their pertinancy to the overall interpretation.

The symbolism of Macbeth's hands and his dagger was completed in Act 5 scene 6 by Macduff entering with Macbeth's bloody dagger rather than his head as proof that he was dead.

Marvin Rosenberg thought that McKellen played Macbeth with wit:

A capacious sense of humor [sic] went with the design: to this Macbeth, the world was an ironic place, and his laughter became more shrill as he saw the cosmic joke turned on him; or was edged with pain when the cut was deep, as at Lady Macbeth's death.²⁹

The matter-of-fact delivery of his response to the news of his wife's death, 'She should have died hereafter'(5.5.17) risked laughter from the audience but this black humour was almost immediately checked by his bitter, seething soliloquy on the futility of life. McKellen's delivery of the 'Tomorrow' soliloquy (5.5.17-28) revealed Macbeth's grim amusement at the banality of life communicated in the longish pauses he left between each 'Tomorrow' Likewise 'Signifying nothing' was drawn out, each syllable sounded and exaggerated, mouthing it only to spit it out with resigned bitterness. It articulated the nihilism which had replaced Macbeth's courage and capacity for love, communicating a sense of hopelessness and a helplessness which made life meaningless to Macbeth.

McKellen's Macbeth embraced the thought of death as a welcome end to the escalation of evil and violence that the witches' promises had initiated. He was tired of his life which had become a tedious waiting game to discover how the 'double sense' of the words of the 'juggling fiends' would be revealed. Reliance on the witches had destroyed any control he had had over his life; he was at the mercy of his guilt, fear and most dangerously of all a tiny vestige of hope. In the last scene Macduff did not enter immediately and spoke his line, 'Tyrant show thy face'(24), from the darkness. The

²⁹ Marvin Rosenberg, 'Trevor Nunn's *Macbeth*', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol 28 (1977), pp.195-196.

promptbook states that at this point Macbeth placed his sword on the box and knelt before it as if he had decided to commit ritual suicide. Macduff entered with his sword poised ready in his hand to announce to Macbeth that he was 'from my mother's womb/ Untimely ripped'(54-5). Macbeth circled round the stage clockwise with Macduff following, then stopped upstage left with Macduff downstage right. Macbeth rested his sword on his shoulder and proclaimed that he would not yield 'To kiss the ground before young Malcolm's feet'(66-7). Robert Cushman believed that by the final scene Macbeth was disgusted with everything in life and that 'his only reason for fighting to the death is that the thought of subjection is the most disgusting thought of all'.³⁰

CONCLUSION

The power of the production lay in the human relationship at the centre of the play. It was the Macbeths who caught the audience's imagination; it was their personal tragedy that they became involved with and were riveted by:

The first half of the piece ... has the scheming couple looking outwards into the world they see as their oyster, and then, never damaging our empathy with this dreadful pair, shows us that outside world, no oyster but a giant octopus closing in upon them.³¹

Richard David felt that 'the understanding of and immediate response of each other to the other' was as striking and as convincing between McKellen and Dench 'as it was between Olivier and Vivien Leigh in Byam Shaw's 1955 production.'³²

McKellen's performance confirmed his reputation as a leading Shakespearean actor.

³⁰ Robert Cushman, *New York Times*, 5 February 1978.

³¹ J.W. Lambert, *Sunday Times*, 12 September 1976.

³² Richard David, *Shakespeare in the Theatre*, p.91.

PART 2: TWELFTH NIGHT

INTRODUCTION

The RSC tour of Twelfth Night in 1978 arose from McKellen's desire to consolidate the work he had done with Trevor Nunn on Macbeth. The recent experience of working in a small space with no scenery had been exhilarating and in an interview at the time he commented: 'I know that being close to an audience has helped me as an actor and I want to go on working for a while in that close relationship'.³³ The appropriateness of Twelfth Night, for this venture, was established by an extract from Harley Granville-Barker's Preface to the play, which was printed in the programme, to the effect that 'There is much to show that the play was designed for performance upon a bare stage... Scenery is an inconvenience' The largest possible audience on the tour was to be 500, with most venues seating about 200. The repertoire of the tour comprised three shows: Twelfth Night, directed by John Amiel, The Three Sisters, directed by Trevor Nunn, and Is There Honey Still for Tea?, an entertainment of words and music about England, devised by Roger Rees and directed by McKellen. Over a period of fifteen weeks the tour visited twenty-two venues including Daniel Stewart's and Melville College as part of the Edinburgh Festival. There were fifteen actors, including Bob Peck, Roger Rees and Griffith Jones from the Macbeth company; Clyde Pollit and Patrick Godfrey from The Winter's Tale cast; and McKellen's Actors' Company colleague Edward Petherbridge. McKellen was unofficially the chairman or artistic director of the group.

³³ Sheridan Morley, 'McKellen on the road', The Times, 12 June 1978.

SET AND COSTUME

The company were completely self-sufficient, carrying with them all they needed: costumes, a platform for the stage and a flexible lighting rig. John Napier designed the simple set of a grey cloth. Due to the simplicity of the set it was the costumes which suggested the period of the play. And there was some confusion among the critics as to what period Twelfth Night was set in. Nicholas de Jongh complained that 'It is set in the 1920's, with no specific purpose'³⁴ whilst Charles Spencer was delighted that the late eighteenth-century costumes 'suit the personality of the character who wears them.'³⁵ McKellen explained to Harold Hodgson that the 'fantastical costume' of the production was designed to 'match the fantasy of the play but I suppose if you must put a period to it, 19th century is as near as you will get.'³⁶ The production photographs reveal an Edwardian feel to the women's costumes, Olivia looks rather like Queen Mary in her mourning dress. The costumes were of mixed period and reflected the personality of the characters. McKellen wore tweeds in line with his depiction of Sir Toby as a country gentleman.

INTERPRETATION OF THE PLAY

The play was presented as a fantasy, a fairy tale. The production opened with Viola stepping through a large mirror, like Alice entering the looking-glass world. The Epilogue to Alice Through the Looking Glass was printed in the programme notes and Anne Barton in an essay in the programme stated that 'The sea captain who first tells Viola about Illyria might justly have said to her what the Cheshire cat says to Alice, "They're all mad here"' Barton also wrote that the two pairs of lovers, Orsino and

³⁴ Nicholas de Jongh, Guardian, 24 August 1978.

³⁵ Charles Spencer, Surrey Advertiser, 19 July 1978.

³⁶ Harold Hodgson, Peterborough Evening Times, 2 August 1978.

Viola; Olivia and Sebastian, manage to remain in their romance world at the end of the play but that the other characters are 'exiled into reality'. Belch, Aguecheek and Malvolio can not be 'absorbed into the harmony of the romantic plot', and so at the end of Amiel's production, as Feste sang his final song, the lovers embraced while the other characters left the stage.

McKELLEN'S PERFORMANCE

McKellen had played the part of Sir Toby Belch before, at Cambridge. His performance in the touring production challenged the pre-conceived notions of the character. He pointed out to interviewers that Shakespeare does not say that Belch is either old or fat. McKellen played him as a country gentleman, 'a dissipated clubman, the kind of bloke who is forever pouring whisky into his tea and pinching serving-girls' bums.'³⁷ He had lots of stage business including smoking cigars and eating sweets. Nicholas de Jongh described it as 'a comic repertoire of superior mannerisms'³⁸ He made the character sympathetic, believing that there is still hope for Sir Toby, that he is not a hopeless case and will 'pull himself up by his boot straps'.³⁹ He did not, however, let the contemptible side of the character be completely overshadowed; he was both an 'amiable buffoon' and a 'boorish bully'.⁴⁰ He was spiteful, determined to wring the last penny out of Aguecheek, in Act 2 scene 3 the promptbook records that Aguecheek held out his money to Feste as he asked for a song but that Belch took the coin from him giving it to Feste himself, 'Come on, there is sixpence for you' (32), with the result that Aguecheek had to find some more money for himself, 'There's a testril of me too' (34).

³⁷ Charles Spencer, Surrey Advertiser, 19 July 1978.

³⁸ Nicholas de Jongh, Guardian, 24 August 1978.

³⁹ Harold Hodgson, Peterborough Evening Times, 2 August 1978

⁴⁰ Allen Wright, The Scotsman, 24 August 1978.

Belch also seemed to be a man of high intelligence, aware of all he was doing and that he was wasting his life. A refrain from Feste's song in Act 2 scene 3, 'Then come kiss me, sweet and twenty:/ Youth's a stuff will not endure'(52-53), was repeated several times in the production and became associated with Belch. It was repeated at the end of Act 4 scene 2. Belch's line 'Come by and by to my chamber'(73), usually addressed to Feste, was spoken to Maria and as he said it McKellen placed a 'key ring' on Maria's finger. Belch exited up left as Feste sang the first line of the refrain and Maria exited up centre on the second line.

Belch's relationship with Maria was established in the pre-scene to the play when Viola peered through the frame of a mirror and saw Olivia cross the stage followed by Malvolio and Belch who pulled Maria's veil off. Sir Andrew then entered up left and Belch crossed to meet him and Feste, and the three exited together. The childish behaviour towards Maria and the sense of his immature attachment to his male friends established a character who was finding it hard to grow up. Maria and Belch were presented as a couple in the last scene of the play, the promptbook records that as Aguecheek offered Belch his help as they are 'dressed together' (203), Belch 'lurche[d]' at Olivia suggesting that her line 'Away with him' (200) was addressed to Belch. Maria restrained him and they exited up right together, after bowing to Olivia. Aguecheek exited alone up left. At the very end of the production the lovers were grouped in the centre of the stage and as Feste sang his song, sat down stage right, the other characters re-entered through the mirror frame and exited again; Antonio, Aguecheek and Malvolio all entered alone but Belch and Maria re-entered and exited together. It appeared that by the end of the play Belch had grown up: his attachment to Maria a sign of his maturity.

John Barber claimed that McKellen's Sir Toby took him 'completely by surprise. Instead of the usual beery boor, this is a nimble squire in Norfolk tweeds, wielding a shooting-stick and walking a merry line between self-indulgence and gleaming malice.'⁴¹ B.A. Young thought the performance innovative and 'as funny a Toby Belch as I can remember, the lines adorned with well-placed frowns, giggles, yawns and side-long winks that polish them to new brightness.'⁴² Robert Cushman described McKellen's Belch as having a 'splendid, habitual air of innocence and a lacrymose family pride ... flaring into real anger with the upstart Malvolio.'⁴³ In Act 2 scene 3, on Belch's line 'Go sir, rub your chain with crumbs' (118-9), McKellen 'flick[ed] open' Malvolio's dressing gown perhaps as a reminder to Malvolio that his nakedness is a sign of his shared humanity and is what makes everyone equal.

THE PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN MCKELLEN AND ROGER REES

There was a strong comic partnership between McKellen's Belch and Roger Rees as Andrew Aguecheek. Rees gave a 'Burlington Bertie of an Aguecheek'⁴⁴ in striped blazer with a lock of hair limply hanging in the middle of his forehead. Charles Spencer believed that 'The scene in which they get a drunken attack of the giggles in the middle of the night is marvellous because it has the ring and tone of absolute authenticity.'⁴⁵ The promptbook reveals that it was full of business such as McKellen tipping Rees out of chairs, sitting on chairs the wrong way round, missing the stool and ending up sitting on the floor, and standing up and immediately falling over.

⁴¹ John Barber, Daily Telegraph, 29 August 1978.

⁴² B.A. Young, Financial Times, 26 August 1978.

⁴³ Robert Cushman, Sunday Times, 27 August 1978.

⁴⁴ J.W. Lambert, Sunday Times, 27 August 1978.

⁴⁵ Charles Spencer, Surrey Advertiser, 19 July 1978.

CONCLUSION

Despite the success of the tour and McKellen's evident enjoyment of his collaboration with the RSC, he did not work with the company again until 1989 when Nunn invited him to play Iago. And although he had learnt that small spaces brought out the best in his acting, and had said at the end of 1978 'I know too that my Romeo and Leontes would have been vastly better on smaller stages',⁴⁶ his next Shakespeare role was Caius Martius on one of the largest stages in the country, that of the Olivier Theatre at the National.

⁴⁶ Sheridan Morley, 'McKellen on the road', The Times, 12 June 1978.

CORIOLANUS

INTRODUCTION

1985 proved to be an 'annus mirabilis' in McKellen's acting career. He started the year playing Coriolanus and went on to form his own company at the National Theatre with Edward Petherbridge. For this group he played Bosola in The Duchess of Malfi, Inspector Hound in The Real Inspector Hound, Mr Puff in The Critic and Lopakhin in The Cherry Orchard. His only previous work for the National Theatre had been at the Old Vic in 1965 when he played Claudio in Franco Zeffirelli's Much Ado About Nothing. He had joined the National Theatre on the South Bank in 1984 to play Pierre in Thomas Otway's Venice Preserved, directed by Peter Gill. That year he went on to play Platonov in Michael Frayn's adaptation of Chekhov's unfinished play, which Frayn titled Wild Honey, and in September he started rehearsals for Coriolanus under the direction of Peter Hall. The success of his amazingly varied body of work in 1985 was due in part to the very strong start to his renewed National Theatre career in 1984. His performances in the Otway and Chekhov plays were well received by the critics. In the December 1984 issue of Plays International Sheridan Morley nominated him in the category of Actor of the Year. The Plays and Players January 1985 issue had McKellen on its front cover: an A4 size colour photograph of him as Caius Martius, covered in Kensington gore, waving the tattered red silk Roman banner, after the victory at Corioles. Inside the magazine announced the winners of the Plays and Players London Theatre Critics' Awards. McKellen won the category of Best Performance (Actor) for Platonov. The critics who voted for him also praised his performance as Pierre, and Christopher Edwards of The Spectator finished his piece with the words,

‘Suffice to say I believe this actor is one of our very best’.¹ Riding high on this critical success McKellen embarked on *Coriolanus*, by the end of the year it had won him the Evening Standard Award for best actor. The pressure to deliver an exceptional performance was tremendous.

Hall and McKellen had worked together before, when McKellen replaced Paul Scofield as Salieri in *Amadeus*, for its Broadway transfer at the end of 1980. The production was directed by Hall who had spoken of McKellen as a star, ‘which... is an actor who can be downstage with his back to the audience in the dark, and still be the centre of attention.’² Their shared Cambridge education (they both studied English under Tom Henn at St Catharine’s College) with the influence of Leavis and Rylands boded well for a sympathetic Shakespearean partnership.

THE POLITICAL NATURE OF THE PLAY

Coriolanus is a play which provokes political debate. There are arguments amongst scholars, theatre directors, audiences and school teachers about how political the play is, whether there is room for a domestic drama within it, and whether Shakespeare is in favour of *Coriolanus* or the people. The threat to Rome is not simply the fault of the tribunes and although Shakespeare questions their manipulation of the populace he does not present them as the sole villains of the piece. Because no clear political opinion is communicated, the play is especially open to politically biased interpretation. Its production history points to the fact that it can be appropriated by both the left and right wings. Michael Billington, remembering an observation made by John Barton, commented in his review of the Royal Shakespeare Company’s 1989 production of the play:

¹ Plays and Players, January 1985, p.21.

² ‘Downstage National Treasure’, Observer, 16 December 1984.

Shakespeare is neither right-wing nor left-wing but wing-less. Coriolanus is seen as a magnificent warrior, a psychologically damaged mother-worshipper and a potential threat to an evolving republic. The people, on the other hand, are suffering from famine at a time when the patricians are hoarding the grain-harvest but are themselves easily manipulated by the tribunes. Shakespeare does not so much take sides as show how the state is threatened by the collision of opposing forces.³

This view is not one that is often expressed in productions of the play. Coriolanus is a play which is mostly treated either as an affirmation of fascism and the strength of dictatorship over a dangerously fickle populace, or as a triumphal celebration of democracy and a warning of the dangers of allowing military power to encroach on civil rule. Few directors see Shakespeare as 'wing-less' and most ascribe to him their own political bias. McKellen was only too aware of this tendency. He had played Tullus Aufidius in Tyrone Guthrie's 1963 production in which the director presented a very left-wing interpretation of the politics of the play. McKellen recalls that:

Guthrie hated figures of authority, even though he was one himself, and so there was an awful lot of ironic laughter at the expense of the patricians. And Menenius was played as a more crucial figure than in our production, I think, as someone who has a strong sense of humour - a rather bumbling figure really.⁴

It is not just directors who hijack the play for their own political ends; the Daily Telegraph review of the 1984 production gave more column inches to the politics of the play than to the merits or demerits of the production itself. Paul Johnson (a political commentator rather than a theatre critic) wrote that:

Shakespeare distrusted the mob but unlike Coriolanus he did not despise it... Those he really hated - the enemies of a just and stable society - were the scheming tribunes of the people, Velutus and Sicinius Brutus [sic], the equivalent of today's Scargills.⁵

³ Michael Billington, One Night Stands, (London: Nick Hern Books, 1993), p.326.

⁴ Kristina Bedford, Coriolanus at the National (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press; London and Toronto: Associated University Press, 1992), p.145.

⁵ Paul Johnson, Daily Telegraph, 16 February 1985.

Johnson was seemingly confident in attributing specific political views to Shakespeare. He believed that Shakespeare supported his own political beliefs or at least those of the right-wing newspaper he was writing for. He overlooked the fact that Shakespeare does not unreservedly condemn the tribunes: after all they bring the people peace in Act 4 scene 6. Even Menenius, who is a father figure for Coriolanus admits to the tribunes that; 'All's well, and might have been much better if/ He could have temporiz'd (4.6.16-17). However, Johnson's reference to Scargill is important in that he was not alone in seeing modern parallels in this Elizabethan play. Part of the design of Hall's production was to suggest such connections.

HALL'S 1959 PRODUCTION AND WHY HE RETURNED TO THE PLAY IN 1984

It was the modern parallels and in particular the nature of the crowd that were Hall's key interests in the play in his 1984 production. The play as a whole rather than the central character concerned him. This was not as obvious as it might first appear. When Hall originally directed it, in 1959 at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre in Stratford, he had concentrated on the character of Coriolanus and eschewed other concerns and themes of the play. Perhaps the individual strength and power of Laurence Olivier, who played Coriolanus, upset the balance of the production. The fact that the most remembered aspect of the production was Coriolanus' death supports this to some extent. In an interview for Drama in 1985, McKellen recalled his memories of the 1959 production which are of 'Sir Larry's fall - typical of him to strike a noble death and then, immediately, to undercut it.'⁶ The power of this moment in theatrical history is evident in that even in the reviews for McKellen's performance in 1984 critics still referred to it. Sheridan Morley compared the final scene in Hall's two

⁶ Christopher Edwards, 'Crunching Butterflies for Breakfast', Drama, 1985, pp.21-22.

productions, 'With Olivier hanging by his heels twenty feet above the stage' Hall had achieved 'an image of sudden death so powerful and so eternally haunting that a few random gunshots at the end of the present production seem, even after all that time, something of an anti-climax.'⁷ In his autobiography Hall has commented that when he directed the play for the second time he decided to emphasise its political nature, which confirms that he recognised that he had not done this in his earlier production.⁸

What Paul Johnson's review illustrates is the extent to which the play excites political debate and opinion. Hall wanted to direct it again in 1984 because he thought that the politics were 'extremely apposite to this moment in our country's history. The play is about confrontation and extremism.'⁹ 1984 saw growing opposition to Mrs Thatcher's extreme right-wing policies. Michael Billington felt that

the play coincided with [Hall's] own personal belief in 'the radical middle' in an era of insensate extremism. I felt he directed it not just because it was there but because it had a burning relevance.¹⁰

Irving Wardle thought that Hall's decision to direct Coriolanus provided a commentary on his own turbulent career as Director of the National Theatre:

the fiery confrontation between the workers' tribunes and the managerial patricians that marked Peter Hall's arrival on the South Bank, ... this production could almost be a revival of the National Theatre's own history.¹¹

⁷ Sheridan Morley, Our Theatre in the Eighties, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1989), p.101.

⁸ Peter Hall, Making an Exhibition of Myself, (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1993), p.326.

⁹ Peter Hall, 'J' Accuse', Plays and Players, April 1985, pp. 6-7, (p.6).

¹⁰ Michael Billington, 'Plateau of High Consistency', Plays International, December 1985, pp.26-30, (p.30)

¹¹ Irving Wardle, The Times, 17 December 1984.

HALL'S INTERPRETATION OF THE PLAY - THE PRESENTATION OF THE PLEBEIANS AND THE TRIBUNES

In his review Johnson described how he sees today's equivalent of Shakespeare's mob:

The mob which is easily deceived today - which wants and even begs to be deceived - is the Polytechnocracy, that middle-class hydra, half-educated and highly opinionated... open its collective head and you will find it stuffed with yellowed clippings from the Guardian and New Society¹²

Hall agreed with Johnson's description of the make-up of a 1980's mob but whereas Johnson was being sarcastic and scathing Hall honestly saw the middle class as being the modern voice of dissent. In Hall's production Shakespeare's mob were the 'radical middle'¹³ of modern times. In Act 4 scene 6 the third citizen speaks the lines:

And so did I; and, to say the truth, so did
very many of us. That we did we did for the best,
and though we willingly consented to his banish-
ment, yet it was against our will (143-6).

Hall emended the text, so that the third citizen retained the line up to 'many of us', then the fourth citizen was given the rest of the line, except for the last part which was altered to 'yet it was his death we wished for'. This made the plebeians more militant than the original line suggests. The fickle nature of the mob was here revealed in its most naked form. The news of Coriolanus' union with Aufidius causes them immediately to place the blame at the tribunes' door. They were not prepared to take the consequence of their actions and now they disclaim any responsibility. Their 'will' is exposed for what it is, frustratingly inconstant. Hall's change made the plebeians more politically aware, repentant that they had listened to the tribunes' call for mercy and

¹² Paul Johnson, Daily Telegraph, 16 February 1985.

¹³ Peter Hall, Making an Exhibition of Myself, p.326.

temperance, rather than that they had any regret in banishing Coriolanus but that they had not killed him. Nightingale was the only critic to comment on this emendation which he called 'a grave distortion of Shakespeare's intentions',

Like it or not, the play is scathingly and sweepingly cynical, seeing whim, pique, greed and other personal feelings in just about every political posture and public person: a proud, mother-fixated protagonist, a shifty and manipulative patrician party, sly and devious tribunes and, not least, plebeians utterly incapable of consistency.¹⁴

This emendation was clearly a direct result of Hall's vision of Shakespeare's mob being the 'radical middle'¹⁵ of modern times. He saw the power of middle class dissent and fashioned Shakespeare's plebeians into a more militant, more intelligent body.

In line with his interpretation of the plebeians Hall altered the characterisation of the tribunes. In Act 1 scene 1 the tribunes reflect on Coriolanus' manipulation of Cominius. Sicinius says:

Besides, if things go well,
Opinion, that so sticks on Martius, shall
Of his demerits rob Cominius (269-271).

Brutus agrees with his fellow tribune, and his comment following this is similar in its sentiment:

Half all Cominius' honours are to Martius,
Though Martius earn'd them not; and all his faults
To Martius shall be honours, though indeed
In aught he merit not (272-275).

Although these lines are to some extent a repetition of the tribunes' previous statements (i.e. lines 261-268) they need to be registered by the audience. Coriolanus' bravery in battle is an accepted given: the audience has witnessed it in Act 1 scenes 4, 5,6 and 8. The idea that the tribunes here suggest that he is conniving to gain undeserved glory is

¹⁴ Benedict Nightingale, *New Statesman*, 20 December 1984.

¹⁵ *Making an Exhibition of Myself*, p.326.

rejected by the following scenes. This conversation between them is important for the audience to remember because when it is disproved the tribunes will be undermined. They have not spoken the truth about Coriolanus and therefore can not be entirely trusted. Again the cut seemed to be in favour of a less harsh view of the tribunes, an attempt to give the plebeians more credibility.

HALL'S PRESENTATION OF CORIOLANUS' ISOLATION

Hall presented the plebeians' reaction against Coriolanus' extremism as being positive, which meant that he saw the figure of Coriolanus as a threat to social harmony. Coriolanus was not part of the city of Rome: in this production he was seen to be a 'lonely dragon' (4.1.30); a phrase he uses to describe himself before he goes into exile. This image of Coriolanus as the lone warrior isolated by an aura of fear was recreated at key moments in the play. In Act 1 scene 4 Titus Lartius believes Coriolanus to have been killed and laments:

Thou art left, Martius:
A carbuncle entire, as big as thou art,
Were not so rich a jewel (1.4.54-6).

The gates of Corioles, upstage, then opened to reveal Coriolanus fighting two Volscians. He then turned and beckoned, with the Roman standard he was carrying, for the soldiers to join him. (Fig.8) This visual image reinforced the text which indicates that Coriolanus enters the city alone. In Act 2 scene 2, at the end of Cominius' speech commending Coriolanus to the senate, Menenius orders the soldier to be called for. At this point the upstage doors of the senate opened to reveal Coriolanus sitting on a stool awaiting their decision. Again the stage picture underlined the text, which indicates that Coriolanus leaves the senate because he can not bear to hear himself praised. However, the visual image was one of exclusion, Coriolanus was alone on the outside, a situation

which prefigured his banishment from the city later in the play. The conclusion to this series of vignettes was only realised at the very end of the production when the corpse of Coriolanus was carried out through the doors of Corioles, which shut with a bang behind him. His exclusion from society, both Roman and Volscian, was a key motif, Coriolanus was presented as a hero, but his bravery and martial ability placed him outside the normal pattern of behaviour and therefore outside society. This idea has been explored in a discussion between by A.D. Nuttall and A.R. Humphreys. Humphreys relates Coriolanus to Aristotle's Politics, in which Aristotle defines two types of men who 'do not fit into the notion of a city' These are 'the man who is not sufficiently human to be sociable, a kind of beast' and 'the man who is superior to his society: a lordly, lofty godlike person.' Humphreys believes that Coriolanus is both of these types of men: 'He uses a great deal of animal imagery calls other people curs and is himself a dragon; at the same time he is a god, a Jupiter, almost superhuman.'¹⁶

Michael Goldman sees the relationship between the single figure of Coriolanus and the multitude of the city as less clear cut. He claims that 'the raging action of the crowds around Coriolanus provides a sustaining dramatic impulse for the play' and that their movement

both traps and exalts the man at the center [sic]. Coriolanus draws his life from them; he defines his heroism and integrity by endlessly clashing with them and calling them together. In spite of their awesome energies, neither he nor Rome can be genuinely free for celebration, affection, variety, and warmth. Their exciting, sterile energy sustains and limits them.¹⁷

This view was not reflected in Hall's production.

¹⁶ A.R. Humphreys and A.D. Nuttall, 'Coriolanus' in Shakespeare's Tragedies, edited by Alan Sinfield (London: Sussex Books, 1979), p.117.

¹⁷ Michael Goldman, Shakespeare and the Energies of Drama, (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972), p.123.

THE ONSTAGE AUDIENCE

This enhanced status of the plebeians was also articulated in the production by the onstage audience. Perhaps the most innovative aspect of Hall's production was his decision to place part of the audience on the stage. About one hundred members of the public got the opportunity, every night the play was on, to sit on the Olivier stage, on specially erected tiered bench seats which were shaped in a semi-circle; a miniature amphitheatre. The majority of the critics mention the onstage audience in their reviews. Hall decided to stick by this concept despite serious misgivings voiced by both McKellen and Greg Hicks, who played Tullus Aufidius. The idea was that the audience would be brought down into the acting area at various points in the play to become an instant crowd. Initially this happened in the opening scene, Act 2 scene 1 when they swelled the crowd for the triumphal entry of Coriolanus into Rome, in Act 3 scene 1 they were added to the citizens to demand for Coriolanus' death, in Act 5 scene 5 they were stood up to complete the stage picture for Volumnia's triumphal entry into Rome and in the final scene of the play they became Volscres waiting to hear Coriolanus' defence of the peace treaty. Part of the audience was also brought down to 'cluster' in Act 4 scene 6 and for the persuasion of Menenius to intercede with Coriolanus in Act 5 scene 1. However, during the previews and the opening week there were problems with audience control. In the first public performance, which was a dress rehearsal, Menenius was too isolated in the first scene as the audience had followed the example of the citizen actors who had sat down to listen to the fable of the belly and had gone back to their seats, in the third preview again some went back to their seats too early in the opening scene. During the sixth preview in Act 2 scene 3 spectators in the outside stands were to be brought down to become part of the action but this was not made

clear enough and all the on-stage audience came down. A more general problem was created by members of the audience getting stranded in the playing area and expressing such inappropriate responses as giggling nervously when Coriolanus threatened them in Act 3 scene 1. (Fig. 11) Kristina Bedford records that on February 21 'it was announced that the audience participation would be cut for all but three of the present scenes - it has been kept for the opening, the trial and assassination' ¹⁸

Most of the critics appreciated the use of the onstage audience and commented that Hall might have been making a political point to the Arts Council. James Hughes-Onslow wrote:

Putting part of the audience on stage is one of the clever economies devised by the NT at a time of drastic Art Council cuts. It provides an instant crowd, saves on seating and gives you the opportunity for some gentle rabble-rousing. ¹⁹

Benedict Nightingale explained to his American readership:

Peter Hall is the director of this Coriolanus as he is of the National itself, a theater [sic] that has been making much public noise of late about its financial problems. Was this improbable Roman rabble, one wondered, actually his demonstration to the powers-that-be that he couldn't afford even a scattering of walk-ons, let alone the multitudes recorded by critics and histories of the past? ²⁰

Hall announced the closure of the Cottesloe theatre, the National Theatre's smallest auditorium, in February 1985, letting it be known that this was a direct consequence of the Art Council's failure to provide a large enough subsidy. However, Hall was not out to score a few political points. The decision to put part of the audience on stage was fairly risky, and bound to invite strong criticism and opposition from the cast as well as from the public. Stephen Wall claimed that the onstage audience reduced the

¹⁸ Bedford, p.337.

¹⁹ James Hughes-Onslow, Evening Standard, 25 February 1985.

²⁰ Benedict Nightingale, New York Times, 6 January 1985.

production's 'political seriousness' He reasoned that Hall was blinded by a desire to do something different from his 1959 production:

Although there is much running up and down the aisles, with trumpets playing Birtwistle fanfares to the right and left of it the audience remains stubbornly unintegrated in the action, despite the conscription of some of its number as onstage hostages.²¹

Nightingale, however, realised the purpose behind this staging choice. Hall was presenting the audience with a 'Roman proletariat we can identify with, one more respectable or at least less giddy and unruly than is to be found in the play most of us know.'²² The onstage seats were sold at a lower price than those in the main auditorium, making them attractive to students and unemployed people who would have perhaps, in their style of dress, contributed more to the desired affect. However, frustrated actors among the well-heeled grabbed the chance of being in the limelight. This gave the critics (only one of whom opted for an onstage seat) the opportunity to make fun of the incongruity of Gucci handbags, Liberty scarfs, sets of pearls and pinstriped suits representing the plebeians of Rome. They did not seem to see that Hall was making the point that in 1984 it was not just the working class but also the middle class who were vocalising their discontent with the government. Paul Johnson after all had recognised that the 'mob' of today has its head stuffed full of 'postcards from Greenham Common, ... Bishop Tutu's sermons'.²³

COSTUME

As Hall dressed his actors in a mixture of modern and Roman dress the modern dress of the onstage audience was not as incongruous as it might have been. He explained this decision as being part of his desire to stress the political nature of the

²¹ Stephen Wall, Times Literary Supplement, 28 December 1984.

²² Benedict Nightingale, New Statesman, 20 December 1984.

²³ Paul Johnson, Daily Telegraph, 16 February 1985.

play. In his autobiography, he wrote that he ‘emphasised the political resonances more by using for the first and only time in any of my Shakespeare productions fragments of modern dress.’²⁴ Thus the patricians wore business suits with togas; the women wore fitted dresses in modern material, occasionally draping large pieces of material toga-style over them; and although Coriolanus and Aufidius fought with swords, Coriolanus was assassinated with bullets. Irving Wardle liked the eclectic nature of the costume and recognised that Hall’s reasoning behind it was to clarify the politics of the play: ‘A figure like John Savident’s Cominius means more than the usual anonymous general when he can switch from armour to a company director’s suit.’²⁵ Stephen Wall found that the mixture of periods had both strengths and weaknesses:

The professional players are in everyday clothes and this allows them to mingle with the amateurs from the terraces without too much sense of discrepancy, but modern dress also brings expectations of political urgency which do not materialise... Period costume might have deflected those comparisons with the real world pickets which are so much to this production’s disadvantage at this time... *Coriolanus* has often been subjected to updating, but here the revisionism is undermined by inconsistencies of detail.²⁶

Wall objected on the one hand to the suggestion in the production that the contemporary miners’ strikes had a parallel in the unrest among the starving Romans at the opening of the play, and on the other to the production’s failure to deliver a clear sense of the play’s modern relevance. He seemed to feel that the mixture of modern and Roman dress reflected neither the current British political situation nor the Roman one expressed in the narrative of the play. This may be a valid point of warning for any director deciding to confuse the period setting of a production but it seems clear that Hall’s intention in the mixture of costumes successfully outweighed any negative

²⁴ Making an Exhibition of Myself, p.101.

²⁵ Irving Wardle, The Times, 17 December 1984.

²⁶ Stephen Wall, Times Literary Supplement, 28 December 1984

results. Wardle praised Hall's avoidance of drawing any 'crude topical parallels' and approved of the fact that Hall had offered a production where 'the affairs of the nation can be aired with the maximum fairness to all sides, where you are at liberty to draw local political comparisons.'²⁷

SET

The stage area consisted of a large circular sandpit with a wide surround. There were exits off the middle of either side in the form of left and right alleys going into the wings, steps leading off the stage into the auditorium on the left, right and centre and through the two sets of doors at the back of the set. The central sandpit was a design feature that Hall had used before, in his 1960 co-production (with John Barton) of Troilus and Cressida for the RSC. Hall believed it was a useful image for Troilus and Cressida: 'Mediterranean, a cockpit for hand to hand combat, an arena for political debate.'²⁸ Clearly these are all factors that made it appropriate for Coriolanus. The only critic to mention the sandpit in 1984 was Sheridan Morley who commented that Hall had 'gone right back to what he did best at Stratford all those years ago, complete with the sandpit from Troilus'.²⁹ The rest of the set was essentially a ruined amphitheatre with the tiered seating suggesting the scaffolding of renovation. One of the citizens spray-painted a slogan at the opening of the play suggesting the modern lack of respect for the ancient. Pomp and ceremony was given to Coriolanus's triumphant return to Rome by the waving of huge silk banners and the rolling out of a red carpet.

²⁷ Irving Wardle, The Times, 17 December 1984.

²⁸ Making an Exhibition of Myself, p.157.

²⁹ Our Theatre in the Eighties, p.101.

McKELLEN'S INTERPRETATION OF CORIOLANUS

McKellen's approach to the role was very specific. Interviewed during rehearsals he confessed that it was a part he had always wanted to play and he expressed very strong views with regard to how Coriolanus should look physically:

I have seen Coriolanuses who don't look very fit but it seems to me the one thing you have to be reasonably convincing about is that you are an athlete and capable of doing most of the feats Coriolanus is supposed to have done.³⁰

McKellen was prepared to back up this conviction with action. In order to get his body into the condition he deemed necessary, he worked out three times a week at Dreas Reyneke's studio. This commitment continued throughout the run of the play. He also gave up red meat, smoking and drinking as soon as he knew he was going to play the role. McKellen was conscious of the fact that at 45 his age was against him: 'the more signs of middle-age I can eradicate from my body the better.'³¹ The result of all his hard work was quite spectacular. He turned himself into a human fighting-machine with a tough, lean, muscular body, he achieved what he desired: the honed appearance of an athlete. In his review Benedict Nightingale mentioned McKellen's physical transformation:

Though macho aggression wouldn't seem his forte, he makes a perfectly plausible killing-machine, with his blood-streaked torso and his grim and baleful relish for the fray.³²

McKellen recognised the amount of energy the role required in terms of becoming physically convincing and then playing the super-human soldier (sometimes for six consecutive performances) he was not as prepared for the energy he had to find for all

³⁰ Lynda Murin, Evening Standard, 7 January 1985.

³¹ Lynda Murin, Evening Standard, 7 January 1985.

³² Benedict Nightingale, New Statesman, 20 December 1984.

the running around he had to do backstage in this production. In an interview in January 1985, a month into the run, he commented:

The most tiring part is not what I do on stage but off stage. Twenty-five minutes into the show I have a full shower and dry my hair with a dryer. Then there's a series of quick changes and running down corridors, running down front of house and being ready for the triumphant entry into Rome.³³

(Fig.10) He had achieved and maintained a level of fitness however that meant he was able to cope with all aspects of this physically demanding and strenuous role.

At the outset of the production McKellen's primary concern and focus was centred on the physicality of his character. His goal was for the audience to be convinced that he was the soldier Titus Lartius describes;

Thou wast a soldier
Even to Cato's wish, not fierce and terrible
Only in strokes, but with thy grim looks and
The thunder-like percussion of thy sounds
Thou mad'st thine enemies shake (1.4.56-60).

(I will consider McKellen's vocal performance later in this chapter.) McKellen's priority was to make the audience believe that his 'grim looks' were capable of striking fear into the enemy, the identity of Coriolanus as a warrior was what McKellen was interested in exploring in this production of the play. He may have been influenced by the criticism John Neville received in Guthrie's production in 1963. One critic described Neville's Coriolanus as 'more of the disdainful sophisticated snob than the warrior whose insults are near barbaric', concluding that 'There is something super-human in valour about Coriolanus which Mr Neville cannot achieve.'³⁴

McKellen based Coriolanus' personality on the temperamental tennis star John McEnroe:

³³ Lynda Murin, Evening Standard, 7 January 1985.

³⁴ Desmond Pratt, Yorkshire Post, 13 December 1963.

It is McKellen's practice, when seeking a way to play an historical character, to study a contemporary person, and the quality he was seeking for the general he found in the tennis brat. That quality: arrogance.³⁵

McKellen's attraction to the unpredictable nature of Coriolanus' public displays is illustrated by his choice as a model of a man capable of giving a spectacularly theatrical floor-show at a moment's notice. McKellen's Coriolanus, like McEnroe, engrossed the audiences' interest because he was dangerous and likely to erupt at any time, a weakness that the tribunes exploit to their own ends in Act 3 scene 3. McKellen in choosing to model the arrogance of Coriolanus on McEnroe's arrogance also adopted a peculiar and individual pronunciation.

McKellen vividly communicated Coriolanus' personality in the very first scene of the play. He appeared behind the group of citizens, gathered in the sandpit to listen to Menenius' fable of the belly, and stood on the top of the right hand section of the seating. He wore a dazzlingly white suit with a white coat draped nonchalantly over his shoulders, white shoes, a blue shirt and tie, and his hair was beautifully coiffured and brushed back off his face. The arrogance of this costume was instantly understood. The impractical colour, the expensive material and the theatrical flamboyance with which it drew attention to the person wearing it, all expressed Coriolanus's utter contempt for the people and their suffering. It was as though he had dressed up on purpose to flaunt his wealth in their hungry faces. Sheridan Morley thought he looked like 'Edward VIII about to demand popular support in return for precisely nothing but arrogance and a sense of the blood royal.'³⁶ McKellen devised this costume himself and first wore it at the second technical rehearsal. Bedford records that the director 'noted and accepted' the costume emendation.³⁷ Originally he also wore sunglasses but he scrapped these

³⁵ *TV Times*, 19-25 October 1985.

³⁶ *Our Theatre in the Eighties*, p.101.

³⁷ Bedford, p.267.

after the third preview. A strong visual statement in this instance made the politics and personality of Coriolanus clear to the audience.

McKellen had strong views on the character of Coriolanus, and was keen to stress the sympathetic aspects of the role. The fact that he was a man of integrity was important to McKellen:

I think Shakespeare, on the whole, was rather pro professional soldiers. So I encourage the audience to see Coriolanus as admirable.

He also claimed:

I do not want to distort the picture at all but there is much to be said in favour of Coriolanus in that his imagination is extremely limited, so are his talents and abilities, and he probably has not got a very big brain for a start!

He found the story a tragic one, and Coriolanus a tragic character:

I do not think this is necessarily the story of a man who is over-proud or over-wilful. If one is apportioning blame, simply to call him a fascist is nonsense. Here is a single man trained by the state. They trained him as a guard-dog and suddenly was told he has got to be a sheep-dog and he cannot do it.³⁸

Yet McKellen recognised that the scope for a sympathetic reading was limited:

Coriolanus has very few redeeming features. Modern audiences can't see why they should love him or why they should like him.³⁹

However, McKellen identified why audiences may find the character sympathetic; Coriolanus' strength is also his weakness, his integrity is the reverse side of his arrogance. He believes that Shakespeare saw Coriolanus as a 'dinosaur' in terms of his political opinions and he points to the fact that the character does not have any significant soliloquies as proof that Shakespeare did not want him to have the 'special appeal'⁴⁰ of other Shakespeare protagonists. Coriolanus's lack of soliloquies indicates his lack of inner life or 'inwardness' as Michael Goldman terms it:

³⁸ Christopher Edwards, 'Crunching Butterflies for Breakfast', *Drama* 1985, pp.21-22.

³⁹ Bedford, p.139.

⁴⁰ Bedford, p.140.

Indeed, Menenius, Aufidius, and any number of others provide a wider view of Coriolanus's possible responses to the events of the play than he does - and a deeper sounding of the feelings they may be presumed to evoke.⁴¹

The absence of soliloquies indicates, so Goldman argues, that the 'live human center' [sic] at the core of the killing-machine is 'sadly stunted, nearly mute', his 'hidden self... is almost hollow'.⁴² It becomes a sign of immaturity rather than simply a matter of sympathy.

McKellen, influenced perhaps by Hall's priorities, stated at the time of the production that he believed that the play was not about Coriolanus at all but about the city of Rome:

The play is about the city, and really the central character who understands what you can do and how you can act in relation to the state is Volumnia, who originally, of course, used to be played by a man.⁴³

McKellen's own personality as an actor meant that this opinion of the play was not expressed in his performance, and his delight in playing a character capable of great self-dramatisation meant that theatrically the focus of the production remained with his character. Despite this, Hall managed to prevent the personality of both actor and character from dominating to the exclusion of all else. I do not believe that in the heat of performance McKellen really felt the play was about the city, whatever he may have perceived intellectually in the cold light of day.

McKellen also drew on his own inner emotions to invest his portrayal of Coriolanus with a convincing set of emotions. Bedford states that he found a personal parallel in the part:

He himself enjoys the attention of playing in public, but knows people's praise to be no guarantee of success... Thus he picked up on the acting metaphor

⁴¹ Goldman, pp.118-119.

⁴² Goldman, p.120.

⁴³ Bedford, p.143.

which runs through the heart of the play and made it a crucial element of his performance.⁴⁴

This makes the decision to cut Coriolanus' line; 'Rather say I play/ The man I am.' (3.2.15-16) seem wrongheaded, as it is a vital part of the mosaic of acting references throughout this scene. Coriolanus claims that he cannot act the part his mother and the patricians are asking him to and that the only part he can play with any conviction is himself. This is not the case, as he demonstrates in the following scene when he persuades the people to give him their voices. He also succeeds in disguising himself and entering Aufidius' house, where he rejects his identity as a Roman. However, he is not able to play the part of a Volscian, and even though he dismisses Menenius in Act 5 scene 2, he can not resist the temptation to temper the rejection with a personal letter. The moment that Coriolanus tries to be other than he is he becomes lost and his character is constantly compromising and in flux for the rest of the play. The removal of what is in fact a crucial line for Coriolanus is difficult to understand especially as the majority of the cuts were made either to reduce repetition or to avoid inessential plot exposition to speed up the pace of the action.

The acting metaphor may have led McKellen to certain flourishes that could be seen as excessive. In Act 5 scene 6 Coriolanus' outburst 'Cut me to pieces Volsces' (111) was accompanied by a dramatic disrobing as McKellen tore off his gloves and his Volscian uniform shirt. Bedford thought that this indicated his 'effort to get back to the primitive warrior of Act 1'⁴⁵ I think there was a suggestion that McKellen's Coriolanus believed that the situation would be resolved by a repetition of the semi-naked face to face duel fought with Aufidius in Act 1 scene 8. But he was inviting all the Volscian

⁴⁴ Bedford, p.350.

⁴⁵ Bedford, p.135.

people to 'stain all your edges on me' (112). The language is verbose, hyberbolic, pushing the boast to its limit, and as such it calls for an elaborate, even coarse gesture. McKellen continued in this somewhat obvious style by playing out the motions of having a cardiac arrest in response to the lines:

Measureless liar, thou hast made my heart
Too great for what contains it (102-3).

As he clutched at his heart, it was unclear whether this was Coriolanus self-dramatising or McKellen trying to find an effective response for his character to Aufidius's accusations against him. Or was it indisciplined over-acting? McKellen simply exploited the histrionic element that Shakespeare wrote into the character of Coriolanus. The fact that he personally could identify with Coriolanus' love of creating an impression perhaps led to a lack of tight control and discipline which unbalanced the fine line between mannered acting and the vulgar excesses of the character.

McKELLEN'S VOCAL PERFORMANCE

The critics were divided to a certain extent over McKellen's portrayal of Caius Martius. More than one objected to his vocal performance. Robert Hewison wrote:

His voice rasps and soars making whatever it pleases of rhythms and vowels. But the tragic flaw in casting McKellen as Coriolanus is that he is tenor, whereas the part demands a baritone. A deeper voice would carry gravitas while McKellen's tenor is for comedy or petulance. His vocalising of the part is as dated as the decision to do the play in modern dress.⁴⁶

Benedict Nightingale's headline for his review for the New Statesman was 'Booyaaahayaaee' a parody of the over-elaborate manner in which McKellen spoke the word 'boy' in Act 5 scene 6 when Coriolanus responds to Aufidius' insult. Nightingale suggested that McKellen's style of delivery in the production worked against the character of Coriolanus:

⁴⁶ Robert Hewison, Sunday Times, 23 December 1984.

In fact there are times when one feels that McKellen's tongue has invented a new tongue, or at least a new regional accent a blend of melodic throb and euphonious whinny, mainly to be found on upmarket stages in and out of the metropolis... the problem is a style often too mannered, too precious, too exorbitant to defend in the obvious way, by pointing out that Coriolanus is actually a rather mannered, precious, exorbitant character.⁴⁷

The Times Literary Supplement reviewer echoed Nightingale's criticism and again made a distinction between McKellen's acting technique and the mannerisms appropriate to the character he was playing:

The cracks between the actor's natural intelligence and the character's overweening boorishness are papered over with flamboyant displays of physical and vocal energy which seem unfunctional and unfocused.⁴⁸

Michael Ratcliffe, who enjoyed McKellen's vocal performance, recognised that he was taking a gamble, and that such a deliberately, eccentric, mannered delivery was bound to provoke dissent. For Ratcliffe, McKellen was able to integrate this element with the other aspects of his performance, making it a part of the whole:

At times McKellen speaks in a kind of action-replay, burnished legato, spinning the verse like butterscotch at the back of his throat, taking a fearful risk with the meaning. It works because his technical command and physical and intellectual grip on the role are so sure.⁴⁹

Critical opinion was divided between those who felt the vocal performance lacked focus and those who saw it as a part of the overall characterisation. McKellen changed his accent from a false upper-class cut-glass nasal one, in which he addressed the plebeians, to a rougher, flatter-vowelled voice when among friends and family. The eccentric delivery of the lines sprang as well from McKellen's belief that Coriolanus is not in control of himself and has to try to accommodate several split personalities. Whether this idea was successfully communicated to the audience is debatable. Two critics

⁴⁷ Benedict Nightingale, New Statesman, 20 December 1984.

⁴⁸ Stephen Wall, Times Literary Supplement, 28 December 1984.

⁴⁹ Michael Ratcliffe, Observer, 23 December 1984.

thought that his Coriolanus lacked any naturalism so that any real tender emotion was lost in favour of an impenetrable acting front. Although as Michael Goldman points out 'the language of affection in the play is reserved for descriptions of war and enemies'.⁵⁰ However, they claimed that McKellen presented Coriolanus as a soldier in love with his own PR, never letting the mask slip, and this they believed was incompatible with certain moments in the play, in particular the capitulation scene with Volumnia. The majority of the critics, however, found this scene the most memorable because it was so emotionally arresting.

The reservations about McKellen's delivery of the lines can perhaps be related to the fact than he found the language difficult:

The language is also very knotty - it is not a highly poetic text. The syntax is dense the verbs are in the wrong place and so are the prepositions... It has been very difficult to learn and, I feel, it will be very difficult to listen to. The danger with this sort of verse is that actors slow up and stress every syllable and you cannot understand a word of it.⁵¹

McKellen's delivery may have been prone to exaggeration but the critics who found the style grating and problematical seemed to overlook the instances when it was used to great effect. An example of this was the way in which the word 'mildly', which is the key word in Act 3 scene 2, was delivered. Because of its repetition throughout the scene the word is often played for comedy. Coriolanus first uses it when Volumnia enters:

I talk of you.
Why did you wish me milder? Would you have me
False to my nature? (3.2.13-15)

⁵⁰ Goldman, p.118.

⁵¹ Christopher Edwards, Drama.

McKellen crossed upstage to greet his mother on her entrance and took her hand after the word 'mildly'. This gesture was a precursor of the hand-holding gesture in Act 5 scene 3 when Coriolanus capitulated and agreed to frame a peace. Volumnia pulled her hand away in exasperation at Coriolanus' response to the people's power: 'Let them hang!' (3.2.23) He tried to take her hand again as she instructed him:

I am in this
Your wife, your son, these Senators, the nobles (3.2.64-65)

but she shunned him. Coriolanus was persuaded to go back to the people and 'mountebank' their love and at the end of the scene McKellen paused before saying: 'The word is "mildly"' (142). He spat the word with explosive anger thereby prompting Menenius to repeat the key word trying to calm Coriolanus, 'Ay, but mildly' (144). This repetition caused McKellen to explode again 'Well, mildly be it then - mildly' (145). The final 'mildly' was ironic, delivered so that it 'encapsulates all his corrosive self-loathing for the performance ahead'⁵² Thus McKellen's tendency to isolate certain words and exaggerate them worked with the text rather than against it in this particular scene.

It can be argued that the language of the play encourages an exaggerated delivery. Goldman describes it as:

terse, elliptical, rapid, studded with invective, dense; it suggests quick, tough activity, bleakness rather than lushness. Even when meanings appear that invite rounded periods or advert to vital process, phrases are preferred that convey a rattling, harsh, eroding, or combative impression.⁵³

The lines are short and often contain a few key words that can be hit hard without unbalancing the sense. For example Coriolanus' final speech in Act 3 scene 3 contains a

⁵² Bedford, p.89.

⁵³ Goldman, p.117.

series of short half lines which lend themselves to being highlighted: 'You common cry of curs!' (120); 'I banish you!' (123); 'Thus I turn my back' (134); and 'There is a world elsewhere!' (135). McKellen delivered this speech in an explosion of anger. Coriolanus silent since line 93, was finally allowed to vent all his pent-up hatred and disgust. The citizens were suddenly bombarded with venom, McKellen hit the hard 'c' sounds of 'common' 'cry' and 'curs', he was spitting his invective at them. He left the stage after 'I turn my back' (134), stalking resolutely down the stage left alley giving the citizens, who watched him go, one last look of contempt. His final shout of heroic resolution boomed in from outside the city, the threat of Coriolanus now that he is on the outside rather than inside was established from this moment, when the citizens could not see him but he could be heard and, most importantly, felt.

The distinct manner in which McKellen delivered Coriolanus' lines can be seen to have been directly linked to his view of the character. McEnroe's unique intonation of certain words led him to be mimicked the world over. McKellen in choosing to model the arrogance of Coriolanus on McEnroe's arrogance also adopted a peculiar and individual pronunciation.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CORIOLANUS AND TULLUS AUFIDIUS

The fight between Coriolanus and Tullus Aufidius was one of the highlights of the physical action in the production. Hall retained the convention of the sword fight between Coriolanus and Tullus Aufidius despite the modern references in costume and design. The prominence accorded the combat is not surprising given McKellen's obsession with being a convincing warrior.

Tullus Aufidius was played by Greg Hicks, who was in the Royal Shakespeare Company's 1976 Macbeth, in which McKellen took the title role. Talking about his time at the RSC Hicks has commented:

I spent my time watching - watching them all, I did lots of understudy. With Macbeth, I learnt that I could make something substantial from the smaller parts.⁵⁴

Hicks had spent six years at the National Theatre before he was cast as Tullus Aufidius. He had been in the notorious Romans in Britain and claims that the director of that production, Michael Bogdanov, gave him creative freedom as an actor and sharpened his 'awareness of the physicality of acting'.⁵⁵ Perhaps one of the most memorable aspects of Hicks' characterisation of Tullus Aufidius was his physical expressiveness. He was a perfect match for the newly-honed McKellen. In order for McKellen to achieve the physical veracity he was seeking for his character he needed an actor as his opponent who was his equal or indeed superior, so that the acting could be as energetic as possible. The fight scene between the two actors was long and expertly choreographed and required real stamina to perform. Both McKellen and Hicks relished the hard work that went into such a convincing stage fight. Al Senter, who attended a rehearsal, observed that:

McKellen and Hicks, at first warily and then with increasing verve and enthusiasm rehearsed their fight scene. Both men sparely built, muscles toned and no excess flesh grappled in a steel embrace.⁵⁶

The physique and fitness of both actors allowed for sustained combat.

The portrayal of the relationship between the two characters was very physical in the production but resisted any overtly sexual implications. This was deliberate and

⁵⁴ Al Senter, 'Hicks' Will', Plays and Players, December 1984, p.7.

⁵⁵ Al Senter, 'Hicks' Will', Plays and Players, December 1984, p.7.

⁵⁶ Al Senter, 'Hicks' Will', Plays and Players, December 1984, p.7.

seemed to have been instigated largely by McKellen. When he had played the part of Tullus Aufidius, at Nottingham Playhouse, Tyrone Guthrie had thought that 'the crucial balancing axis of the play was the relationship between Aufidius and Coriolanus'.⁵⁷ Guthrie also thought this relationship was homosexual. This view can be supported by the text, as Aufidius uses very sensual language when describing his feelings for Coriolanus:

Know thou first,
I lov'd the maid I married; never man
Sigh'd truer breath; but that I see thee here,
Thou noble thing, more dances my rapt heart
Than when I first my wedded mistress saw
Bestride my threshold (4.5.114-9).

In a post-Freudian age Aufidius' dream has been interpreted as springing from a deep sexual desire:

I have nightly since
Dreamt of encounters 'twixt thyself and me -
We have been down together in my sleep,
Unbuckling helms, fisting each other's throat -
And wak'd half dead with nothing (4.5.123-7).

McKellen was not keen on stressing the possible sexual desire between Coriolanus and Aufidius. Referring to Act 4 scene 5 he has said:

I think it's very tempting to play that scene in a hugely theatrical way and get the audience interested in their psychological entanglement; and I don't think it really gets you anywhere. I think its better if you simply work on Coriolanus's sense of Aufidius.⁵⁸

McKellen does not mention the speech very similar to Aufidius's, spoken by Coriolanus to Cominius in Act 1 scene 6. Cominius and his soldiers have retired from the battle and Coriolanus arrives as reinforcement. He approaches Cominius:

Oh! let me clip ye
In arms as sound as when I woo'd; in heart

⁵⁷ Bedford, p.145.

⁵⁸ Bedford, p.141.

As merry as when our nuptial day was done,
And tapers burn'd to bedward (1.6.29-32).

The language is too similar to Aufidius's for the parallel not to have been intended. Shakespeare seems to be suggesting that there is an intimacy in war, a bond between soldiers, that can only be explained to civilians as being like the sexual bond that couples realise in the marriage bed. This exchange between Coriolanus and John Savident's Cominius was played in a very intimate way. McKellen entered down the central aisle of the auditorium. He arrived on stage from downstage left, crossed round the perimeter of the sandpit to arrive at Cominius who had been following Coriolanus' progress throughout. Cominius crossed slightly to meet Coriolanus as he advanced towards him. They embraced at the end of Coriolanus' speech (quoted above). McKellen rested his head on Savident's shoulder. The moment was played with immense tenderness and Cominius' line 'Flower of warriors' (33) was almost a caress. The mood was finally broken by Savident lifting McKellen's head up off his shoulder to ask him, 'How is't with Titus Lartius?'(34) In the second preview a parallel embrace was introduced in Act 2 scene 2, long and tender, a direct echo of the one in Act 1 scene 6.

The gentle intimacy of these exchanges was not expressed in the meeting between Coriolanus and Aufidius at Antium. There, the physical contact was kept to a minimum, but the embrace that is demanded by the text in Aufidius' line 'Let me twine/ Mine arms about that body'(4.5.107-8) lasted the length of seven lines and was finally broken by Aufidius on 'Contend against thy valour', (114) so that the lines that have come to be read as having homosexual overtones were spoken while the actors remained physically apart. This left the audience free to interpret the degree of sexual desire implied in the language. Before they exit the text again indicates contact as

Aufidius says, 'your hand: most welcome!' (148) In this production Hicks held out his right hand which McKellen shook. McKellen then exited by the stage left alley followed by Aufidius. This was the sum of their bodily contact. This is surprising given that the fight in Act 1 scene 8 had sexual overtones in that they were both naked apart from a loin cloth. So why deliberately curtail physical contact in this scene? Why avoid the sexual nature of Coriolanus with Aufidius if you haven't ignored it with regard to Coriolanus and Cominius? I feel that the answer to these questions lies with McKellen's personal feelings about Act 4 scene 5. This scene in particular made him uncomfortable, possibly a legacy of the Guthrie production. For whatever personal reason, McKellen seems to have been adamant that there should be no homosexual overtones in this scene although he was happy for them to be present in Act I scene 6 and in Act 1 scene 8. This discrepancy should perhaps have been eliminated by the director. McKellen recognised that Act 4 scene 5 was problematic in performance but he declared that 'It didn't really worry me that the scene isn't dead on target' and 'It didn't worry me in the end that that scene wasn't stronger stated'.⁵⁹ This attitude may also indicate the general bias of the production towards the emotional involvement of Coriolanus with his family, which might be seen as precluding a strong Coriolanus/Aufidius relationship. McKellen wanted the attraction between the two soldiers to be based on obsessive competitiveness. This meant that one of the avenues of exploration in terms of the Coriolanus/Aufidius relationship was closed off from the outset because McKellen seemingly was so against any suggestions of a homosexual undercurrent. It is interesting to note that McKellen enjoyed the best of both worlds. In Guthrie's production when he was playing Aufidius the personal relationship between the Volsc

⁵⁹ Bedford, p.141.

and the Roman was made central to the play. This meant that McKellen was given a rise in status sharing the spotlight of interest, whereas when he played Coriolanus, Hicks was not given equal weight in terms of the interpretation of the play in this area. The relationship was largely unexplored and apart from the fight in Act 1 scene 8 the character of Aufidius was shadowy.

It is not surprising therefore that Hicks also had problems with the staging of this scene. Hicks, recalling the initial moves which he found unsatisfactory, commented:

the very first piece of blocking was Ian and me “twining” from behind, which I felt was very contrived.

Hicks felt that the scene never really worked:

It doesn't feel good. I don't like the way I handle him particularly, and I don't particularly like the way he handles me.⁶⁰

In the promptbook there are additions which are marked ‘March ‘85’ This indicates that the scene changed slightly three months into its run. Just before Hicks embraced McKellen he decided to start dropping his sword, a move which, he has said, came out of performing the play:

I suddenly realised that it was a wonderful symbol of my impotency, or the end of the game between us, or the end of the duel between us, or it was a symbol of the throwing down of my whole *raison d'être*.⁶¹

Hicks was also helped by a change McKellen made to his performance. At the opening of the scene in which Coriolanus is disguised, McKellen wore a long coat and a floppy wide-brimmed hat. The scene opened the second half of the production after the interval. Coriolanus retains his disguise while talking to the servants and trying to gain access to Aufidius. In this production, once Hicks entered, McKellen took off his coat and hat and dropped them to the floor. He faced upstage to start his speech, ‘My name

⁶⁰ Bedford, p.147.

⁶¹ Bedford, p.146.

is Caius Martius' (66). After he had delivered the words 'My surname' (69) McKellen paused and then turned to face Hicks, looking straight into his face, as he uttered his agnomen, 'Coriolanus' Hicks felt that McKellen did not 'successfully set-up his own speech before I spoke so that it was all slightly flat'.⁶² However, towards the end of the run McKellen changed his delivery of the first part of the speech and after 'There to witness may/ My surname'(68-9) the pause became longer and then he bellowed 'Coriolanus' at Hicks so that it came as a shock to him and gave him something emotional to react to. Hicks had very little opportunity to experiment with this scene and in particular was very limited in terms of the emotional scope. Given McKellen's adamant refusal to allow a sexual element in the scene, Hicks had to ignore the emotional charge behind his character's lines.

The narrowness of the interpretation of his character also made the death scene very difficult for Hicks. As he was never entirely clear about the emotional relationship his character had with Coriolanus, Aufidius' reaction to the death - which is complex and difficult for all actors - was even harder to perform effectively. The staging of the death further compounded the situation. Hall decided to give the conspirators modern weapons and made the death of Coriolanus a quick-fire political assassination. The conspirators were placed above the sandpit in which Coriolanus stood. One was positioned on the left ledge of Corioles' gates and the other two were in the opposing slips of the auditorium. Coriolanus drew his sword, sweeping it round, brandishing it at Aufidius and the Volscres taunting them all;

O that I had him,
With six Aufidiuses or more, his tribe,
To use my lawful sword (5.6.127-9).

⁶² Bedford, p.147.

Aufidius, standing on the seating above Coriolanus, in reply drew his sword as he insulted Coriolanus: 'Insolent villian' (130), it was at this moment that the conspirators appeared on their perches. In reaction to this insult Coriolanus lurched towards Aufidius ready with his sword to revenge the dishonour: this was the cue for the conspirators to shoot. McKellen was shot down as he started this run, he fell face down with his head towards the auditorium. Aufidius climbed down the seating and crossed to the left of Coriolanus' body, he then stood on the corpse. Hall directed Hicks to stand with both feet on the dead Coriolanus so as to intensify the sense of desecration. Bedford has stated that Hall felt 'a modern audience dulled to violent atrocities by their extensive media coverage'⁶³ needed to be shocked out of their complacency and feel the same horror an Elizabethan audience would have experienced seeing Aufidius place only one foot on the body. Hicks remained standing on the body until line 138. After the assassination three members of the crowd ran screaming in panic in opposite directions across the stage. The senate stood there stunned: it was clear that this plot did not involve them. When Aufidius stood on the corpse one of the crowd lunged towards him in an attempt to push him off but was restrained. The staging of the death meant that Aufidius did not physically kill Coriolanus, which made it difficult for Hicks to find an effective emotional response. There was no real climax for him as there would have been had he had to kill Coriolanus himself which made the anti-climax difficult to express. Hicks has admitted that he hated the shooting at the end of the play 'although I've made it work for me, in my own head'⁶⁴ Paul Johnson in the Daily Telegraph felt that the 'the anachronistic surprise almost ruins the climax'.⁶⁵ Irving

⁶³ Bedford, p.350.

⁶⁴ Bedford, p.153.

⁶⁵ Paul Johnson, Daily Telegraph, 16 February 1985.

Wardle was one of the few critics who thoroughly approved of the staging of the death.

He believed that Coriolanus being

brought down by two matter-of-fact bursts of gunfire [is] a device which simultaneously justifies all the anachronistic preliminaries and isolates the hero as himself a valour-drunk anachronism in a world of political calculation that has no place for heroes.⁶⁶

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CORIOLANUS AND HIS FAMILY

Perhaps the imbalance in the Coriolanus/Aufidius relationship was the price that had to be paid for prioritising Coriolanus' family context. The importance given to the family group was illustrated by the staging of Act 5 scene 3. Commenting on the thoughts behind the direction of the emotion of this scene McKellen has said that Coriolanus is:

under tremendous pressure... first of all, his family is his enemy now; but in the end he does not give in. He's having to measure up to his past, with Aufidius watching. And he's confronted with his son whom he adores, and who he himself was twenty years ago. I think it is the sight of his son, the sight of that child, that ultimately sways him; and then it's added to Volumnia's words. He can't bear it - he needs that support of his mother. So it's really a combination of the two. But the future of the play is in the little boy.⁶⁷

Volumnia's long speech starting, 'Nay, go not from us thus' (131) was choreographed with close attention to the text. So that when she referred to the Volscres;

If it were so that our request did tend
To save the Romans, thereby to destroy
The Volscres whom who serve, you might condemn us (132-4)

she stood facing Aufidius, whom she looked at and who nodded back in acknowledgement of what she had said. There was a pause before her plea, 'Speak to me, son' (148) which was made more desperate as Coriolanus was facing stage left

⁶⁶ Irving Wardle, *The Times*, 17 December 1984.

⁶⁷ Bedford, p.144.

away from her. When she elicited her daughter-in-law's help she turned to Virgilia but still Coriolanus did not move. However when Volumnia then said:

Speak thou, boy:
Perhaps thy childishness will move him more
Than can our reasons (155-7).

Coriolanus turned slightly downstage to where the boy was standing and took a couple of steps towards him. Coriolanus turned away again as indicated by Volumnia's speech and the ladies knelt in the sand on her instructions; 'let us shame him with our knees' (169). On her second 'Down!' (171) the ladies flattened to the ground with their arms held out in supplication like three priests at ordination. The boy remained standing, his eyes fixed on his father. Face down in the sand, neither Volumnia nor the other ladies saw Coriolanus turn to face his son. On 'an end' Volumnia stood up, helped by Valeria. The stage direction 'The Four Kneel' is usually placed after line 171, but this production transposed it and it was at this point that they stood. Just before Volumnia's 'Nay, behold's' (173) the boy knelt and held out his hands. Seeing the boy, the ladies, who had begun to walk downstage right, stopped and Volumnia crossed back towards the boy speaking the lines:

This boy that cannot tell what he would have,
But kneels, and holds up hands for fellowship,
Does reason our petition with more strength
Than thou hast to deny't (174-177).

Virgilia then picked up the boy and all the ladies continued to make their exit downstage right. Virgilia and Valeria stopped on the steps into the auditorium stage right. Volumnia crossed to the right of Coriolanus and stood close to him to spit her final insult:

This fellow had a Volscian to his mother;
His wife is in Corioles, and his child
Like him by chance (178-180).

It was the last part of this speech that seemed finally to break Coriolanus' resolve. The audience registered the look he gave his son while the ladies were prostrate before him. Volumnia had hit upon his Achilles' heel: he could not destroy his son. As she turned to go, on 'I'll speak a little' (182), Coriolanus grabbed her left hand and then everybody on stage remained still and silent as if hanging over a precipice, hardly daring to breathe for fear of upsetting the knife-edge balance. Yet Irene Worth's Volumnia knew that this gesture meant triumph for her. She stood turned away from her son, McKellen stood facing out into the auditorium, they remained immobile, until Volumnia almost imperceptibly straightened her back, her face showing that she knew she had succeeded. Coriolanus finally broke the silence with an agonised cry:

O mother, mother!
What have you have done? (182-183)

As McKellen began to speak these lines Worth turned towards him and they looked at each other. (Fig.9) On Coriolanus' decision:

For my part,
I'll not to Rome, I'll back with you; and pray you,
Stand me in this cause (197-9).

Virgilia, Volumnia and the boy crossed the stage to join him and Coriolanus bent down to the boy. He then promised the ladies 'We will drink together' (203) and on this line McKellen held the boy's hand and crossed to Hicks who took it and the two men exited either side of the boy. This exit as indicated in the promptbook was introduced later in the run, from March 1985. However, it was an idea that had been tried in rehearsal and subsequently rejected. Bedford documents that there was a

suggestion made by McKellen that after 'by and by' he take his son's hand and present him to Aufidius, and that they exit framing the child, but this was vetoed on the basis that it is a scene about the ladies.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Bedford, p.300.

There were two alternative exits being performed before McKellen reintroduced the one vetoed in rehearsal. One of the variants had McKellen and Hicks exiting together followed by the ladies with the boy. The other was McKellen bending down to take his son's hand, but the boy scared of his father and running back into the safety of his mother's arms, leaving Coriolanus, thus rejected, with no choice but to exit with Aufidius. The women then followed. Bedford's note and the staging indicate that McKellen did not see this scene as being about the ladies but rather about his character's feelings towards his son. The fact that he did adopt a move that had been rejected in rehearsal highlights his very strong ideas about the emotional bias of this scene. McKellen clearly believed that it was Coriolanus' son who actually broke his resolve and changed his mind from war to framing a 'convenient peace' (191). It is significant that the critics made no mention of the boy in this scene, although it is true that the exit with the soldiers framing the boy was only introduced long after press night. It was Irene Worth's Juno-like Volumnia who grabbed their attention.

The frisson this scene communicated to the audience was the result of the excitement that McKellen and Worth experienced when playing together. Benedict Nightingale in his review for the New York Times commented on the moment where Coriolanus grabs at Volumnia's hand:

for a moment in her final encounter with her son it looks as if she may not get her way, and you can sense her hurt, pique and sheer bafflement; but of course it passes. There is a long, long pause and Mr McKellen stretches out his hand to her, with a helpless gurgle of 'Mother, mother what have you done?' Formidable fellow though he is he never stood a chance with Miss Worth.⁶⁹

Hall had also made this a moment of intense emotion in his 1959 production, in which Edith Evans played Volumnia. Pamela Mason notes that:

⁶⁹ Benedict Nightingale, New York Times, 6 January 1985.

At the end of her long entreaty to Coriolanus the stage direction reads "Hold her by the hand, silent." The moment was held before Olivier quietly uttered, "O Mother, mother! What have you done?" (182-183) with the second phrase spoken quickly, almost fearfully.⁷⁰

The casting of Irene Worth helped ensure that the bias of the production toward the family group succeeded. She had recently played the part for a BBC television production. David Nathan observed that:

It cannot be coincidence that the programme illustrated Irene Worth's rich and varied past with pictures of her Jocasta (with Gielgud) in 1968. Arkadina and Mrs Alving, both from Greenwich in 1974, all women who have difficult if not downright sick relationships with their sons.⁷¹

Sheridan Morley described her Volumnia as being 'of classical strength and tragedy'⁷² Worth is an actress with a strong pedigree in the so-called classic roles. Her confidence and self-assurance on stage meant that McKellen and herself developed a great partnership. They improvised the scenes they had together in performance:

Crucially Irene and I always played the same basic form of relationship, it was just the subtle adjustments.⁷³

This is McKellen's preferred method of acting but is something he does only if he feels his fellow actor is confident enough to accept and react to slight changes. Irene Worth was later replaced by Yvonne Bryceland. Worth played the part for longer than she originally intended, which testifies to her enjoyment of playing opposite McKellen. The headline for Irving Wardle's review in The Times was 'Great dramatic partnership'⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Pamela Mason, 'Olivier's Shakespeare', (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Birmingham, 1978), p.181.

⁷¹ David Nathan, 'When the Unforeseen Happens', Plays International, December 1985, pp.16-17 (p.16).

⁷² Our Theatre in the Eighties, p.101.

⁷³ Bedford, p.141.

⁷⁴ Irving Wardle, The Times, 17 December 1984.

CONCLUSION

It is clear therefore that McKellen and Hall approached the play with very distinct personal agendas. McKellen was interested in his physical presentation of the central character feeling that his opportunity to play the role was being threatened by his age. Hall saw the increasingly right-wing politics of Mrs Thatcher and her government and the consequent unrest among the working and middle classes reflected in Shakespeare's text, making it a play for the moment. Although this might suggest that a conflict of interests was inevitable, no serious confrontation arose due to their mutual respect and their common Cambridge background. In 1984 McKellen, referring to the role of Coriolanus, stated that he believed that if he 'didn't do it soon I probably wouldn't do it at all'⁷⁵ Yet in 1990 Coriolanus was suggested as the companion piece to King Lear for the National Theatre's world tour, with McKellen once again playing the Roman soldier. His acceptance of this idea perhaps indicates how confident he felt about his physical performance in 1984. To agree to undertake a role which six years earlier he felt he might be too old for is testimony to how confident and how comfortable he felt in the role. In the event he didn't get to play Coriolanus again, because Richard Eyre decided on Richard III.

⁷⁵ Bedford, p.139.

OTHELLO

INTRODUCTION

Considering the success that the 1976 Macbeth enjoyed it was not surprising that the announcement of the reunion of Trevor Nunn and Ian McKellen for a production of Othello at The Other Place was greeted with eager anticipation. Othello was to be the last production at The Other Place before it closed for a period of renovation and refurbishment. Nunn was returning to the RSC after several years of working in commercial theatre, a period of substantial personal and financial success; Cats, Starlight Express, Aspects of Love and Les Miserables (the latter originally an RSC production) had made him a rich man and a star in the world of musicals. Before this Nunn had been the artistic director of the RSC for 18 years, and at the time of his departure he had felt that he was ‘a bit of an imposter running the RSC when I was so dried out with Shakespeare. I was terribly stale, self-critical’.¹ He returned refreshed and fired with enthusiasm. Othello was the first Shakespeare play he had directed in seven years, and, although he had always wanted to, Nunn had never directed the play before: ‘there’s always been a reason to prevaricate and put it off. Frequently at the RSC, because somebody wanted to do it urgently and one’s job as artistic director is to make things easy for other people’.² It was after the production of Macbeth that Nunn and McKellen had agreed that they would both like to present Othello in a small space. McKellen, according to Nunn, ‘only ever wanted to play Iago’³, so they had to find an Othello. Nunn realised that the partnership between McKellen and Dench had been vital to the overall interpretation of Macbeth and that if that central relationship had not

¹ Alex Renton, ‘Honest Conversation’, Independent, 17 August, 1989.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

worked the production would not have been effective. Therefore the quest to find a suitable Othello for McKellen's Iago was undertaken with care and deliberation. It took just over ten years for Nunn to find a partner for McKellen who would provide the right chemistry for the relationship to work. In 1987 Nunn directed the Jamaican-born opera singer Willard White in a production of Porgy and Bess at Glyndebourne and he 'noticed this quality of a room becoming silent when he walks into it'.⁴ Nunn had finally found his Othello.

White's operatic background made him the perfect foil for McKellen's Iago. White's elaborate gestures and exaggerated movements were contrasted with McKellen's inward, understated, physically cramped Iago. There is a theatrical tradition of actors alternating the two roles. This would have been impossible for White and McKellen, not simply due to the superficial matter of skin colour, (McKellen could have blacked-up and White would not have been the first black Iago - in 1989 Janet Suzman's Market Theatre production had a black actor in the role) but because their respective acting styles would have made nonsense of the characters as they portrayed them. McKellen does not possess the imposing physical stature of White nor his rich bass voice. White would not have been able to produce the detailed precision of McKellen's acting style. Nunn had not chosen White because of any similarity to McKellen but because of his differences.

For Nunn the roles were not interchangeable in terms of actors. In his production they clearly did not come from the same world. Nunn exploited the theatricality of White's natural stage presence and physicality. His acting was physically too big for the confined space of *The Other Place* and this seems to be what Nunn was

⁴ Alex Renton, 'Honest Conversation', Independent, 17 August, 1989.

aiming for. Othello's first entrance bodily communicated the rhetoric of Othello. He entered through the upstage centre doors, throwing them wide open and striding onto the wooden floor with his hands up in the air. Iago remained standing in the doorway. It was an effective visual expression of the differing temperaments of the two men: Othello animated, slightly out of control, over-reacting, physically expansive, Iago detached, cool, observing all carefully.

INTERPRETATION OF THE PLAY

The combination of a small acting space, attention to detail and a minimal set that had proved so felicitous for Macbeth was employed once again for Othello. The size of The Other Place also facilitated Nunn's reading of the play as a domestic drama rather than an epic tale of tragedy. The 'stark primitive world of tragedy'⁵ that links Othello with King Lear was rejected and replaced by a claustrophobic nineteenth-century civilised world of Venice and its colonial outpost Cyprus.

Nunn's highlighting of the elements of the play that coincided with the concerns of a nineteenth-century novel (which will be discussed presently) was influenced by his feeling for the language of the play. He believed that 'In writing the play Shakespeare seems to be taking himself to the limit in exploring the possibilities of real speech ... It's a text full of slang and stylistically it is immensely varied'.⁶ Nunn believed that this revolutionary change in Shakespeare's verse style was dictated by a change in his working conditions. He cited the fact that the bulk of the recorded performances of Othello in Shakespeare's day took place at Court. Nunn suggested that the performances were probably given in a more confined space than The Globe and it was

⁵ Michael Billington, Guardian, 26 August 1989

⁶ Alex Renton, 'Honest Conversation', Independent, 17 August 1989.

this new intimate venue that caused Shakespeare to alter his style in Othello. He saw the manner in which Iago speaks as being particularly instructive:

Iago speaks in torrents of prose which are extraordinarily arhythmic. The language is jagged it has right-angled tones, it has overlaps of thought, it's extraordinarily naturalistic and vernacular. It won't unlock until it's tapping naturalistic juices: it remains absolutely inert. And then one realises what Shakespeare is attempting. He's wanting these people to be immensely approachable, recognisable, human scale. He's not interested in any grandiloquent public effects.⁷

To unlock Shakespeare's language in Othello Nunn felt that he had to discard all the rules that he had previously thought 'sacrosanct or fundamental'.⁸ He rejected the starting points that are central to the RSC ethos of how actors should speak verse: 'observe the pentameter, mark the hiatus, observe the end of the line rather than the punctuation, pick up half lines and complete rhythmically'.⁹ Nunn felt that these rules would restrict the text by making it rhetorical, whereas he believed that Shakespeare's intention in Othello had been to move away from the rhetorical mode to a more vernacular, intimate, conversational mode. Nunn's opinion on the non-rhetorical style of the language obviously meant that he would require naturalistic, non-rhetorical, non-theatrical performances from his actors. The small acting space of The Other Place also required naturalistic acting; the audience was too close for any heightened or stylised acting. Macbeth had illustrated the effect intense naturalistic performances could have on an audience.

Naturalistic performances in a nineteenth-century setting, perhaps unsurprisingly, led the critics to compare Shakespeare's characters with characters from Chekhov, Ibsen and Strindberg. Zoe Wanamaker's Emilia was a close relative of Masha

⁷ Alex Renton, 'Honest Conversation', Independent, 17 August 1989.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

in Chekhov's The Seagull. She was quiet, unobtrusive but ever watchful. In Act 3 scene 3 Othello winced as he took a sip from the glass of lemonade that Desdemona had just poured for him. Young and inexperienced at housewifery Desdemona had forgotten to put any sugar in; Emilia quietly but efficiently remedied the situation. She smoked a pipe, rather than taking snuff, and she communicated an interior sorrow that is associated with Chekhovian females. Michael Ratcliffe referred to her as a 'troubled Chekhovian [sic] sphinx'.¹⁰ This comparison with nineteenth-century dramatic characters was not confined to Wanamaker's Emilia. Adam Mars-Jones thought that in Act 4 scene 3, when Desdemona (played by Imogen Stubbs) unlocked her dressing table to retrieve the sweets that Cassio had given her, she turned 'briefly into Nora from A Doll's House, hiding her sweet tooth from her father-husband'.¹¹ McKellen was described as 'a hellhound from Strindberg'¹² by Ratcliffe and Christopher Edwards agreed with him: 'Ian McKellen's Iago repeatedly puts you in mind of Strindberg... spiritually we are inside the four walls of bourgeois naturalist drama.'¹³ Billington thought that setting the play in such a precise time period gave the action 'a rare plausability'¹⁴ but it was the interpretation of the characters that made the events credible, the time period simply made sense of the characters, it presented the audience with a credible world from which such characters could spring. Nunn directed Othello as if it was part of the dramatic tradition of nineteenth-century Europe.

However, it was not just the drama of the nineteenth-century that Nunn had uppermost in his mind but also the prose of the period. His very specific reading of the

¹⁰ Michael Ratcliffe, Observer, 27 August 1989

¹¹ Adam Mars-Jones, Independent, 26 August 1989

¹² Michael Ratcliffe, Observer, 27 August 1989.

¹³ Christopher Edwards, Spectator, 2 September 1989

¹⁴ Michael Billington, Guardian, 26 August 1989.

play came from Nunn's belief in 'Shakespeare the novelist'.¹⁵ In an interview he told Peter Conrad that he saw the characters as having an 'obdurate, annoying truth to life.'¹⁶ Conrad recognised the link that Nunn was making between the Elizabethan play and the literary traditions of the nineteenth-century; 'Shakespeare the novelist is a colleague of Jane Austen and George Eliot and like them concentrates on marriage so as to inspect the abrasive relationship between men and women and between individuals and society.'¹⁷

Nunn's reading of the play can be seen to be reflective of social and cultural trends current at the end of the 1980's and the start of the 1990's. Virginia Mason Vaughan sees Nunn's choice to present the play as a 'search for meaning in human relationships, the struggle to find trust and intimacy in a world of appearances, the fragility of human bonds' as being 'symptomatic of the 1990s, when each day's newspaper features the story of another battered woman murdered by her husband or boyfriend'.¹⁸ Vaughan believes that Nunn's production presented both Emilia and Desdemona as battered wives who are violently murdered by their husbands.¹⁹ Certainly Nunn focused the play on the two marriages: Emilia's and Iago's; Othello's and Desdemona's rather than on the Venetian-Turkish conflict. The feminist Shakespeare criticism of the 1980's may have influenced Nunn encouraging him to present a production that examined the gender relations.

Nunn carefully characterised a male world where bonding was established through alcohol and tobacco: In the Senate scene the men shared brandy and cigars, in

¹⁵ Peter Conrad, 'When Less Means Moor', *Observer Magazine*, 29 April 1990, pp. 24-26, p.26

¹⁶ Conrad, p.26

¹⁷ Conrad, p.26

¹⁸ Virginia Mason Vaughan, *Othello - a contextual history* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p.219.

¹⁹ Vaughan, p.228.

Act 2 scene 1 Iago passed round his hip flask and distributed stolen cigars to the soldiers waiting on the quay for Othello. Act 2 scene 3 was the finest example of the importance of alcohol in the male world. Their relationships were shown to be superficial, formed by sharing a drink. There was no room for sensitivity in this macho military world and the absence of women lead to fumbled attempts at intimacy between themselves. The physical intimacy the men desired with the women was thwarted by the fact that their worlds were separate: 'women are by definition excluded from the battlefield and barracks' ²⁰

Iago knew about the male desire for intimacy with the female because he felt it too but he was also able to exploit it in others, especially in Roderigo. In Act 1 scene 3 Roderigo, overcome by self-pity, fell to the floor after declaring, 'then we have a prescription to die, when death is/ our physician' (306-7). Iago knelt behind Roderigo and pulled him up onto a chair. Iago continued to stand behind him and soothed him by rubbing his temples as he lectured him, 'Our bodies are our gardens, to the which our wills/are gardeners' (317-8). He increased the physical intimacy by removing Roderigo's hat and running his fingers through his hair. Roderigo relaxed and comforted by Iago's corporal manipulation accepted his advice to 'Put money in thy purse'(336) and follow the war. Before he exited, Roderigo crossed to hug Iago, the false body language of Iago he had read as truth. Running his fingers through Roderigo's hair was a parody, or rather a perversion, of the same action which Othello had performed with Desdemona in Act 1 scene 3, as he begged the senate to allow his wife to go with him to Cyprus. As Othello protested that he wished this 'not/ To please the palate of my appetite,/ Nor to comply with heat' (258-60) he played gently with

²⁰ Vaughan, p.226.

Desdemona's hair as he stood behind her. Roderigo was denied the intimacy with Desdemona that Othello had demonstrated. The next best thing was to become Desdemona and receive pleasure from Iago. Thus Nunn not only pointed up Othello's failure to appreciate the strength of his lust but also created a vivid stage picture which Iago noted and then used to further his own ends with Roderigo. Nothing escaped Iago, although he appeared not to see anything.

The female world was depicted as being much more fragile. For most of the play Emilia and Desdemona were isolated from each other. Both were trying to form a relationship with their husbands in the male world. Wanamaker's Emilia was masculine, smoking her pipe, accepting a swig from Iago's hip flask in Act 2 scene 2. She ignored Desdemona's tears and distress in Act 2 scene 1; it was Cassio who hugged and comforted her. Emilia passed the time whistling to herself. She was hardened to any affection she thought sentimental. Again it was Iago and not Emilia who comforted Desdemona in Act 4 scene 2.

It was in Act 4 scene 3 that Desdemona and Emilia achieved a moment of solidarity, a shared understanding of the female position in the male world. The sympathy between them was expressed in a gesture of intimacy. Desdemona said 'So get thee gone; good night' (55) and leant forward and hugged Emilia but she did not return the gesture of affection; she remained stiff and unresponsive in Desdemona's embrace. The scene continued and Emilia sat in a chair while Desdemona placed herself at her feet. She unlocked her dressing table to retrieve the sweets that Cassio had given her, they shared these as they discussed whether they could be unfaithful to their husbands. The shared sweets bonded them just as the alcohol had the male characters. Desdemona said goodnight again and this time it was Emilia who lent forward in the

chair to cuddle Desdemona. The scene clearly expressed an emotional rebirth for Emilia made possible by her intimacy with Desdemona. The natural, free, open expression of affection that Desdemona had displayed towards Emilia and her artless, innocent naivety, had unlocked Emilia's stifled emotions; she had relearned the language of physical affection.

This fragile new relationship made Emilia's lament over the murdered Desdemona much more poignant and her savage attack on Othello more convincing because the audience understood its raw and wild emotion. Emilia's murder by Iago was seen as the male response to her choosing 'this female bond over the marital relationship'²¹ Iago's power over her as husband had been superseded by the claim of female solidarity in the face of male violence. Emilia's desire for physical intimacy with her husband led her to betraying her sex by giving Desdemona's handkerchief to him. However, once she has been re-born emotionally, through her moment of physical intimacy with Desdemona, he has no power over her. She no longer needs anything from him.

The nineteenth-century setting enabled Nunn to emphasise the separate worlds of the sexes. It also provided a wider literary context for his interpretation of Shakespeare's play. Nineteenth-century prose as well as nineteenth-century drama tends to focus on the institution of marriage and in particular scrutinises the position of the female within it. This perspective coincided with his concern to highlight the gender relationships in the play. The military context of the play added a further barrier between the sexes rather than establishing a sense of the 'global framework'²² of the play. The martial background stressed the patriarchal and macho male world that made

²¹ Vaughan, p.227

²² Ibid. p.218.

satisfactory relationships between the sexes impossible. The historical setting allowed Nunn to comment on current concerns about the differences between the sexes and an increased awareness of domestic violence more objectively.

COSTUME

Nunn created a precise sense of period for the production through costume. The uniforms which Othello, Iago and Cassio wore were similar to those worn in the American Civil War, especially the peaked braided caps. The critic John Gross also saw hints of the Austro-Hungarian army,²³ while other critics thought the costumes were influenced by the Franco-Prussian war. Robert Gore-Langton described the military dress as being 'somewhere between Beau Geste and Gone with the Wind'.²⁴ For the cabinet meeting in Act 1 scene 3 the Venetian senate's frock coats reinforced the audience's sense of the nineteenth-century period of the production. John Barton's 1971 production at the RSC had been set in the nineteenth-century with Brewster Mason's Othello dressed as a Victorian gentleman and casually lighting a cigar in the Senate scene. The nineteenth-century world in which Barton set the play was more consistently military, brutal with 'a barrack-room atmosphere' which 'favoured Iago's story, sharpened the audience's sense of rank, and gave an edge to Iago's envy at Cassio's promotion'.²⁵ However, for Nunn, choosing a nineteenth-century setting for the play was part of a more complex search for reciprocal resonances between the Elizabethan text, the setting and the audience.

²³ John Gross, Sunday Telegraph, 27 August, 1989.

²⁴ Robert Gore-Langton, 'A Round, Unvarnish'd Tale', The Listener, 1 February 1990, pp.36-7, p.36.

²⁵ William Shakespeare, Othello, ed. by Julie Hankey (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1987), p.116-117.

SET

Although the costumes were suggestive of the nineteenth-century, the set was so simple that the world it presented remained imprecise. The set was very basic, a square acting area with a back wall of louvred doors, a narrow, raised wooden platform with two posts at either end, suggesting a southern American verandah. Additional props were used to define the place in which each scene was taking place. Thus in Act 1 scene 3 the atmosphere of an urgent council meeting, taking place in the middle of the night, was created by a round table with four low back chairs around it, three high-backed chairs positioned around the edges, carpets, and a green overhead lamp; rolled-up maps, letters, rulers, cigarettes, ashtrays and brandy glasses were spread across the table. The quay in Act 2 scene 1 was created by a telescope on a tripod stage left, a pile of blankets and two lanterns stage right and a scattering of sand on the floor. Othello and Desdemona's bedroom was dominated by a four-poster double bed, centre stage; two easy chairs, a table with a framed photograph of Brabantio, a stool and the luggage, which the audience had seen brought ashore in Act 2 scene 1, completed the domestic ambience.

MCKELLEN'S PERFORMANCE PART 1: THE PUBLIC IAGO

Due to mixed feelings over White's performance, McKellen was regarded by the critics as the dominant force in the production. His performance received general acclaim. McKellen's characterisation of Iago was a manifestation of the character's assertion 'I am not what I am' (1.1.66). McKellen played two personalities, the public and the private Iago. The public Iago was a fussy, military mother-hen, always tidying up, pulling his jacket down, checking his cap was on straight. He always had a hip flask ready to dispense a drop of the hard stuff to heal the other characters' physical and

emotional hurts: Roderigo had a swig in Act 1 scene 1 to cheer and bolster himself up for calling on Brabantio; Emilia gratefully accepted a sip to warm herself up in Act 1 scene 2 having completed the sea journey, as did the other soldiers, waiting on the quay. 'He is a person everyone instinctively turns to for practical help'²⁶ and prepared to cater for everybody's need. One of the production's props was Iago's first-aid kit which was his box of magic tricks; he produced his hip flask from it in Act 1 scene 2, and the bottles of wine, corkscrew and mugs he used in Act 2 scene 3. He was also the character whose energy galvanised others into action. In Act 1 scene 1, having persuaded Roderigo of his hatred of the Moor, he became the director of the action, pointing out the direction of Brabantio's house, giving his instructions; Roderigo obeyed, caught up in the whirlwind of Iago's frenzied energy. Iago provided a similar impetus to the action in Act 2 scene 3. The stage business which best typified the public Iago was also present in Act 2 scene 3. Cassio lay reading on his bed in the barracks; a quiet picture of an off-duty soldier relaxing. Desdemona and Othello entered to wish him good night; in this setting this action was another testament to the friendship between all three characters.

Iago then entered took off his sword, neatly hung it up while Cassio had a wash. Comfortable in each other's company, they both lay on their beds and gossiped about their general and his wife. Iago, more fastidious than Cassio, carefully turned back the bottom of his blanket so as not to dirty it with his boots. Iago was suddenly fired into renewed activity with 'Come, Lieutenant, I have a stoop of wine'(26). He opened his first aid box and produced two bottles, a tin tooth mug and a corkscrew. He uncorked the bottles, wiped out the washing bowl with his towel, which he threw over his

²⁶ Harry Eyres, The Times, 26 August 1989.

shoulder as he emptied the two bottles into the bowl. By the time Iago had finished he had persuaded Cassio to join in the drinking and Cassio exited to find the 'brace of Cyprus gallants' (28). The relentless energy of Iago overpowered Cassio. While he was out of the room Iago took out a flask from his box and added some of its contents to the bowl. He stirred it with his finger which he then licked. He considered the taste and added some more. Satisfied with his concoction he took two more enamel tooth mugs and placed them next to the bowl ready to be filled. The master of ceremonies was ready. The rowdy drinking session which followed included one of the youths being debugged by Iago.

After the fight and Othello's dismissal of Cassio, Iago and Cassio were once more alone together in their barrack room. Iago immediately started clearing up, tidying up his own bed and putting his belongings back into his box, which he also put away neatly. Cassio was sick into the bowl, Iago crossed over to him, felt his head and body and proceeded with professional nursing efficiency to wash the bowl out, wipe it dry and replace it stage left. As he left Cassio, 'Good night, Lieutenant, I must/to the watch (23-24), he picked up his blanket and covered him with it. Cassio who had been half propped up on his bed was moved by this kindness and gratefully lay down fully for his mother-substitute Iago to tuck him in. Cassio's response 'Good night honest Iago' (25) was an utterly natural expression of thanks. How could Cassio have known that Iago was dangerous?

The production made clear to the audience how Iago duped his victims. The outward presentation of a dependable, helpful, resourceful, ordinary soldier was created in front of the audience. This characterisation reflected Nunn's belief that the play has to be 'uncomfortably recognisable. You have to admit to yourself that you would trust

Iago, and that you'd feel Othello's jealousy'.²⁷ The public face of Iago was devastating because it was so credible and so ironic that 'He tidied up people's lives superficially while undermining their certainties prior to projecting them into chaos'²⁸ Iago consolidated his practical alleviation of the other characters' needs with physical reassurance and comfort. This imbued McKellen's Iago with particular repulsiveness. Harry Eyres referred to Iago's 'disciplined, leathery toughness' which he displayed in 'every movement'²⁹, but this was balanced by a false tenderness that Iago fooled his victims with when they were at their weakest, emotionally.

Perhaps the most painful and repugnant instance of Iago's false physical tenderness was his hugging and kissing of Desdemona in Act 4 scene 2. In Nunn's production Desdemona, distraught at the violence and anger of the words that Othello has just spoken to her, is desperate for physical comfort. Iago was stealthy in his approach, he cautiously moved towards her asking, 'How is't with you?' (109), then more secure in the situation he completed his movement towards her and held her hands urging her 'Do not weep, do not weep. Alas the day!' (123) She continued to cry and Iago sat upright behind her and cuddled her. The stage picture of Iago, sitting with his arms around Desdemona as she cried, her head on his chest, while Emilia spoke of 'Some base notorious knave, some scurvy fellow' (139) who was responsible for slandering Desdemona, was tragically ironic. (See Fig. 13) The 'cogging, cozening slave' (131) was in their midst acting as comforter. Iago, perhaps elated by the success of his deceit, perhaps testing the extent of his audacity or perhaps giving in to his own lust, kissed Desdemona before she and Emilia exited. He looked after them as they left;

²⁷ Conrad, p.26

²⁸ Paul Lapworth, Stratford-upon-Avon Herald, 1 September 1989.

²⁹ Harry Eyres, The Times, 26 August 1989.

McKellen 'chillingly purged the glance of emotion'³⁰ Iago had no guilt over ruining both the women's lives. The show of gentle care and pity that he had just displayed towards Desdemona was immediately revealed to be empty, yet it had been utterly convincing. Iago also cradled Cassio in his arms as he prepared to stab him in Act 5 scene 1, before he was frightened off.

Iago's physical relationship with Emilia was troubled by his seeming desire for intimacy but his inability to express that need adequately. In Act 2 scene 1 Iago dried his hair with a towel which he then gently flicked at Emilia, teasing her playfully. At the end of the scene, perhaps angry at Cassio, kissing her hand and cheek, or perhaps fired by lust induced by watching Othello and Desdemona's kissing, he grabbed Emilia and kissed her with a passionate, roughness. She was non-plussed by this sudden outburst of physical affection but, before she could return it, Iago ordered her to meet him 'presently at the harbour' (207) and then turned away from her to Roderigo. Iago had difficulty expressing any positive emotion, although the exchanges with Emilia suggested he did still have affection for her. His jealousy had not quite killed it all. In Act 3 scene 3 at line 87, Othello pulled Desdemona towards him and bestowed on her a lengthy, passionate farewell kiss. Iago watched them, Emilia looked at Iago and caught his eyes but there was no warmth in them for her. Although earlier in the scene he had sat on the arm of Emilia's chair to drink his lemonade and there was a suggestion of his desire to rekindle an intimacy with her.

Emilia believed that her discovery of Desdemona's handkerchief would win her husband back. Nunn placed the interval in the middle of Act 3 scene 3 so that the second half opened with Emilia's speech, 'I am glad I have found this napkin' (286).

³⁰ Conrad, p.25.

She taunted Iago with it when he entered, he finally snatched it from her, and then pulled her onto his lap and kissed her hard, breaking off as suddenly as he had begun. He pushed her off roughly, curtly dismissing her enquiry as to why he wanted it with 'Why, what is that to you?' (312) Wanamaker showed in her face Emilia's pain, she was hurt and confused, what Emilia had hoped would be a means of reviving her husband's love had made him more remote. The pain from this scene was carried into Act 3 scene 4 and informed Emilia's bitter comments of men, 'They eat us hungerly, and when they are full,/ They belch us' (101-2) and also into Act 4 scene 3 and her conversation with Desdemona.

McKELLEN'S PERFORMANCE PART 2: THE PRIVATE IAGO

The superficiality of Iago's exterior personality was dramatically revealed in Act 2 scene 1:

In Cyprus, Mr McKellen is the military joker who relishes his role as the camp entertainer; but, in one swift move, he turns his back on Desdemona and the rest to reveal his superhuman contempt for these laughing fools.³¹

McKellen was able to switch from the public to the private man in an instant. Peter Conrad recorded McKellen's frightening effectiveness at showing the hollowness of the public persona. McKellen re-enacted for him the debagging of the soldier in Act 2 scene 3:

McKellen began to act the nasty little macho jape in a corner of the office. As he did so, his face turned wan and waxy, his eyes emptied and began to stare at me in a dull mesmerism; the joke lost all humour as he stood aside from it to watch himself manipulating his victims.³²

It was McKellen's eyes that the critics often mentioned as revealing the emotionless, empty man, he presented as the public Iago. McKellen has the ability to strip his eyes of

³¹ Michael Billington, *Guardian*, 26 August 1989.

³² Conrad, p.26.

any emotion. They were dead only coming to life in the soliloquies or when Iago was activating his plots. There was a look of surprised delight in Iago's eyes when Othello hit Desdemona in Act 4 scene 1. Otherwise when in public McKellen's eyes were devoid of any emotion, or flicker of life. The moment in McKellen's performance which struck the majority of the critics was the final image of the production, Iago staring at the 'tragic loading' of the bed. His eyes were blank, empty, it was impossible to read any emotion from them. The audience were left questioning what he was thinking; was he trying to make sense of his bloody work, was it a triumphal gaze at this proof of his skill? The critics offered various explanations of Iago's feelings at this moment: Adam Mars-Jones wrote in the Independent, 'Iago edges towards the bed where Othello and Desdemona lie dead, his face still hungry for their secret',³³ Matthew Williams in the Stratford-upon-Avon Observer commented:

As the bodies of Othello and Desdemona lie on the bed Iago, now mute and withdrawn like all the best killers at the point of capture, moves forward to gaze on his handiwork with the same inquisitiveness of a schoolboy performing a biology vivisection.³⁴

Michael Coveney thought that the sight of the dead couple was 'more voyeuristic meat' for Iago, whose features at this instant were 'pallid, puzzled',³⁵ Charles Osborne was unsure whether Iago's gaze revealed a 'fascination with Othello or... with death.'³⁶ McKellen's eyes refused to comment on the scene. He held the implacable stare that had been present throughout the production, his eyes remained blank and expressionless as the stage lights came down for the end of the play.

Iago's eyes along with his voice really came to life in the confessional soliloquies. It was during these that the 'hard bitten mask' slipped 'just enough to

³³ Adam Mars-Jones, Independent, 26 August 1989.

³⁴ Matthew Williams, Stratford-upon-Avon Observer, 31 August 1989.

³⁵ Michael Coveney, Financial Times, 26 August 1989.

³⁶ Charles Osborne, Daily Telegraph, 26 August 1989.

reveal the cancerous workings of jealousy’³⁷ McKellen’s performance supports Rosenberg’s comment that ‘the more accurately the actor playing Iago expresses the image of a thwarted human being, the more powerful is the play’s impression of tragic life’³⁸ Iago’s inner, private existence was revealed in the soliloquies. They were addressed directly to the audience. Before he started his first soliloquy in Act 1 scene 3 McKellen looked round the audience, slowly taking everybody in, making sure everybody’s attention was riveted on him. The soliloquies were delivered matter-of-factly, Iago chatted to the audience about his evil machinations. The casual tone made them bald statements of evil intent which was chilling, but it also presented his plots as rational; the soliloquies were not uncontrolled, frenzied outpourings. This fitted McKellen’s personal agenda to make Iago something more than simply the incarnation of evil. McKellen believed that the motivation for Iago’s evil is that, ‘He’s jealous too, like Othello, and afraid of being cuckolded’³⁹ McKellen accepted what Iago stated in the soliloquies as being the truth:

Every academic says Iago’s jealousy stems from what he says to Roderigo about his thwarted promotion. They miss the point. ... That is what he tells Roderigo. He tells the audience something different: “I don’t like Cassio and I hate Othello, because I think they have fucked my wife. Even if they haven’t, it *feels* as if they have.”⁴⁰

Michael Coveney thought that McKellen re-defined ‘the areas of jealousy in the play by being himself gnawed up with it’⁴¹ By giving Iago such definite motivation McKellen was able to make sense of his actions. McKellen’s Iago convinced himself of the justice of his scheming, as Nunn told Peter Conrad: ‘Iago believes his own lies, he acts them

³⁷ Harry Eyres, The Times, 26 August 1989.

³⁸ Marvin Rosenberg, The Masks of Othello, (Berkeley: London: California University Press, 1961), p.170

³⁹ Conrad, p.26.

⁴⁰ Robert Gore-Langton, ‘A Round, Unvarnish’d Tale’, The Listener, 1 February 1990, pp.36-7 (p.37).

⁴¹ Michael Coveney, Financial Times, 26 August 1989.

out with extraordinary emotional conviction.’⁴² McKellen wanted to make Iago ‘real’. He did this by presenting the soliloquies as truthful confessions to the audience, straightforward explanations of his inner pain and insecurity which has led him to invent these plots. Thus in Act 5 scene 1 Iago was about to stab Cassio but, disturbed by Gratiano and Lodovico, he picked up his lantern, crossed over to Roderigo who was staggering to his feet and stabbed him instead. This action supported the information which Iago had divulged in his soliloquy, at the opening of the scene, that Cassio rather than Roderigo must die because he has ‘a daily beauty in his life’(19) and more importantly because ‘the Moor/ May unfold me to him - there stand I in much peril’ (20-1). This confirmed the production’s presentation of the soliloquies as being truthful, the only element of Iago’s conversation not infected with deceit. The private Iago only existed during the soliloquies and, once McKellen had established the inner persona, playing the role of the public Iago was easy; ‘I don’t have to act the pain or the emotion, because Iago always covers up. All I do is play a man in a light comedy who is cheery to everybody.’⁴³ Jose Ferrer, who played Iago opposite Paul Robeson’s Othello on Broadway in 1943, has written that his characterisation was based on presenting ‘the simplest most trustworthy character I could suggest when in the presence of others’⁴⁴ The critics appreciated McKellen’s presentation of the double persona of Iago. It made sense of the character.

The connection between the public and the private Iago was Iago’s intelligence. McKellen invested him with sharp attentiveness. He appeared not to observe anything while he observed everything, storing it up to use at a later date. In Act 1 scene 3

⁴² Conrad, p.26.

⁴³ Robert Gore-Langton, ‘A Round, Unvarnish’d Tale’, *The Listener*, 1 February 1990, pp.36-7 (p.37).

⁴⁴ Martin L. Wine, *Othello Text and Performance* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1984), p.59.

Desdemona looked at Cassio on the word 'win' when the Duke spoke his line; 'I think this tale would win my daughter too' (170). Desdemona identified Othello as her husband in front of the assembly and it was Cassio she looked at, as well as smiling at Othello. Her glance to Cassio established that he was part of the conspiracy. Roderigo noticed the look she gave Cassio and tried to catch Iago's eye but he appeared not to be noticing anything, looking straight ahead, a soldier at attention in the presence of his general. (See Fig.12) This network of small glances established the triangular relationship between Othello, Desdemona and Cassio which Iago later used to destroy Othello's marriage. It prepared the audience for Iago's exploitation of its weaknesses especially the revelation that Cassio was the go-between in Othello's courtship of Desdemona. In Act 2 scene 3 Iago delivered his soliloquy sitting on Cassio's bed, with Cassio fast asleep, after he had spoken his line; 'Even as her appetite shall play the god/ With his weak function'(337-8) Cassio turned over and put one of his legs across Iago's lap. Iago removed the leg with a look of distaste and stood up. This seemingly insignificant moment of stage business became pivotal in the destruction of Othello in Act 3 scene 3. Iago remembered this moment and incorporated it into the tissue of lies that he used to ensnare Othello;

In sleep I heard him say, 'Sweet Desdemona
 Let us be wary, let us hide our loves'
 And then, sir, would he grope and wring my hand,
 Cry 'O sweet creature' and then kiss me hard,
 As if he plucked up kisses by the roots,
 That grew upon my lips; then laid his leg
 Over my thigh, and sighed and kissed (16-22).

The attention to detail not only made the intellectual core of the play convincing, but it also empowered its emotional impact. Iago's intelligence was a keen awareness of the endless possibilities of exploitation. During Iago's first soliloquy

McKellen illustrated his lines 'The Moor is of a free and open nature/ That thinks men honest that but seem to be so' (1.3.393-4) with what appeared to be the unnecessary, obvious, stage business of stealing some cigars from a box in the Duke's council chamber. He placed the cigars in the top pocket of his uniform. In Act 2 scene 1 Iago retrieved the cigars from his pocket and gave them to the soldiers waiting on the quay for Othello's arrival. What might have seemed a fussy, overstated piece of business was revealed to be a telling clue as to the nature of Iago's character. He was always ready and alert to exploit an opportunity; he stole the cigars because he knew they might be useful to him. He used them to gain favour with the men. It enabled the audience to see how he persuaded the other characters of his honesty, generosity, and caring nature. It was these men whom he later used in his plot against Cassio.

McKELLEN'S VOCAL PERFORMANCE

Nunn expected his new ideas on speaking Shakespeare's text would bring criticism. McKellen's vocal performances are often the target of dissatisfaction. However, the objections to his vocal performance were mainly to his personal mannerisms rather than to Nunn's emphasis on a conversational delivery. Adam Mars-Jones disliked McKellen's delivery of the soliloquies which he found 'full of familiar vocal tricks, inbreathed gasps, explosive final consonants, artificial nuance, a whole apparatus of synthethic excitement.'⁴⁵ Christopher Edwards felt that the vocal traits were part of the character not a McKellen mannerism: 'Hatred bubbles out of his throat, choking his speech.'⁴⁶ McKellen used a flat North Country accent which John Gross described as having a 'take-it-or-leave-it' tone to it.⁴⁷ He pronounced the word

⁴⁵ Adam Mars-Jones, *Independent*, 26 August 1989.

⁴⁶ Christopher Edwards, *Spectator*, 2 September 1989.

⁴⁷ John Gross, *Sunday Telegraph*, 27 August 1989.

'Moor' as 'mou-er'. He exaggerated his pronunciation of certain words, for example 'patent' in 'give her patent/ to offend' (4.1.196-7) stressing the alliteration with Othello's previous repetition of the word 'pity'. His 'clipped Northern consonants' were part of his characterisation of Iago as a stiff, obsessively neat, fussy, 'buttoned-down, bottled-up' NCO.⁴⁸ His terseness reflected his uptight personality, the only time his voice resonated beyond this restricted manner was in the soliloquies. The critics generally gave whole-hearted approval to this vocal interpretation.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE IAGOS OF EMRYS JAMES AND BOB PECK

McKellen's characterisation of Iago owes a debt to both Emrys James' interpretation of the role at the RSC in 1971 and Bob Peck's in 1979. This is not surprising given McKellen's outspoken admiration for both actors. Emrys James' Iago was in its turn influenced by Frank Finlay's performance opposite Olivier's Othello at the National Theatre in 1964. The concept that links all the performances is 'the idea of extraordinary evil arising out of nothing very special'.⁴⁹ Bob Peck's Iago was described as 'a dogged North country NCO... never more dangerous than in understatement'.⁵⁰ Both Finlay and James also adopted provincial northern accents. Finlay was close cropped, James bald; both presented Iago as a lower class soldier. Bringing Iago down the social scale makes him once again the 'low scoundrel he was in the eighteenth and for much of the nineteenth centuries'.⁵¹ McKellen's performance can be seen as fitting into this tradition. It followed James' performance especially closely in its emphasis on the sudden switch from friendly soldier to deadly villain. J.C. Trewin commented on 'the leering bonhomie that turns to a deadly concentration'⁵² in James' characterisation

⁴⁸ Jack Tinker, Daily Mail, 26 August 1989.

⁴⁹ Hankey, p. 118.

⁵⁰ Steve Grant, Observer, 6 August 1979.

⁵¹ Hankey, p. 108.

⁵² J.C. Trewin, Birmingham Post, 10 September 1971.

and Lloyd Evans in the Guardian observed that 'James's Iago is an army lad whose high jinks can turn to calculated vice at the dropping of a handkerchief'.⁵³ However, McKellen's interpretation differed in one very important area from James': his Iago was not vulgar, he was not governed by petty spite, his characterisation of Iago would not allow him to cackle over the dead bodies at the end of the play as James' Iago did. This demonstration of Iago's enjoyment of his evil was something that Peck also highlighted. The reviewer for the Morning Star described Peck's Iago as a 'Northern club comedian' who 'capitalises on the wit, humour and charm of this demonic character'.⁵⁴ McKellen's Iago differed from those of James and Peck in that there was no real sense of enjoyment about Iago's plotting. Rather it was presented as enabling him to 'suck up some deadly life-force'.⁵⁵ The other important differentiating factor about McKellen's Iago was his fierce intelligence.

CONCLUSION

The fact that it took ten years for Nunn to find an appropriate Othello for McKellen's Iago highlights the meticulous manner in which he approaches Shakespeare's texts. He knows what he wants to realise in a production and is ruthless and relentless in pursuing his ideal. Part of his directorial style is a sharp focus on the detail of the play. The majority of the critics cited Nunn's unique attention to detail in this production of Othello as being the crucial axis around which the strong, effective performances were built. Michael Billington saw 'microscopic attention to detail'⁵⁶ as Nunn's trademark and Matthew Williams rejoiced that Nunn 'packed detail after detail into every scene'.⁵⁷ When considering McKellen's success as Iago it is important to

⁵³ Gareth Lloyd Evans, Guardian, 11 September 1971.

⁵⁴ Morning Star, 23 August 1979.

⁵⁵ Jack Tinker, Daily Mail, 26 August 1989.

⁵⁶ Michael Billington, Guardian, 26 August 1989.

⁵⁷ Matthew Williams, Stratford-Upon-Avon Observer, 31 August 1989.

recognise that his performance owes much to the tight and precise world of the play which Nunn provided him with.

The real brilliance of McKellen's characterisation of Iago was that not only did he manage to make the audience understand Iago but he also managed to 'induce a compassion for this pitiable creature'⁵⁸ while simultaneously refusing to present any 'redeeming characteristics' or 'any tiny shred of remorse'⁵⁹ He did not compromise the character in any way and yet he gained the audience's sympathy.

McKellen's precise, detailed, sharply intelligent portrayal of Iago was thrown into relief by White's Othello, and just as Dench had been vital to McKellen's performance in Macbeth so in Othello White with his rich voice and over-powering physicality provided the vital visual and emotional counter-balance to McKellen's arid, acid, reptilian performance.

Although critics applauded the strength and depth of all the cast, it was McKellen's performance as Iago which elicited the greatest praise. The production was naturally compared to Macbeth and assigned a place in theatrical history alongside it. The combination of Nunn and McKellen and small-scale Shakespeare had triumphed again. Nunn was seemingly able to contain and refine McKellen's tendency towards excessive, overly-flamboyant, tricky acting. Nunn's attention to the detail perfectly matched McKellen's working method which is to examine every line, 'Never to take anything for granted in Shakespeare' to 'discover exactly what Shakespeare means, because Shakespeare always means something exact'.⁶⁰ Irving Wardle has written that

⁵⁸ Michael Billington, Guardian, 26 August 1989.

⁵⁹ E C, Stratford-upon-Avon Journal, 31 August 1989.

⁶⁰ Shakespeare Superscribe, ed. by Myra Barrs (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1980), p.22.

'the test of great acting is not impersonation but revelation',⁶¹ McKellen's performance as Iago was revelatory. Benedict Nightingale wrote:

... it is his Iago that theatre historians will surely be discussing in 100 years. Somehow McKellen was simultaneously that unobtrusively efficient NCO and a human animal tortured by his own lovelessness. Beneath that cropped, arid exterior was jealousy far more corrosive than Othello's: more dangerous for its quietness, the more eloquent for its restraint; McKellen at his most confident, mature, and maybe even great.⁶²

⁶¹ Irving Wardle, The Times, 14 September 1977.

⁶² Benedict Nightingale, The Times, 30 January 1990

KING LEAR - National Theatre (1990)

INTRODUCTION - THE GENESIS OF THE TOURING PROJECT

In 1990, two years into his appointment as director of the National Theatre, Richard Eyre decided to take positive action to improve the company's poor commitment to touring: 'If you're called National, the obligation to tour is inescapable.'¹ Coincidentally McKellen had been talking to Eyre about returning to the South Bank on McKellen's proviso that he could tour for a year. He was in the middle of a successful revival of Martin Sherman's play Bent at the Garrick Theatre. McKellen's personal belief in taking productions out of the metropolis and round the country is illustrated by his own career. Prospect, the Actors' Company and the McKellen/Petherbridge group formed in 1985, all testify to his loyalty to his own regional background and his sense of debt to the companies that toured in his youth. Under Peter Hall's directorship, at the National Theatre, McKellen with his partner from the Actors' Company, Edward Petherbridge, had led a national and world tour with productions of The Duchess of Malfi and The Real Inspector Hound. As an experienced tour organiser McKellen must have seemed the obvious choice to lead a revival of touring at the National Theatre. Eyre gave him carte blanche as to the selection of plays, directors and actors. McKellen immediately approached the director Deborah Warner, whose acclaimed production of Titus Andronicus for the RSC had just finished its London run, and had won her the Evening Standard Drama Award for Best Director. She had also received great praise for her 1988 RSC production of King John, and had a reputation as an exciting new Shakespeare director. Both of these Warner Shakespeare productions were staged in small spaces and one of the main

¹ Peter Lewis, 'McKellen and his foot soldiers', Sunday Times, 22 July 1990.

challenges for her on McKellen's project was directing for much larger spaces, initially the Lyttelton Theatre. The fact that McKellen approached Warner highlights his awareness of directorial talent. It was Petherbridge and McKellen who first invited Philip Prowse to the National. Warner's response to McKellen's offer for her to direct a play for the tour was to suggest King Lear, with her recent Titus, Brian Cox, playing Lear. She had directed the play before for her own fringe theatre company, Kick Theatre. Titus Andronicus had proved Deborah Warner and Brian Cox to be an exciting combination, just as Macbeth had done for the partnership of Trevor Nunn and Ian McKellen, so the reunion of Warner and Cox for a production of King Lear held great promise. Directing Cox as Lear seemed the next logical step after their success with Titus Andronicus. Originally McKellen had envisaged that one director would direct both plays. Coriolanus was accepted as the companion piece, with McKellen once more in the title role; again a play Warner had previously directed for Kick Theatre. However, Warner changed her mind, deciding that directing both plays would be too much, and so McKellen invited Eyre to direct a play of his choice. Eyre was flattered to have been asked to be part of the project and chose Richard III.² Just as McKellen's original idea for the National Theatre tour was to have one director for both plays so it was envisaged that the productions would have one designer: Bob Crowley. However, he declined King Lear because he had designed Adrian Noble's RSC production in 1982. Hildegard Bechtler, who had designed the set for Warner's production of Electra, in 1989, was asked to take over.³

² Brian Cox, The Lear Diaries (London: Methuen, 1992), p.8.

³ Cox, pp.14-15.

McKellen was not only part of the acting company, he was also the producer of the tour and company manager. He had to cope with all the domestic and technical problems the company faced. In Madrid they were confronted with a strike by theatre technicians. Cox commented, in his diary of the two productions, on the way McKellen handled the situation: 'He can take comfort from the fact that he exercised brilliant company leadership. His fairness and egalitarianism showed remarkable statesmanship.'⁴

McKellen also has a personal love of touring that has nothing to do with his intellectual and moral belief in it. He likes to feel part of a close, selective community; his emotional world seems to be the world of the theatre and a touring company intensifies the element of comradeship and togetherness that exist in any small community. In an interview in 1990 Peter Lewis asked McKellen how he felt about giving up a year of his life to the tour. McKellen's response was: 'I don't see it as giving anything up. What else would I rather do with a year of my life? Nothing.'⁵

WARNER'S CHARACTERISTICS AS A DIRECTOR

Through her successful productions of King John and Titus Andronicus Warner had become well-known for her trust in the text and rejection of 'concept theatre'. Both of the Shakespeare plays she had directed for the RSC had had a chequered post-war performance history. The two previous RSC productions of King John, in 1970 directed by Buzz Goodbody and 1974 directed by John Barton, had used severely cut text. In 1988, to much acclaim, Warner presented the play uncut and without additions from the Troublesome Reign of John, King of England or King Johan. Her rigorous

⁴ Cox, p.153.

⁵ Peter Lewis, 'McKellen and his foot soldiers', Sunday Times, 22 July 1990.

focus on the text allies her to the Cambridge school of Hall and Nunn, although she was trained on a drama school stage management course. Like Nunn, her starting point is the text. Her trust in the text means that she does not start rehearsals with a definite interpretation. Cox believes that she sees a play in the same way he does, as a thing that ‘opens like a flower’. Rehearsing a play for Warner is about giving the text ‘breathing space’.⁶ Thus she allowed the production of King Lear to evolve slowly and organically out of the rehearsal period. This particularly suited Cox, who was uncomfortable finding himself having to fit his characterisation of Buckingham into Eyre’s 1930’s concept of Richard III. Alongside this trust in the text Warner had had a felicitous relationship with small spaces. In his review of her production of Electra, Sheridan Morley described what he considers to be her unique directorial style:

In so far as it is possible to talk about characteristic productions by a director not yet thirty ... then Electra is typical Warner: an intense, almost religious experience on a bare stage through which runs a river... It is hallmarked by what might be called the Barbican barbarity of Titus, but also by an absolute belief in simplicity and textual purity.⁷

WARNER’S INTERPRETATION OF THE PLAY

Warner’s view of the world of King Lear seems to have arisen from her love of clarity in text and space. Bechtler’s set communicated the world of the play. The atmosphere on stage was created by large swathes of cloth. In the opening scene a gold cloth, swagged up, gave the sense of a royal court. After this scene the set was very basic consisting of russet and off-white draperies that became more and more muddled as the storm progressed. Cox described the set as ‘a large, empty white space on a slight rake, fractured by a series of cloths to change locale and climate - a leaden sky,

⁶ Cox, p.85.

⁷ Sheridan Morley, Our Theatre in the Eighties (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1990), p.214.

the white cliffs of Dover - and a white floorcloth which can be torn up at the beginning of the storm, leaving a vast muddy underlay.’⁸ There was to have been a mobile catwalk that would have divided the stage into two but, when it arrived, despite having been made out of the same material used in aviation manufacture, it was too heavy to move and had to be abandoned. This left the stage even emptier. The journey of the play was recorded in visual terms on the set; as the physical and spiritual confusion of the characters increased the floor and backcloth became muddier and more ragged and torn. A similar idea was used in Adrian Noble’s RSC production in 1993, when the action was played out over a map of England which covered the floor of the set: ‘Gradually the paper map ripped and shredded from the moment of Edgar’s entry as Poor Tom in 3.6 until it was finally removed in the civil war of the last battle.’⁹

The set reflected Warner’s vision of the play as being about the characters’ need to fill up the emptiness; the tragedy of the drama being their failure to do so. The visual image of small, isolated human figures in a vast empty landscape was an expression of the characters’ psychological state. They lived ‘solitary and desperate’¹⁰ existences. Warner presented the play, in part, as an existentialist drama. The minimalist set and a barechested Fool, in an illfitting black suit and airman’s hat, could not fail but bring to mind the worlds of Samuel Beckett’s plays. Cox states that both he and Warner agreed that there were Beckettian elements in King Lear.¹¹ In the National production’s programme notes Stanley Wells pointed out that Peter Brook’s King Lear, at Stratford in 1962, had stressed the play’s ‘affinities with Beckett’ and that ‘absurdist influences

⁸ Cox, p.20.

⁹ Peter Holland, English Shakespeares (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.170.

¹⁰ Martin Dodsworth, Times Literary Supplement, 10 August 1990.

¹¹ Cox, p.24.

were apparent in Trevor Nunn's 1968 production'¹² Brook's production was 'directly inspired'¹³ by Jan Kott's essay 'King Lear or Endgame', published in his book Shakespeare Our Contemporary.¹⁴ Brook interpreted the play as 'a metaphysical farce about the blindness of man in an environment of savage cruelty'.¹⁵ He had wanted to create on stage 'the visual equivalent of timeless universality'.¹⁶ The set for Brook's production was 'two uncoloured "flats" with rusty and indeterminate metal shapes placed against them'.¹⁷ Apart from some wooden furniture the set was simply space. Brook's presentation of King Lear in 1962 can be seen to be reflective of developments in the literary criticism of the play. Up to the 1960's criticism of the play was 'dominated by overtly or implicitly Christian accounts'¹⁸; however, during the 1960's this view was challenged and the Lear universe was no longer necessarily a just one ruled by higher powers. Kiernan Ryan argues that 'two new critical dynasties emerged' One was humanist criticism, which 'redefined Lear's heroism as his capacity to absorb endless agonies and endure death itself without prospect of salvation', and the other was an existentialist view 'refusing altogether the consolation of significance'.¹⁹ Clearly Brook's production in 1962, influenced as it was by Kott, was a contribution to the new existentialist critical thinking on the play. Warner's production with its empty space set and psychological focus was influenced by the Beckett-Kott-Brook combination. However, because of her distrust of 'concept theatre', the influence was

¹² Stanley Wells, Royal National Theatre Programme.

¹³ J.L. Styan, The Shakespeare Revolution (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p.218.

¹⁴ 'King Lear or Endgame', Jan Kott, Shakespeare Our Contemporary (New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday & Co., 1966), pp.127-168.

¹⁵ Styan, p.218.

¹⁶ Gamini Salgado, Text and Performance King Lear (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1984), p.55.

¹⁷ Salgado, p.54.

¹⁸ Kiernan Ryan, 'Introduction', New Casebooks King Lear, ed. by Kiernan Ryan (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993), p.1.

¹⁹ Ryan, p.2.

by no means conscientiously applied. Perhaps the most Beckettian element of the production was its tendency to highlight the comedy of the play. Unlike Brook who saw the humour as being savage, Warner's production presented it in a much more gentle and wry manner. Set against this existentialist atmosphere was Cox's very human *King Lear*. Unlike Brook who favoured an unheroic Lear, Warner followed the humanist critics in presenting a Lear who gained heroic stature through suffering. Thus her interpretation of the play, despite being presented in 1990, can be seen to reflect the critical fashion of the 1960's and 1970's, in its attempt to reconcile the two branches of thought dominant then: a nihilistic world in which the central character affirms that human existence is itself an heroic act.

However, this interpretation failed to communicate successfully. Perhaps this was partly due to Warner being unable to cope with the size of the Lyttelton stage, Peter Holland believed so: 'Actors in *King Lear* moved limply to fill the spaces, unwilling to accept the vacuums around them. It seemed a studio production awkwardly metamorphosed.'²⁰ Certainly there was a lack of coherence and little connection between the characters. Warner's view of the play ignored the social hierarchy present within it. As Martin Dodsworth commented, 'whole areas of the drama remain unassimilated'.²¹ Most of these areas involved McKellen's Kent. Cox's decisions about Lear seem to have been taken without consideration for the effect they might have on the other 'feudal' characters. In his essay 'The Humanity of King Lear' Arnold Kettle divides the characters of the play into 'those who accept the old order (Lear, Gloucester, Kent, Albany)' and 'the new people, the individualists (Goneril,

²⁰ Holland, p.49.

²¹ Martin Dodsworth, *Times Literary Supplement*, 10 August 1990.

Regan, Edmund, Cornwall))' For Kettle the 'old order' is feudal and the 'new people' represent the 'outlook of the bourgeoisie'²² Although Kettle's reading is expressed in Marxist vocabulary and emphasis, it points up the fact that what links certain characters in the play is their social relationships. Warner, and even more so Cox, ignored this and only examined the personal relationships.

COX'S INTERPRETATION AND PRESENTATION OF KING LEAR

For Lear, Cox tried to find the elements in the character that he could personally relate to and understand, rather than playing a wholly invented character. In an interview he described Lear as 'a rather sweet, misunderstood man who has made enormous mistakes and has a terrible temper.'²³ He sympathised with Lear and wanted to present the audience with a Lear whose actions they could understand. In the same interview he stated that he believed that the key to his performing a successful Lear was the extent to which he as an actor was able to relate the emotions of the play to his own life, especially mistakes he made as a father himself. He wanted to play the emotions he knew about. The rejection of Lear was central to his concept and he found it hard to deal with the pain of Lear which became his own pain. His emotional involvement with the role was occasionally overwhelming and the tears that he wept over Cordelia's corpse in the final scene would sometimes continue offstage and into the dressing-room. He found it difficult to delineate where the character of Lear stopped and Cox the actor started. The artistic benefit of this personal suffering was a performance praised for its humanity. Charles Osborne found Cox 'almost unbearably moving at the

²² Arnold Kettle, 'The Humanity of King Lear' in *New Casebooks King Lear*, ed. by Kiernan Ryan (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993), p. 17.

²³ Andrew Barron, *Daily Telegraph*, 4 July 1990.

end of the play with the dead Cordelia'²⁴ and the review in the Sunday Telegraph applauded Cox on his ability to capture 'the part's pathos' and found that 'in the later chastened scenes he has an affecting softness. The last of his five "nevers", as Cordelia lies dead, is the more piercing for being almost inaudible.'²⁵ Martin Dodsworth wrote in the Times Literary Supplement that the production 'powerfully insists on the humanity of its victims, and on the power of that humanity.'²⁶ In The Lear Diaries Cox claimed that what he wanted to achieve was 'to make Lear as human as possible'²⁷

THE LIMITATIONS THE INTERPRETATION OF KING LEAR PLACED ON McKELLEN'S PRESENTATION OF KENT

This approach to the character of Lear was, however, only partially successful. Although Cox discovered humour and humanity in the role he only presented one facet of the complex Shakespearean creation that is King Lear. As Cox was forty-four when he played Lear the onset of old age and senility did not strike resonant personal chords and so remained unexplored. More importantly for McKellen's characterisation of Kent he failed to communicate any sense of the kingship of Lear. He played Lear the father rather than King Lear. The critics who praised his pathos found fault with his lack of regality. Dodsworth complained that Lear should have 'that in his countenance that Kent would fain call master, and that is authority'.²⁸ John Gross in the Sunday Telegraph echoed this claiming that Cox's face 'no longer has anything of what Kent sees in it, authority.'²⁹ It is interesting that both these reviewers highlighted this

²⁴ Charles Osborne, Daily Telegraph, 30 July 1990.

²⁵ John Gross, Sunday Telegraph, 29 July 1990.

²⁶ Martin Dodsworth, Times Literary Supplement, 10 August 1990.

²⁷ Cox, p.199.

²⁸ Martin Dodsworth, Times Literary Supplement, 10 August 1990.

²⁹ John Gross, Sunday Telegraph, 29 July 1990.

weakness in Cox's performance, as it was an area with which he was uncomfortable from the beginning of rehearsals. One of Warner's rehearsal techniques is to have the cast read through the play several times, but to have the actors read a variety of roles other than their own. This enables the actors to see the play from the differing perspectives of assorted characters. At the third read-through McKellen read the part of King Lear and Cox observed, 'he can say the lines about kings with a sense of authority which I envy'.³⁰ Even eleven weeks into rehearsals Cox had reservations about his characterisation of the role, 'I don't know if my Lear is tragic or kingly enough'.³¹

The focus of Cox's characterisation of King Lear, on the humanity and issues of fatherhood, made it difficult for McKellen to find a place in the world of the play for Kent, a character who belongs to the play's debate about the distribution of power in society and the play's commendation of the virtues of loyalty and service. Lear's outburst in the final scene when Kent is presented to him - 'A plague upon you, you murderers, traitors all!' (5.3.269) - nearly broke his heart. Hurt and stunned, McKellen's Kent backed away from Lear unable to cope with the accusation of being a traitor as this struck at the very reason for his existence. This moment, however, was not integrated into the rest of the scene or the production as a whole. McKellen had to try to portray a character whose world, in which social hierarchy is paramount, had been almost totally ignored in the production. There was no clear indication of the characters' relative positions of power in the production and so McKellen's performance, which was based on Kent's sense of allegiance and his virtue in maintaining his place in the structure of society, remained largely unassimilated.

³⁰ Cox, p.20.

³¹ Cox, p.60.

The opening scene was a striking example of how the production's values and McKellen's characterisation clashed. The scene was mentioned by nearly all the critics because of its originality. The three daughters ran onto the stage shrieking with laughter, sporting party hats. Lear was swung round the stage by a rope attached to his wheelchair³² and he blew a party whistle. The atmosphere was joyful and playful; this was Lear's 'division of the kingdom' party. Granville-Barker's dictum that Lear 'must leave this scene as he entered it more a magnificent portent than a man'³³ could not have been more soundly flouted. This opening made the rejection of Cordelia all the more frightening, because the audience saw a man capable of such joyousness suddenly turn and be as extreme in his anger as he had been in his happiness. It was a thrilling start which set up Lear's immense instability and unpredictability. Some of the critics complained that the scene established Lear as being mad from the beginning of the play so that the character had nowhere to go; there was no scope for development. These critics had mistakenly read playfulness as an unpredictable temper for madness.

Kent's role in this scene was initially a practical one. He carried the map of the kingdom and duly gave it to Lear when he requested it. His duty performed, he discreetly retreated upstage, leaving the family to their high-spirited private party. It was only when the party turned sour and Lear's behaviour towards Cordelia became violent, as he rejected her, that Kent moved from his position and involved himself in the action. The promptbook records that, after Cox spoke Lear's line, 'Here I disclaim all my paternal care' (113), he took hold of Cordelia's head and pushed her downstage.

³² In his essay 'King Lear or Endgame' Kott comments that Hamm's 'wheel-chair brings to mind a throne' in *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1966), p.157.

³³ Harley Granville-Barker, *Prefaces to Shakespeare* Vol.1 (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd, 1930), p.285.

Lear then chased Cordelia upstage to where Kent was standing and he stepped between them, trying to appeal to Lear for calm: 'Good my liege' (120). He shielded Cordelia from the towering rage of Lear, thus prompting Lear's line 'Peace Kent. Come not between the dragon and his wrath' (122). Kent then exited to fulfil Lear's command to 'Call Burgundy' (127). He re-entered five lines later, having completed the task. There is no stage direction in the text to indicate that Kent exits at this point but, by giving the exit specifically to Kent the role he played in Lear's life was established from the beginning. He was Lear's right-hand man, whose job it was to ensure that Lear's life ran as smoothly as possible, the perfect private secretary.

The turning point in the scene for Kent was his speech in support of Cordelia. He moved downstage left of Lear as he protested, 'Let it fall rather, though the fork invade/ The region of my heart' (144-5). Lear's increasing anger at Kent's words culminated in his explosion 'O vassal! O miscreant!' (161). This line in the text is often accompanied by the stage direction of Lear laying his hand on his sword. The editors of the Oxford Shakespeare have the less prescriptive direction 'making to strike him' and in Warner's production Lear went to attack Kent with the scissors he had used earlier to cut up the map. Kent made no attempt to ward off this attack. It was Albany and Cornwall who held Lear back. Kent's failure to take any defensive action was part of his sense of loyalty to Lear; his obedience to his master's will extended to the acceptance of bodily harm. This action also lent credibility to his recent assertion, 'My life I never held but as a pawn/ To wage against your enemies' (155-6).

Lear knew the nature of his power over Kent and he finally resorted to it, to prevent any further engagement with him; 'Hear me; on thy allegiance hear me!' (167)

Kent immediately knelt down in humble obedience to receive Lear's order of banishment. Kent's verbal response, 'Why fare thee well King; since thus thou wilt appear' (180) was accompanied by a physical display of his acknowledgement of his banishment. He undid the ceremonial sword he had been wearing and placed it on the floor in front of Lear. This was a sign that the feudal bond between king and vassal had been broken and the former promise of loyalty, including the willingness to give up his life in the king's service, had been cancelled. After Kent's exit Lear violently pushed his wheelchair over, perhaps as a sign that he resented being told he was old, as Kent had done, or perhaps in angry recognition at the truth of Kent's accusation of rashness against him. The opening scene, which began as a domestic, royal family party with the actors highlighting the humanity of their characters, ended with a display of feudalism with an emphasis on the hierarchical structure of the society of the play. Lear's relationship with Kent seemed to be part of a separate world from the close, intimate, private family environment which had dominated at the beginning of the scene.

There was a production of King Lear, directed by Nicholas Hytner at the RSC at the same time as the National's and a comparison of the banishment of Kent in Act 1 scene 1 is illuminating. Kent's (David Troughton's)

interruption disrupts the ceremonial formality of Lear's court. As Lear [John Wood] hurled Kent to the floor, Lear himself, as well as his courtiers, was appalled by his violence. Unable to admit to himself the destructive effect of disinheriting Cordelia, he could acknowledge what it meant to have stooped to a physical assault on a trusted councillor.³⁴

Wood as Lear proceeded to stroke Kent's head as he offered him five days grace against his banishment. From this description it is clear that there was a professional and

³⁴ Holland, p.41.

a personal relationship between Kent and Lear and, more significantly in relation to Warner's production, the dismissal of Kent was part of the same narrative as the rejection of Cordelia. There was no division between Kent's world and the world of the royal family in Hytner's production.

The emphasis of the National's production on the family relationships also meant that the emotion of the play tended to be expressed only between those family characters and therefore it was very difficult for McKellen to establish any sense of feeling between Kent and Lear. One of the only times Cox's Lear exhibited any emotion exclusively towards Kent was anger in Act 1 scene 1. In Act 2 scene 4, when Lear entered to find Kent in the stocks, Warner and Cox made the focus of the scene Lear's relationship with Regan and all the emotion of the scene was channelled into this, bypassing Kent. Cox admitted to finding the beginning of the scene hard to express:

I have great difficulty with that moment, the moment of discovering Kent. I've never been happy about how to play it. Ian suggested I come and sit with him, which helps to root it, but to be agitated sitting down is also a problem.³⁵

There is always a problem over getting Kent out of the stocks and we have to find a solution that isn't distracting from the main thrust of the scene, keeps the scene moving.³⁶

The promptbook records that Cox did sit down next to Kent which allowed him to find humour in the line 'Follow me not; stay there' (160) by addressing it directly to Kent. (See Fig. 14) After Kent had been released from the stocks and Lear had noticed him and dismissed him 'O! Are you free?/ Some other time for that' (133-4), McKellen exited downstage left so that the domestic focus on the family argument was complete.

³⁵ Cox, p.58.

³⁶ Cox, p.30.

There is no exit for Kent in the text, but McKellen's exit here highlights the production values that too often made his character an anomaly. The scene was concerned with a father's relationship with his two daughters:

Prior to Goneril's entrance, I got Regan to sit on my knee, desperately trying to re-establish power over her, playing her off against her husband, reassuring her of my love.³⁷

It appears that as Kent had no further function in the scene the character was removed. The fact that Kent could not remain indicates the gap between the world he inhabited in this production and the main thrust of the production overall.

McKELLEN'S PERFORMANCE

Kent is often a fairly unobtrusive role on stage and what McKellen cleverly did with the part was to make a virtue of this unobtrusiveness, incorporating it into his interpretation of the character. Kent's disguise as the servant Caius naturally developed out of Kent the loyal, dependable civil servant of the opening scene. The disguise was only physical; Kent's role as Lear's personal valet remained constant. Throughout the play Kent, and then Kent as Caius, saw to all of Lear's physical needs. McKellen played the first scene in a beard, adopting a formal upper class accent, which meant that when the text called for Kent to come on in disguise he could play in his own face with his natural soft Lancashire vowels. This enabled McKellen to present a more natural and effective character and avoid the stereotyped country bumpkin acting that Kents in some productions have resorted to. Being able to perform the role, for the majority of the play, without any obviously theatrical mannerisms meant that McKellen could give the character 'a roundness it can too often lack'.³⁸ As he made his entrance for Act 1

³⁷ Charles Osborne, Daily Telegraph, 30 July 1990.

³⁸ Cox, p.13.

scene 4 he was putting on a raincoat which was part of his disguise as Caius and after he had whispered the phrase 'now banish'd Kent' (4), he pulled a felt trilby hat from his satchel and put it on. This, alongside his Lancashire accent called for by the text ('If but as well I other accents borrow'(1)), completed his transformation from Kent to Caius. Usually once the nature of the disguise has been established and Lear is fooled by it, it ceases to be an issue in the play until Kent reveals himself to Lear in the final scene. However, in Warner's production there was an effective reminder of Kent's disguise in Act 4 scene 7. This scene is the first time Cordelia has seen Kent since his banishment. Kent entered upstage centre and crossed to centre stage, whilst Cordelia entered downstage right and crossed to stage left of Kent. Cordelia did not recognise him so Kent removed his hat and it was only then that she was able to see he was Kent and she ran into his arms. This staging also lent an effective and touching immediacy to Cordelia's urging of Kent to 'Be better suited/ These weeds are memories of those worser hours' (7-8).

Out of all the company McKellen had the longest list of personal props. These were listed in the promptbook as: ring, map of kingdom, 2 pennies, staff, ceremonial sword, flask, satchel, 2 towels, cup, biscuit, hanky, purse, knife, bottle and juice. This list reflects the emphasis of McKellen's characterisation. His Kent was in some ways the good alter ego of his Iago. Instead of a first aid box he had a satchel and he dispensed food and drink from it as efficiently as his Iago had done. He had towels to dry Lear after the storm as his Iago had had after the sea journey to Cyprus. Whereas McKellen's Iago had created a sense of his indispensability to dupe his victims into trusting him, McKellen's Kent simply was indispensable to Lear. There was no ulterior

motive behind his caring attention, Kent clearly regarded his service as his duty and this duty was sacrosanct to him.

McKellen's characterisation was limited to being the necessary valet for the majority of the production. In Act 1 scene 4 Lear entered with his knights, all carrying buckets, to wash in after their days hunting. Lear shouted for dinner and then proceeded to wash his face. The promptbook records that he then 'feels for a towel' Kent, in his disguise as Caius, obliged, handing Lear a towel on the end of his staff. This gesture naturally brought Kent to the notice of Lear thus precipitating the question, 'How now! What art thou?' (10). One of the knights, at this point, crossed the stage and stood behind Kent, pointing a loaded crossbow at the back of his head. This highlighted the potential danger Kent has placed himself in by adopting this disguise and disobeying the order of banishment. Marvin Rosenberg states that 'Kent's disguise must be seen as a dangerous gamble; recognition means death and he is in the home of the enemies'³⁹ In Warner's production the possibly mortal consequences of his being discovered were effectively raised by this moment, adding to the audience's sense of the extreme nature of Kent's understanding of loyalty. Lear crossed to his campstool and started putting his coat on, Kent crossed over to help him. These two gestures of practical help established the continuity of Kent and Lear's relationship. Lear did not question the second of these offers of help nor did he reject it. This indicated how familiar they were to Lear and how dependent he had become on Kent anticipating and caring for his needs.

³⁹ Marvin Rosenberg, *The Masks of King Lear* (Berkeley: London: University of California Press, 1972), p.96.

As Kent answered Lear's question, 'Who wouldst thou serve?' (26) with the single word, 'You' (27), he poured Lear a drink from his hip flask and gave him a biscuit from inside his hat. Lear ate and drank and accepted Kent's offer of service, giving him the order to 'Follow me' (43) which he cemented with a kiss on Kent's cheek. Kent immediately resumed his duties, clearing away the cup and flask and buckets. Later in the scene Kent punished Oswald's insolence to Lear by tripping him up with his staff; he held him by the coat as he tried to get up. When Oswald did finally exit, Kent threw a bucket of water after him. Lear thanked Kent and the money that the text indicates Lear gives him, 'There's/ earnest of thy service' (98-9), was thrown into the bucket Kent was still holding. Kent was once again in the pay of the king.

As Lear became more uncontrollable, Kent became more solicitous of him. In Act 3 scene 6 having finally succeeded in bringing Lear out of the storm Kent gently dried him with a towel and made up a bed for him. Lear copied the tender motherly care that Kent bestowed on him, mimicking Kent's actions towards him in his actions towards Edgar, in the disguise of Poor Tom. Just as Kent dried Lear, so Lear took the towel and tried to dry Edgar and, as in Act 3 scene 4 Kent and the Fool had desperately tried to stop Lear from undressing, continually attempting to re-clothe him, so Lear used his blanket to cover Edgar's nakedness. Trying to protect Lear, Kent attempted to get rid of Edgar by giving him money when he begged, 'Do Poor Tom some charity' (60). Kent physically slapped Edgar away from Lear as Lear became obsessed with covering up Edgar's nakedness. Kent's final service to Lear was to undo the top button of his shirt, just before his death, in the last scene. The directorial decision to interpret Lear's line, 'Pray you, undo this button' (309) literally and, to assign the duty to Kent, made the action a poignant conclusion to Kent's years of devoted service to his king.

Lear sums up his servant Caius in the final scene as ‘a good fellow’, adding ‘He’ll strike and quickly too’ (285), and this could also be a description of McKellen’s characterisation. He pulled his knife out ready to defend his king’s life in Act 3 scene 4 before he identified the intruder as Gloucester. He brandished his knife at Oswald in Act 2 scene 2 and had to be disarmed. He continued to taunt Oswald imitating a goose as he insulted him; ‘Goose, if I had you upon Sarum Plain/ I’d drive ye cackling home again to Camelot’ (84-5) and then proceeded to calmly insult Cornwall which resulted in his being punished in the stocks. Kent’s soliloquy in the stocks was plainly spoken and the promptbook records no additional flourishes either vocal or physical. He also twice tried to attack the dying Edmund as he confessed his plot ‘To hang Cordelia in the prison, and/ To lay the blame upon her own despair’ (253-4), Albany had to restrain Kent. McKellen’s performance as Caius, as the text suggests, was rougher and more physically robust than his characterisation of the courtier Kent in the opening and closing scenes.

THE INFLUENCE THAT PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN ACTORS HAD ON McKELLEN’S PRESENTATION OF KENT

One reason why McKellen was limited to presenting Kent simply as Lear’s personal servant was the absence of an emotional relationship between Kent and Lear. I believe this was not only due to the overall emphasis of the production but also the result of Cox’s personal relationship with David Bradley, who played the Fool, and with Derek Hutchinson, who played Edgar, or rather Cox’s decisions about his characterisation of Lear were influenced by the actors playing the Fool and Edgar.

Cox's emotional closeness to Bradley and Hutchinson resulted in his Lear forging stronger relationships with his Fool and Poor Tom than the text suggests. Cox had recommended that Bradley be offered the part of the Fool. While Cox had been playing Titus Andronicus at Stratford, Bradley had also been in the company, playing Morose in The Silent Woman and Mephostophilis in Dr Faustus. Cox has commented that during their time at Stratford together 'there wasn't a performance he [Bradley] gave that wasn't flawless'.⁴⁰ The mutual professional respect and personal friendship between Cox and Bradley gave the partnership of Lear and the Fool an added strength. Cox claimed that the rapport he had with Bradley 'sustains so much of the play for me'⁴¹ Cox had 'a very clear image of the Fool as a tired old vaudeville act, a man who is entirely dependent on Lear for his living', that they are 'two people who thoroughly know each other, who have a rapport and a shared sense of humour'⁴² and who are the same age.

In two separate interviews Bradley gave in June and July 1990 he echoed these ideas of Cox. Bradley saw the Fool as a 'character who moves from the music hall to the demonic', he believed Lear and the Fool are the same age and that 'there is a strong friendship there. I expect they're quite a double-act at the dinner-table'⁴³ Like Cox he saw the Fool's destiny as being 'totally linked with Lear: Lear is his meal-ticket, his survival kit'⁴⁴ He also admitted that Lear was a part he wanted to play and he believed the nearest he would get to it would be understudying Cox. Bradley did get to play the part in Nottingham when Cox was 'off' after straining his voice.

⁴⁰ Cox, p.57.

⁴¹ Cox, p.36.

⁴² Liz Gilbey, What's On, 11 July 1990.

⁴³ Simon Reade, Independent, 20 June 1990.

⁴⁴ Cox, p.51.

This partnership left little scope for McKellen's Kent, and Lear and Kent's relationship could in no way challenge that of Lear and the Fool who (unlike Kent) was Lear's contemporary and personal friend. The efficient civil servant that McKellen made Kent had no emotional interaction with Lear. Although Kent held Lear in an embrace in Act 3 scene 6 as he lamented 'O pity! Sir, where is the patience now/ That you so oft have boasted to retain?' (58-9), there was no response from Lear. Opportunities for the development of both characters were missed. Rosenberg comments that the moment in the play when Kent assures Lear that there is 'authority' in his face has been exploited in past productions to suggest that Lear has learnt something about flattery: 'Scofield looked shrewdly into Kent's eyes, with a hint of mockery'⁴⁵ But it went ignored in Warner's production.

Even before the Fool's death in Act 3 scene 6 Kent had been replaced in Lear's affections by Edgar. This was communicated in two corresponding visual stage pictures. For the entrance of Act 3 scene 4 Kent came on first leading Lear by the hand who in turn led the Fool by the hand. At the exit of the scene this chain had been significantly altered. Kent again led off holding Lear's hand who held Edgar's hand. Derek Hutchinson who played Edgar had played the role of Lucius, one of Titus' sons in Titus Andronicus, and had also played Kent in Warner's Kick Theatre production of King Lear. Cox had developed a strong emotional bond with Hutchinson during the run of Titus Andronicus and used it, as he had with Bradley, to inform Lear's relationship with Edgar. During rehearsals Cox found that:

It [wa]s wonderful to be working with someone like Derek Hutchinson with whom, as with Deborah, I have a shared past and shared tastes and experiences and who understands things immediately as Deborah does.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Rosenberg, p. 100.

⁴⁶ Cox, p.51.

Lear's transfer of affection from the Fool to Edgar was facilitated for Cox by both roles being played by trusted friends and colleagues. Thus the emotional focus of the play was transferred from the Fool to Edgar and again Kent was excluded.

CRITICAL RESPONSE TO McKELLEN'S PERFORMANCE

Despite having to contend with all these difficulties, McKellen presented a rounded, credible and sympathetic character and the critics were complimentary about his performance as Kent. The review in the Evening Standard commented that 'Ian McKellen, as Lear's loyal Earl of Kent, manages to find a still, quiet place in the midst of the maelstrom'.⁴⁷ Martin Dodsworth in the Times Literary Supplement claimed that Cox's Lear 'had an admirable foil in Ian McKellen's solidly inobtrusive Kent'⁴⁸ and Charles Osborne in the Daily Telegraph declared it was 'the finest performance of the role I can recall in forty years since I saw my first Lear'.⁴⁹ Michael Coveney was not so favourable; he thought that:

The two lead actors save all their fire-power for the main roles. An important postscript to the enterprise is that Cox's Buckingham is a strangely low-key performance buried in a beard and monocle, while McKellen's Kent, a part for which he is entirely unsuited, comes across as a nodding simpleton.⁵⁰

McKellen's performance as Kent was at the very least adequate: it was unfussy and solid, if at times pedestrian. This, however, was an achievement in the light of the difficulties he was presented with by the nature of the production and in particular by

⁴⁷ Annalena McAfee, Evening Standard, 27 July 1990.

⁴⁸ Martin Dodsworth, Times Literary Supplement, 10 August 1990.

⁴⁹ Charles Osborne, Daily Telegraph, 30 July 1990.

⁵⁰ Michael Coveney, Observer, 29 July 1990

Cox's characterisation of Lear. Kent was never going to be a 'great' performance. It could never compete for the scale of energy and intense intellectual scrutiny McKellen was lavishing on Richard III.

CONCLUSION

As Kent McKellen delivered a professionally competent performance, but it had none of the finesse of his characteristic imaginative exploration of language, or the raw fireworks of his best emotional acting. Margery Mason, who was in the cast of King Lear for the Actors' Company production in 1973, has stated that McKellen 'said to me when he was playing Edgar that he didn't really like playing supporting roles'⁵¹ I suspect he felt the same way about Kent in 1990. However, the compensation of playing Richard III must have made it worthwhile.

⁵¹ Joy Gibson, Ian McKellen, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1986), p.83.

RICHARD III

INTRODUCTION

McKellen's performance as Richard III significantly challenged the characterisation so favoured since Olivier played the part: a physically grotesque but charismatic figure, winning the audience over with the enjoyment of his cunning and audacity. McKellen avoided both the humour and the sexuality associated with the role. It was uncomfortable for audiences to watch because the evil was presented matter-of-factly without a cushion of gleeful complicity. The performance also continued McKellen's exploration of the psychology of Shakespeare's professional soldiers, which had begun with *Macbeth* in 1976.

In the introduction to his screenplay of Richard III, McKellen states:

Before 1990, I had had no interest in playing Richard III. Indeed, I had long dismissed the play as not fit for modern consumption. Its sell-by date had surely expired, once modern psychology had questioned the cruel assumption of Shakespeare's contemporaries that physical deformity was an outward expression of some inner moral turpitude.¹

It is hard to believe now that McKellen had no interest in Richard III before Richard Eyre chose to direct him in the role for the National Theatre World Tour. McKellen can now look back on a career which includes playing Richard III on a World Tour, on a 15-week tour of the United States and in a six million pound film. For all this to have come out of initial indifference is astonishing, and that he turned his lack of interest into the extraordinary level of energy that was required to achieve this production history is a testament to McKellen's belief in and enjoyment of his interpretation of the part. He pursued his goal of committing his performance to celluloid obsessively for four years. It was finally shot in the summer of 1995 and released in North America on 22

¹ Ian McKellen, William Shakespeare's Richard III (London: Doubleday, 1996), p.22.

December 1995 and Great Britain on 26 April 1996. The film was the culmination of McKellen's intense relationship - one might even say love affair - with the role, that had prevented him from accepting that it should come to an end with the American tour in 1992. In his screenplay he comments wryly:

I only realised that this was unlike any other job when I first saw the scale of the enterprise: 200 soldiers from the local barracks, ... 20 horses with their grooms; half a dozen alsatians and their handlers; a crew of 50 technicians; Anette Bening; tents, caravans and catering trucks; and a German engine that had been designed to pull Hitler's train across the Third Reich - and all because three years previously I had wanted to go on playing Richard III.²

His reluctance to let go of the success he experienced on both tours was finally assuaged by 103 minutes of film.

There would have been no bringing together of Anette Bening, Steamtown Railway Centre at Carnforth and Hitler's engine without the initial creation of a production at the National Theatre in 1990 which fired McKellen's imagination. The combination of director Richard Eyre, designer Bob Crowley and McKellen resulted in a production that was bold, visually arresting and theatrically effective. It may have been justifiably criticised for its narrowness of vision - its specificity of historical period allegedly acting as a strait-jacket on the Elizabethan play - but the power of its spectacle and its confidence in the bravura of the modern political parallels it reflected made it hard for an audience to resist. The uncompromising interpretation of the play as a modern political fable of the rise of European dictatorship was matched by a central performance from McKellen that was equally uncompromising, bold and theatrical.

SETTING

The production was set so firmly in the 1930's that McKellen's Richard was seen variously as an impersonation of Edward VIII, Sir Oswald Mosley and even

² McKellen, p.242

Hitler. The decision to set the play in the 1930's was a joint one made by Eyre, Crowley and McKellen, and it was not a 'concept' that they imposed on the play but arose from a daily reading of the text aloud to each other, so that the design 'emerged empirically'.³ Eyre admitted that they did draw parallels with Hitler but that these were 'forced by Hitler himself'.⁴ Donald Wolfit experienced the same thing in 1942 when he played Richard in a production at the Strand Theatre:

The more I studied [Richard] the greater grew his resemblance to Hitler... My wig of long red hair with a cowlick over the forehead gave a most curious resemblance in an impressionistic way to the Fuhrer.⁵

However, there was a general feeling among the critics that the setting chosen for the 1990 production had limited the vision of Shakespeare's play, turning it into a modern political story of the rise of fascism. Milton Shulman opened his review:

It is facile to identify a medieval ruler such as Shakespeare's Richard III with a Fascist dictator such as Hitler or Mussolini... The only thing they have in common is their reliance on violence as an instrument of power.⁶

Shulman was perhaps too hasty in referring to the modern analogy with Fascism as being 'facile'. Richard III shares 'the military ethos and the alliance of personal motives with historical conditions [which] are the common backgrounds of many twentieth-century tyrants'.⁷ Bertolt Brecht certainly did not see the comparison as 'facile', and The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui (written in 1941) is based on this idea. It is historical coincidence that the rise of Hitler shadowed that of Richard III very closely. The rise of an individual to political power by ruthless and violent means is an ancient tale and, as Barbara Everett pointed out in the production's programme notes, 'Shakespeare's

³ Richard Eyre, Utopia and Other Places (London: Bloomsbury, 1993), p.165.

⁴ Eyre, p.165.

⁵ First Interval (Long Acre, London: Odhams Press, 1954), p.205.

⁶ Milton Shulman, Evening Standard, 27 July 1990.

⁷ Eyre, p.165.

Richard is a King of Graft, a political gangster at home anywhere between the decline of Rome and the onset of the twenty-first century.’

Eyre with his strong personal ties to Romania (forged through a close friendship with the actor Ion Caramitru and the Bulandra Company) perhaps had Ceaucescu in mind when he thought of a modern parallel for Richard. Indeed, when the company performed in Eastern Europe the reception they received was overwhelming, as the audiences saw their own recent history retold in this Elizabethan play. The production seemed to English critics so limiting in its historical analogy but proved to have a more universal relevance on tour. McKellen observed that:

In Hamburg, Richard’s blackshirt troops seemed like a commentary on the Third Reich. In Bucharest, when Richard was slain, the Romanians stopped the show with heartfelt cheers, in memory of Ceaucescu’s regime. In Cairo, as the Gulf War was hotting up, it all seemed like a new play about Saddam Hussein. One critic lambasted me for poor taste when I ruffled the young prince’s hair before imprisoning him, as Hussein had just been seen doing to a little English boy he had taken hostage. My stage business, of course, had been devised six months previously - life imitating art.⁸

The 1930’s world of the play was largely created by costumes and props rather than a set design. The set was essentially very simple, as touring commitments meant that any staging had to be able to travel easily. The floor was bare, a back wall was flown in and out, and hanging from six fly bars were rows of seven silver-chrome, domed lamp shades which diminished in size from the front to the back row so as to achieve a sense of depth. Richard’s throne and the platform he stood on for Act 3 scene 7 were attached to a mechanical arm or crane which was wheeled on and off stage. The rest of the set consisted of simple props such as a card-table and chair to suggest Clarence’s prison cell, or a long dining table and eight chairs for Act 1 scene 3 (also

⁸ McKellen, p.13.

used as the furniture for Richard's cabinet room in Act 2). There were also two tent bags and an army bed for the final act.

The single piece of design that caused the most controversy and most confusion was a back cloth that appeared at the invented scene of the coronation, which came after Act 4 scene 1. The painting depicted McKellen as Richard at the centre, naked, with legs astride and staring out of the picture, holding a banner in his right hand. To his left was a white horse, reared up on its back legs, partially behind the figure of Richard. To the right of the central image, soldiers marched with banners in their hands. Any member of the audience who had read their programme would have realised that this painting was based on Herbert Lanziger's portrait of Hitler, 'The Standard Bearer'.⁹ Barbara Everett also made the connection between the New Testament's description of death arriving on a pale horse and Richard's horse White Surrey. The theatrical effectiveness of the painting on stage divided the critics. Michael Billington appreciated what he interpreted as the intention of the director and designer:

There is an inspired scene where the newly-crowned Richard hurtles towards us on a gantry-like throne clad in black doublet and backed by a heroic, idealised mural: an exact reminder of the self-mythologising quality of Fascism.¹⁰

Lois Potter failed to recognise that the image was of McKellen and therefore found the whole concept rather muddling, calling it 'an awful Fascist poster' of a 'naked Nordic youth waving a party banner' and reasoning that it 'hints, perhaps at the fantasy that motivates his cult of war.'¹¹ Benedict Nightingale hated the whole coronation scene, calling it ridiculous and pointless, providing no useful insight into the play:

⁹ This design idea found its way into Loncraine's film. In scene 96 'Int. The King's Office - Day' McKellen sits in front of an impressive self-portrait. There are no horse or soldiers (See Fig. 17)

¹⁰ Michael Billington, *Guardian*, 27 July 1990.

¹¹ Lois Potter, *Times Literary Supplement*, 3-9 August 1990.

A fascist setting - complete at one bizarre point, with a tapestry of a vast, heroically nude McKellen - fits oddly with a world that sets store by curses, oaths, witchcraft, cavalry battles and other medieval matters.¹²

It is true that Eyre had to be selective with the medieval elements in the play. However, the coronation scene was one of the moments where the modern setting and the play's medievalism were happily fused. In this scene Eyre was trying to communicate the modern manipulation of ancient ritual:

Although the production is set in the twentieth-century, I wanted Richard to wear a medieval costume in the coronation; it's like turning a telescope the wrong way round. Tyrants always invent their own ritual, synthetic ceremonies borrowed from previous generations in order to dignify the present and suggest an unbroken continuum with old traditions.¹³

Michael Coveney echoed this sentiment: 'The lingering fetish of medieval pageantry in the ceremonials of monarchy is as potent today as in the 1930's.'¹⁴

COSTUMES

The Fascist overtones were established by costumes and banners. McKellen first appeared in a full khaki First World War British army uniform. He changed into evening dress for the 'Dinner Party Scene' (Act 1 scene 3), then donned a smart pin-striped morning suit to greet the Princes (See Fig. 16), which he retained until his appearance at Baynard's Castle in the Fascist uniform. He did not change out of this for the rest of the play, apart from his coronation when he wore a medieval gown. The Nazi uniform consisted of black knee-high boots into which he tucked his black trousers, black tunic jacket with an white arm band, which was emblazoned with the emblem of the new regime, a red cross behind the central black outline of a boar's head and a black peaked cap. This motif appeared on the banner hanging from the podium in Act 3 scene 7. It

¹² Benedict Nightingale, *The Times*, 26 July 1990.

¹³ Eyre, p.159.

¹⁴ Michael Coveney, *Observer*, 29 July 1990.

also decorated the armbands of Richard's soldiers and the banners they held. Eyre did not agree with the view that the design was full of Nazi imagery:

There are specific references to our own English iconography: the cross of St George, the uniforms of the British army... The language of demagoguery in this century has a remarkable consistency; Stalin, Mao Tse-Tung, Ceaucescu and Bokassa share a predilection for large banners, demonstrations, and military choreography.¹⁵

What this does not acknowledge is that red, black and white are specifically Nazi colours, adopted from the German imperial heraldry.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE PLAY

Eyre's personal vision of the play was that it is a linear narrative, 'a long journey into night, a journey studded with nightmares and references to dreams. All the characters realise their dreams of (mostly posthumous) retribution in Richard's nightmare.'¹⁶ Eyre ignored the traditional act and scene divisions and actors worked from a typed-up script. The scenes were identified by a number and title. Shakespeare's Act 2 scene 1, Act 3 scene 1 and Act 3 scene 2 became 'Scene 6 Family Photo', 'Scene 9 Victoria Station' and 'Scene 10 Early Morning Downing Street' respectively. Modern productions have commonly placed the interval directly after Act 3 scene 7 - and the coronation ceremony if they choose to stage one. This division affects the audience's understanding not only of the structure of the play but also its morality. By making this a play in which the narrative of the seizure of power is followed by the narrative of the loss of power and death, the director is presenting the second half as the consequent punishment for the wrong deeds committed in the first half. Eyre saw the play as linear rather than cyclical, and although he also placed the interval after Act 3 scene 7 he did not stage Richard's coronation until after the first scene in the second half, which was

¹⁵ Eyre, p. 159.

¹⁶ Eyre, p. 162.

Act 4 scene 1 ('Scene 26, Outside the Prison'). Thus, the second half opened with Queen Elizabeth mourning for her children imprisoned in the Tower and Stanley voicing his fear for the safety of Dorset. The encroaching loss of liberty and life was highlighted. Dorset's fleeing to Richmond also marks the beginning of the mobilisation against Richard, which is another reason why Eyre opened the second half with it. Although the apogee of Richard's power did come directly before the interval its confirmation by the coronation followed.

EYRE'S INTERPRETATION OF RICHMOND

Eyre's view of the play's structure as linear, rather than a cycle of sin and punishment, was partly informed by his belief that Richmond is not an unequivocally good character. The success of Richmond over Richard was not for Eyre a metaphor of good triumphing over evil. He viewed Richmond's seizure of power through war as an indication that Richmond will not necessarily bring England peace. In his production he wanted to leave the audience with the feeling that there could well be a continuance of the struggle for power and that the new regime was no different, even with a new leader. He shortened the final speech of the play, spoken by Richmond, to conform to his viewpoint. In the speech all references to the union of the red rose of York and the white rose of Lancaster were removed so that the speech revealed Richmond to be obsessed with traitors and treason. Richmond's speech began:

Proclaim a pardon to the soldiers fled
That in submission will return to us;
What traitor hears me, and says not amen? (5.5.16-17 and 22)

The following four lines were retained but the next eight, which refer to the union of Richmond and Elizabeth, to 'smooth-faced peace' and to 'fair prosperous days' were cut. Richmond continued directly with:

Abate the edge of traitors, gracious Lord,

That would reduce these bloody days again
 And make poor England weep - streams of blood!
 Let them not live to taste this land's increase (5.5.35-38).

Thus the amnesty he offered in the opening lines was immediately withdrawn. Eyre reinforced the feeling of unease at the close of the play by having Richmond's soldiers line up behind him. This choreography throughout the production had been associated consistently with Richard, especially at his coronation. It seemed now that there was no obvious difference between Richard and Richmond: both ruled by military power. Richard was killed by Richmond's soldiers, after he had proved himself a better soldier than Richmond by managing to disarm him. Richard was overpowered by being outnumbered. Stanley was the last to draw his sword out of Richard's corpse and had to be pulled off by Richmond, who then smashed Richard's skull on the floor, an action of unnecessary violence indicating that peace is not guaranteed. This ending was particularly shocking as Eyre had not prepared the audience for it.

In Richmond's earlier scene he had been presented as the golden hope - literally, by the lighting design. The lighting for the majority of the other scenes was the harsh, bright light of the overhead lamps. The only alternative was the candlelight of the dinner party and the women mourning their dead in Act 4 scene 4 ('Scene 19 Greenham Common'). There was a totally new light for Richmond's first scene, Act 4 scene 2 ('Scene 21 Sunlit Uplands'). The stage was bathed in warm yellow light and there was a painted backdrop of green fields surrounding a dominant centrally-placed English country church. This was the first and only 'natural' scenery in the play. Eyre was making a very precise point:

Richmond's first entrance is set against a backdrop of a peaceful country village, in Devon, in fact, near where I was born, the England of "summer fields and fruitful vines". If I was asked what I thought Richmond was fighting for, it

would be this idealised picture of England. To me it's more than a metaphor; it's a heartland.¹⁷

The hope that was promised in this scene was dashed by the brutality of Richmond and the similarity of his military coup in the last scene with Richard's regime.

The idea that 'there are no good and bad kings'¹⁸ in Shakespeare is expressed by Jan Kott in Shakespeare Our Contemporary. He describes Shakespeare's presentation of the Great Mechanism of history as a flight of stairs that lead to the abyss, and argues that the kings in Shakespeare's history plays are 'on different steps of the same stairs.'¹⁹ When 'the new prince finds himself near the throne, he drags behind him a chain of crimes as long as that of the until now legitimate ruler. He has killed enemies, now he will kill former allies... The wheel has turned full circle.'²⁰

Therefore, although Eyre rejected the cyclical structure of the play (in terms of it being Richard's rise to power followed by his fall from power) he still presented the play as cyclical: the continuation of power 'marked by murder, violence, treachery.'²¹

THE WOMEN AS THE HEART OF THE PLAY

It was the women in the play, rather than Richmond, who represented the hope for England, they were the alternative to the cycle of fighting for power in civil wars. Queen Margaret, who is completely cut from McKellen's film (as she is from Olivier's) retained most of her lines in the stage production. Eyre included Margaret in the dream sequence in Act 5 scene 3 (from which the text omits her) and the Duchess of York appeared in Scene 6 'Family Photo' (Act 2 scene 1), a scene earlier than the text demanded, thus reinforcing the female opposition to Richard throughout the play. Eyre

¹⁷ Eyre, p.167.

¹⁸ Jan Kott, Shakespeare Our Contemporary (New York: Anchor Books; Doubleday & Company Inc., 1966), p.38.

¹⁹ Kott, p.38.

²⁰ Kott, p.7.

²¹ Kott, p.6.

also believed that the women provide the atmosphere of grief which is the emotional centre of the play:

Some recent productions leave out the incantatory scenes of sorrow. They are notoriously difficult to handle, and often sound alien to modern sensibilities, but I think of them as the heart of the play. It is called the tragedy of Richard III, and it is their tragedy that is being told.²²

The grief of the women and their outspoken hatred and censure of Richard was the sympathetic side of the dialectic of the production: the other side was Richard and his evil and Richmond and his military coup.

McKELLEN AND EYRE'S FOCUS ON RICHARD AS PROFESSIONAL SOLDIER

The women of the play also filled the emotional void left by a humourless, unattractive and distant Richard. Eyre and McKellen did not see Richard as a charismatic joker but as a professional soldier damaged by war and incapable of feeling any emotion other than anger and hate.

The fact that McKellen played Richard III on stage so soon after his successful interpretation of Iago, in the RSC's 1989 production of Othello, inevitably led to comparisons. Martin Hoyle opened his review for the Financial Times with the comment: 'There is a general murmur that Ian McKellen's Richard is a continuation of his Iago'²³ and Carl Miller writing for City Limits started his with the observation: 'After his NCO Iago, McKellen's King Richard is high-ranking material'²⁴ Michael Coveney, in the Observer, also made a comparison between the two roles: 'Like his RSC Iago, McKellen's Richard is a brilliant soldier in a new setting.'²⁵ Coveney hit on the very element of Shakespeare's play that fascinated both McKellen and Eyre: Richard as soldier. McKellen has played a number of Shakespeare's soldiers: Iago,

²² Eyre, p.161.

²³ Martin Hoyle, Financial Times, 27 July 1990.

²⁴ Carl Miller, City Limits, 2-9 August 1990.

²⁵ Michael Coveney, Observer, 29 July 1990.

Coriolanus, Macbeth as well as Richard III, and finds the dramatist's exploration of what happens to soldiers when they try to enter civilian life absorbing. McKellen having had the recent experience of playing Iago, as well as the other characters, naturally homed in on this similarity:

What is it that goes so terribly wrong when soldiers are idle? What happens when a great soldier like Richard returns from the war and suddenly finds himself out of a job? What happens when he finds people talking to women? Shakespeare's soldiers all have terrible relationships with women.²⁶

Eyre was as fascinated as McKellen by the identity of Richard as a soldier recently returned from war. In 1987 Eyre won a BAFTA award for Tumbledown, a television film about the Falklands war. In the course of making the film he had talked to soldiers involved in the conflict and was alarmed by their inability to reintegrate themselves into civilian life. This experience fed directly into his interpretation of Richard III whom he saw as a soldier 'raging with unconsummated energy' For Eyre 'this hunger to fill the vacuum left by battle' was the 'driving force of the play.' He stated, 'I saw this sense of unfulfilled appetite at first hand in people who had fought in the war and were unable to come to terms with peace...soldiers are licensed to break the ultimate taboo against killing; some of them get the habit' ²⁷ This is how he viewed Richard's violence. Both Eyre and McKellen had an image of Richard as a redundant military man, who with no legitimate means of channelling his energy, allows his aggression to become uncontrolled as he wreaks havoc on his immediate community.

THE PRESENTATION OF RICHARD'S PHYSICAL DISABILITIES

The decision to prioritise Richard's identity as a soldier directly informed the visual presentation of Richard's deformity. Olivier's interpretation, both on stage and

²⁶ Kate Kellaway, 'Shakespeare's kings take to the road', Observer, 29 July 1990.

²⁷ Eyre, p.157.

film, was and is physically very striking: a huge hump and very pronounced limp. Antony Sher, when he played the role for the RSC in 1984, took Olivier's physical exaggeration a step further and presented a Richard who was a cripple, totally reliant on crutches. Sher, like Olivier, had also opted for a sizeable hump. McKellen might have taken this physical decrepitude even further as Brian Cox recorded that: 'Ian at one time even thought of playing Richard in a wheelchair.'²⁸ However, the opposite happened and Eyre and McKellen reduced Richard's deformity so that when McKellen stood still and faced the audience it was almost undetectable. The only obvious physical disability he had was chronic alopecia. This came out of McKellen's desire to have an instantly visible handicap while underplaying the expected hump and limp. Cox recalled sitting next to McKellen in a rehearsal:

Ian has obviously been thinking about Richard's image and was doing doodlings... He drew a face and then suddenly hit on the idea of a birthmark. I said if we visit Moscow and Leningrad, with Gorbachev in power, a birthmark might look a little close to the bone.²⁹

So the birthmark became alopecia (See Fig.15 and Fig.16). This is typical of the way McKellen approaches a role. Eyre has echoed Cox's observations articulating McKellen's method of developing a character:

It is said of Olivier that he started with the shoes; with Ian it's the face and the voice. I have a postcard he sent me when we started work on Richard III - a wry cartoon of a severe face, recognisable as his own, with sharply receding hair, an arrow pointing to a patch of alopecia; at the throat is a military collar, above the shoulder the tip of a small hump.³⁰

The design in the cartoon was adopted for the production. McKellen wore a very small hump that could only be really seen from the side or back, he played the part as if he was completely paralysed down the left hand side of his body, with his left arm hanging

²⁸ Brian Cox, The Lear Diaries (London: Methuen, 1992), p.39.

²⁹ Cox, p.33.

³⁰ Eyre, p.101.

uselessly by his side. The critic Jack Tinker saw Richard's successful masking of his deformities as a visual image for the equally successful pious smokescreen with which he hid his evil:

A military man through and through, as practised in turning the stiff upper lip into the dissembler's smile as he is at disguising the paralysed arm and slight hunched shoulder with ramrod parade ground posture.³¹

Both McKellen and Eyre, with their desire to highlight Richard's soldiership, needed the audience to believe in his prowess on the battlefield.

Eyre thought that the three physical weaknesses they gave to Richard were enough to justify the other characters' contempt, and pointed out that even today, as in Elizabethan times, 'slight deformities are enough to inspire repulsion'.³² The paralysis and hair loss was enough, Eyre believed, to make sense of the personal abuse and insults he receives about his deformity in the play, as well as being compatible with his success as a professional soldier. This opinion was not shared by all the critics. Michael Billington believed that this minimalist approach to Richard's deformity means that 'It seems somewhat excessive for Queen Margaret to describe as "an elvish-marked, abortive, rooting hog" this immaculate, evening-dressed figure at a state banquet.'³³ Milton Shulman complained that 'he is not the deformed, unfinished hunchback that dogs bark at, and that audiences are not expected to take the Bard's lines as relevant to this particular production.'³⁴ One could argue, though, that the fact that McKellen's Richard had only slight deformities made the insults against him more not less effective. Invective is rarely accurate description and verbal taunts hurt the victim not necessarily because they are true but because they exploit a psychological insecurity. Just because

³¹ Jack Tinker, *Daily Mail*, 26 July 1990.

³² Eyre, p.158.

³³ Michael Billington, *Guardian*, 27 July 1990.

³⁴ Milton Shulman, *Evening Standard*, 27 July 1990.

characters call Richard a spider and a hog does not mean he must look like these animals. Antony Sher's very physical performance as Richard was a literal interpretation of the description of Richard as a 'bottled spider'. His crutches and the long thin sleeves of his costume made up the complement of eight limbs. The dichotomy between how McKellen looked on stage and what the characters said about Richard indicated the depth of their hatred and fear of him because it was so exaggerated.

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF RICHARD'S EVIL

The underplaying of Richard's disabilities also fitted in with McKellen's personal dislike of the play's association of physical deformity and evil. It was this aspect of the play that had earlier made him resistant to it. He did believe that Richard's evil is linked to his physicality but not in the sense that his physical deformity is its manifestation. McKellen believed that: 'Studying the play reveals an opposite proposition - that Richard's wickedness is an outcome of other people's disaffection with his physique.'³⁵ Eyre believed that Richard's mother's rejection of him from birth because of his deformities is directly responsible for his wickedness. The Duchess of York's first appearance was in Act 2 scene 1 instead of scene 2. Eyre decided to cut the beginning of Act 2 scene 2 and so make scenes 1 and 2 one long scene (Scene 6 'Family Photo'). After the discovery of Clarence's death, Queen Elizabeth, Dorset, Rivers and Grey exited with King Edward on line 135, leaving the Duchess of York, Richard, Stanley, Buckingham, Ratcliffe and Catesby on stage. After Richard's line 'O, they did urge it still unto the King! / God will revenge it' (139-40) a scream was heard offstage and Queen Elizabeth re-entered with the news of Edward's death. The Duchess of York therefore heard the news of Clarence's death along with the rest of the court and

³⁵ McKellen, p.22.

then learned of the death of her eldest son Edward. Eyre moved Richard's request for his mother's blessing to the end of the scene just before the court left to arrange for Prince Edward to come to London. McKellen knelt before his mother to receive her cold impersonal words. The fact that she had just lost two of her sons made Richard's aside (which McKellen spoke to Buckingham) much more pertinent:

... And make me die a good old man!
That is the butt end of a mother's blessing;
I marvel that her grace did leave it out (2.2.109-111).

The fact that the Duchess of York did not wish for long life for Richard despite having just lost her other two sons indicated her lack of love for him. Lois Potter pointed out that the Duchess of York's behaviour gave the audience an explanation for Richard's lack of humanity: 'The unloving hero is the product of an unloving mother, herself the product of a social class that refuses to recognise the reality of human emotion.'³⁶ Because McKellen wanted to avoid any suggestion of the medieval notion that disability is God's punishment for sin, the production cut lines that related to this, such as Queen Margaret's taunt:

Sin, death, and hell have set their marks on him,
And all their ministers attend on him (1.3.292-3).

McKellen wanted the audience to see Richard's villainy as a human response to the harshness of the world's reaction to him rather than a supernatural inevitability. McKellen rejected the idea that Richard is simply the embodiment of pure evil just as he had rejected this description of Iago:

Having just played that part [Iago] and delved into the jealous psychology of a sexually frustrated husband, I was prepared to explore Richard's humanity rather than reducing him to an emblem of wickedness.³⁷

³⁶ Lois Potter, *The Times Literary Supplement*, 3-9 August 1990.

³⁷ McKellen, p.22-23.

THE INTELLECTUAL FORCE OF McKELLEN'S RICHARD

McKellen's rejection of Richard as being simply 'an emblem' points to the performance's intellectual force which was largely achieved through his depiction of Richard's appropriation of religion to gain power. In general, McKellen was very struck by the religious images in the text; 'I believe that he even suggested playing Richard in a dog collar with army fatigues but someone pointed out that chaplains don't fight', stated Cox.³⁸ The reference to 'Holy Writ' in Act 1 scene 3 had a greater resonance than is usual because throughout the production McKellen's Richard carried a soldier's Bible. He thrust one into Clarence's hand as he was taken off to the Tower. In Act 3 scene 7 (Called in the production 'Scene 15 - Baynard's Castle' or 'Up to the Leads' or 'Nuremberg Rally') Richard is seeking the consent of the people of London that he become king. Buckingham is stage-managing the whole event, manipulating the Lord Mayor and the citizens while Richard connives by pretending to be at his prayers, affecting a lack of interest in the crown. This scene was staged with McKellen stationed aloft, facing the audience, in a small caged platform on a crane. An old-fashioned stand microphone was attached to the front of the podium. Cox, as Buckingham, stood at the front of the stage facing out to the audience, also with a stand microphone. The artificial staging with both Cox and McKellen facing out to the audience, perhaps made it more difficult for the actors because of the lack of eye contact, but it meant that the audience did not have to look at a lot of backs (a danger for directors struggling to make this scene dynamic in performance). At the end of the scene when the Lord Mayor and the citizens voiced their acceptance of Richard the crane descended. The assembled crowd shouted 'Amen' five times and then knelt in two lines facing upstage

³⁸ Cox, p.38.

towards Richard. Ratcliffe and Lovel entered upstage right and left with flaming torches, crossed to either side of the crane and as it slowly came down pulled out the banner that was hanging from it to its full extent. The banner with Richard's cross and boar motif covered the stage. Richard stepped onto the banner and slowly moved downstage past his new subjects. He stopped at Buckingham and raised him to his feet. Buckingham promptly asked, 'Tomorrow may it please you to be crowned? (241) McKellen spoke his exit line 'Farewell, my cousin; farewell, gentle friends' (246) and walked upstage to the top of the banner and then turned to the audience, placed his hand on his heart and then raised it in the air, brandishing the Bible he was still holding in his hand. This embryonic Nazi salute, as it was perceived by the critics, was effective in that it gave a strong visual image to the paradox that Richard has used religion as a tool to gain power.

This staging was innovative, a radical change to what has become established as an opportunity for clowning comedy. At one point in the same scene in Bill Alexander's 1984 RSC production the promptbook indicates that Richard, Buckingham and all the citizens were on their knees, crawling from one side of the stage to the other in pursuit of each other. The exits at the end of the scene have traditionally been altered so that either Richard and Buckingham or just Richard are left alone for the last six lines. This is often staged as a moment of exhilaration and triumph, Richard and Buckingham laughing at the foolishness of the citizens and Lord Mayor. In the video of Peter Hall and John Barton's Wars of the Roses (RSC 1963) Ian Holm's Richard is seen pretending to exit with the citizens but as the doors shut behind them he swings round throwing the prayer book at Buckingham who catches it laughing. A.C. Sprague traces the business of the throwing of the prayer book back to Colley Cibber's staging of the

play and states that ‘Benson and Mansfield, Baliol Holloway and Laurence Olivier all flung away their books, the last adding a leap from a window, to join Buckingham’³⁹ Eyre avoided any lightness in this scene, the modern parallels echoed in McKellen’s Richard intimidating the people into consent made it sobering rather than comic. There was no release for the audience at the end to revel with Richard in his success nor during the scene to enjoy the spectacle of Buckingham and Richard in cahoots. The lack of humour throughout the production meant that McKellen’s Richard was a remote, enigmatic, frightening force of evil. This was a conscious decision by McKellen who did not see Richard as ‘a stage villain who should be played for laughs’.⁴⁰

THE PRESENTATION OF RICHARD’S WOOING OF LADY ANNE

It is not only the humour of Richard but also the attraction of his personal charisma and sexual magnetism that commonly allow audiences to enjoy his ascent to power, but McKellen’s portrayal of Richard lacked sex appeal as well as humour. This lack of sexual allure can perhaps be ascribed to the specific 1930’s proto-Fascist concept of the production. The sexual inhibition associated with the type of upper-class military officer with which McKellen was aligning his characterisation made this element in the play very difficult to express. The scene with Lady Anne in Act 1 is frequently made credible for an audience by Richard’s intense, overwhelming, erotic appeal. The exact point of Anne’s capitulation is not indicated in the text and each production has to make its own decision as to where to locate it. Later in the play, in Act 4 scene 1, she recalls the earlier scene and attributes her surrender to Richard’s

³⁹ Shakespeare’s Histories: Plays for the Stage (London: The Society for Theatre Research, 1966), p.134.

⁴⁰ Kate Kellaway, ‘Shakespeare’s kings take to the road’, Observer, 29 July 1990.

‘honey words’ (79). Eyre and McKellen seemingly did not think that it would be appropriate or credible for McKellen’s Richard to persuade Lady Anne by force of sexual energy. Rather, the scene was directed in such a way as to suggest that she was the victim of Richard’s superior skills of manipulation. This Richard used psychology rather than sexuality to woo her. As he challenged her -

If thy revengeful heart cannot forgive,
Lo, here I lend thee this sharp-pointed sword,
Which if thou please to hide in this true breast (1.2.173-5)

- he removed his overcoat and jacket and handed her the sword. The fact that Richard could only use one of his hands meant that the removal of the clothes was a lengthy process despite being a practised one. Because Lady Anne stood watching as Richard unbuttoned his coat, shrugged it off his shoulders, unbuttoned his khaki army jacket, having already removed his ceremonial sword and belt, both she and the audience had time to take in the full extent of Richard’s disability. Although Lady Anne took up the sword he offered, the seeds of doubt had been sown in her mind and the beginning of her softening to him had begun. By showing her his physical vulnerability he had made it impossible for her to kill him in cold blood, despite his admission that he had killed her husband. There was no sexual passion in the exchange when Richard placed the ring on her finger, having first removed it from his own by his teeth: he simply kissed her hand. McKellen did not put his jacket back on until Lady Anne had exited.

Jan Kott also sees the reason for Richard’s victory over Lady Anne as being psychological and relates it to modern history:

This scene should be interpreted through our own experiences. One must find in it the night of Nazi occupation, concentration camps, mass-murders. One must see in it the cruel time when all moral standards are broken, when the victim becomes executioner, and vice-versa.⁴¹

⁴¹ Kott, p.44.

Richard has annihilated the moral order and Kott argues that Anne surrenders ‘to prove to herself that all the world’s laws have ceased to exist’⁴² rather than because she is overwhelmed by Richard’s sexual charisma.

In keeping with the presentation of Richard as sexually inhibited, Eyre cut his lines to Queen Elizabeth in Act 4 scene 4, referring to her daughter’s womb:

Where in that nest of spicery, they will breed
Selves of themselves, to your recomforture (424-5).

Michael Billington noticed this cut and saw it as ‘symptomatic of McKellen’s asexuality’.⁴³ In the 1984 RSC production the lines which Eyre cut gave rise to an excitingly potent moment. Unlike McKellen, Sher presented Richard as highly sexed and confident in his sexual magnetism. The promptbook indicates that Sher, who was sitting on the floor at this point in the play, pulled Queen Elizabeth towards him and positioned her between his legs while he stroked her stomach. There was a dangerous erotic attraction between them both which made this scene thrilling, as the audience were uncertain as to Elizabeth’s true feelings towards Richard.

McKELLEN’S ATTEMPT TO SHOW THE STUNTED HUMANITY BEHIND THE EVIL

McKellen’s presentation of a Richard devoid of humour and sexual power meant that he needed to provide the audience with some other means of feeling connected to him. Lois Potter lamented that the audience were ‘denied warmth and humour’.⁴⁴ Carl Miller also regretted the lack of humour, stating:

⁴² Kott, p.44.

⁴³ Michael Billington, *Guardian*, 27 July 1990. Due to Billington’s comment McKellen purposely reinstated the line in the screenplay. It did not succeed in making his film performance any sexier than his stage performance.

⁴⁴ Lois Potter, *Times Literary Supplement*, 3-9 August 1990.

It is a brave decision to eschew Richard's endearing qualities completely but one which even as neatly executed as everyone is here, leaves a hole in the heart of the play which proves unfillable.⁴⁵

Eyre intended to fill the 'heart of the play' with the women's grief and opposition to Richard and McKellen intended to engage the audience's emotions by revealing Richard's humanity. The actor's aim was to communicate to the audience the man behind the evil. What McKellen was hoping to reveal about the interior of Richard is contained in his statement that Shakespeare's soldiers 'are people who, however central they might be to the life of the nation they are leading or wanting to lead, feel somehow inadequate to the task.'⁴⁶

The inner suffering of Richard was seen in Act 1 scene 2 when Lady Anne spat at him. His reaction to this very violent and heartfelt expression of pure hatred was to remain perfectly still. He made no attempt to wipe the spittle off but after a pause he asked her calmly and simply: 'Why dost thou spit at me?' (144) It was only after her answer 'Would it were mortal poison for thy sake!' (145) that he turned upstage, away from her and the audience, took off his hat (which he wedged under his paralysed left arm) removed his glove with his teeth, took a handkerchief from his right hand pocket and wiped his eyes. The controlled response indicated that this was not the first time Richard had been spat on, and his quiet, resigned questioning of Lady Anne's behaviour reflected the pain he had gone through to reach this level of acceptance. The skilled but nevertheless slow process McKellen's Richard had to perform simply to get a handkerchief to clean himself made Lady Anne's behaviour seem almost brutal.

⁴⁵ Carl Miller, *City Limits*, 2-9 August 1990.

⁴⁶ Ben Brantley, 'Out and About with Sir Ian', *Vanity Fair*, June 1992, pp.16-25, (p.17).

Ben Brantley saw the private turmoil of Richard as revealed in ‘sly, shocking glimmers of psychopathic anger and contempt.’⁴⁷ One such glimmer came in Act 1 scene 3 (called in the production ‘Scene 4: The Dinner Party’). The set for this scene consisted of a long dining table with eight chairs, three either side and one at each end. The table was set for dinner, complete with four lighted candelabras. Richard is left alone on stage for a short while after Rivers, Queen Elizabeth, Buckingham and Catesby exit and before the murderers enter. Richard’s soliloquy starts with the observation:

I do the wrong, and first begin to brawl.
The secret mischiefs that I set abroad
I lay unto the grievous charge of others (323-5).

These lines can be delivered in a way that suggests Richard delights in his deviousness. McKellen, however, delivered them matter-of-factly, indicating Richard’s cynicism at the court’s naivety: it was obvious that he was not plotting out of a sense of fun. The ease with which he can manipulate them disgusted him. On the line ‘Clarence, whom I indeed have cast in darkness’ (326) McKellen crossed to the candelabra stage left, lit his cigarette from the first candle and then blew the other two out. (See Fig.15) He continued his speech moving on to the middle candelabra on ‘Now they believe it’ (331). The ‘they’ referred to Stanley, Hastings and Buckingham and there was an ominousness to his careful blowing out of the three candles, one at a time; it was as if Richard was thinking of the three men separately as he extinguished each one. The final candelabra made the point clearly as McKellen spoke the line, ‘To be revenged on Rivers, Dorset, Grey’ (332) he blew out a candle after each name. The last candelabra, stage right, he snuffed out with a napkin as he spoke the line, ‘And thus I clothe my

⁴⁷ Ben Brantley, ‘Out and About with Sir Ian’, *Vanity Fair*, June 1992, pp.16-25, (p.21).

naked villainy' (335). This stage-business not only effectively dramatised the speech but also characterised Richard's contemplation of murder as casual, unemotional and coldly rational. The setting, in the aftermath of a social event, further pointed up the dangerous civilised veneer that Richard was hiding behind. He was a villain, lurking not in a dark corner of the court but out in the open, a part of the social life that the royalty and the aristocracy were beginning to enjoy now there was peace. The sight of McKellen's Richard, charming, in full evening dress, seemingly relaxed, discussing murder as he casually smoked and blew out the candles on the table was appalling. He was revolted by the gullibility of the court surrounding him:

But then I sigh, and with, a piece of Scripture,
Tell them that God bids us do good for evil
And thus I clothe my naked villainy
With odd old ends stolen forth of Holy Writ,
And seem a saint, when most I play the devil (333-7).

In general in Eyre's production, and particularly at this point in McKellen's performance, the audience could understand why no one suspected Richard - he was so subtle. The passage quoted above can be delivered by an actor so as to elicit sympathetic complicity from an audience, but McKellen did not encourage sympathy from the audience at this point. He was trying to reveal the private complexity of a damaged individual, the extent of that personal damage being evident in his evil.

The critics were divided as to whether McKellen was successful in communicating the man behind the evil. Some felt that he failed to complete the journey from the outward man to the inner. Benedict Nightingale observed:

For much of the play we are mainly aware of McKellen's military and aristocratic mask of a fastidious exterior that conceals much and reveals little. It is hard to discern interesting truths beneath the supercilious mannerisms.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Benedict Nightingale, *The Times*, 26 July 1990.

Lois Potter disagreed, and saw the private, recognisably human Richard in the very layers that the other critics thought obscured it:

Our sense of his inner life comes from a mosaic of carefully accumulated details; the facial twitches, the cigarette-smoking, the handing out of Bibles at every opportunity, the deliberate mispronunciation of the names of his enemies, the ghastly humourless smile.⁴⁹

McKELLEN'S VOCAL PERFORMANCE

McKellen's vocal performance is an area that seemingly always divides the critics. His Richard III was no exception. As he played him as a very stiff, formal upper-class officer, he had cut-glass Sandhurst vowels that came out of his throat in a strangled fashion because his mouth remained so clenched. Ben Brantley referred to it as 'a ruling-class lock-jaw accent'.⁵⁰ Paul Taylor joked that his accent 'makes Edward Fox sound common' and that 'the more outrageous his hypocrisy, the more constipated and clipped the vowels' became.⁵¹ Benedict Nightingale attempted to describe the exact sound of McKellen's style of pronunciation:

He comes stiffly across the bare, bleak stage in his general's uniform and talks of "wintah" and "myajestea" in a blend of drawl and blimpish staccato.⁵²

The paralysis down his left hand side seemed to include his mouth resulting in an inability to control the left hand side of his face. McKellen communicated not only the institutionalised military careerist in his vocal delivery but also the slight unnaturalness of a voice not completely controlled.

THE 1995 FILM

McKellen's objective in making a film of Richard III was not simply to preserve his stage performance for posterity. In fact this had already been done: three cameras

⁴⁹ Lois Potter, Times Literary Supplement, 3-9 August 1990.

⁵⁰ Ben Brantley, 'Out and About with Sir Ian', Vanity Fair, June 1992, pp.16-25, (p.21).

⁵¹ Paul Taylor, Independent, 27 July 1990.

⁵² Benedict Nightingale, The Times, 26 July 1990.

videotaped the production at the Lyttelton Theatre as part of the Theatre Museum's project to make archive recordings of plays. His objective was to make a film that would succeed in making Shakespeare exciting and modern, dispel any prejudices that Shakespeare is boring and difficult to understand, and give an audience the same love for Shakespeare that he has:

In 1958 I saw Laurence Olivier's Richard III at the Odeon Cinema in Bolton. A spell was cast as I watched the shadows of great actors and I had confirmed my juvenile sense that Shakespeare was for everybody. I hope that today's young audience might feel something similar when they see our film.⁵³

He wrote his screenplay according to the principle of choosing what was 'most important in terms of plot and interesting in terms of writing'⁵⁴ McKellen has stated that the film has a different emphasis than the play: 'If the action of the play often looks back, the film centred on the living moment and then looks forward.'⁵⁵ The omission of the character of Queen Margaret helps to achieve this. McKellen resisted but was persuaded that 'her powerful presence would not compensate for the time spent in explaining clearly who she is and has been'⁵⁶

In the film McKellen seems to have tried to reduce the Fascist parallels. For the film McKellen added a pencil-line moustache to his make-up inspired by the idea that Richard is playing out the fantasy role of a romantic lover, so the figures that he becomes associated with are 1930's screen heroes like 'Clark Gable, Clifton Webb, David Niven, Douglas Fairbanks'.⁵⁷ This, perhaps, lessened the rigid identification of his performance with 1930's fascist leaders a little. Likewise, although, in the film, McKellen is still reading from a prayer book when Buckingham apologises for

⁵³ McKellen, p.37.

⁵⁴ McKellen, p.9.

⁵⁵ McKellen, p.17.

⁵⁶ McKellen, p.17.

⁵⁷ McKellen, p.80.

disturbing him at his 'devotions' it is absent from his hand for the salute at the end of the scene. The Nazi salute has become a wave of greeting 'Richard is happy for the last time in his life'⁵⁸ and the idea that it is his pretended religious piety which has helped him achieve the crown is lost. (See Fig.18) In his screenplay McKellen comments 'Onstage, I had acknowledged my subjects with a full-arm salute but in the film did not want to specifically identify Richard with fascism.'⁵⁹ McKellen's reason for changing the salute seems naive as the identification with Fascism was not effected by the salute alone and therefore his decision to alter it, in the film, does not make the Fascist associations at this moment any less strong. Moreover, the alteration weakens the 'shock value' of the blasphemy of Richard that was achieved onstage by the combination of the Bible and the Nazi salute.

McKellen's intention in his original screenplay seems to have been to retain as many of the religious overtones as possible, but they seem to have been dropped during the actual shooting or editing. Richard does not give his Bible to Clarence before he is taken to the Tower, so Clarence could not be shown reading a Bible in the bath just before his murder in scene 43 of the film. (Instead Clarence reads a newspaper.) Richard's abuse of the power of religion, one of the intellectual subtleties of McKellen's stage performance, is lost in the film.

Perhaps the most telling difference between McKellen's film and the play is that the film shows the violence that the text keeps offstage. The murder of Rivers was particularly sensationalised:

Through the thin curtains, the afternoon sun shines on Rivers, lying back, naked, on the brass-headed double-bed in the luxury hotel room, which he has rented for a couple of hours. The Air Hostess french-kisses him. The camera closes in on Rivers. As Miss Pan-Am moves down his chest to attend to lower parts,

⁵⁸ McKellen, p.209.

⁵⁹ McKellen, p.206.

unseen by him, the door silently opens a little. CLOSE on Rivers, as his ecstasy rapidly reaches an agonising climax, a long, sharp blade slices up through the mattress, emerging out of his chest.⁶⁰

McKellen's original draft had Rivers executed by Tyrell at the Tower, after which his body would be seen being thrown into the Thames. The lurid, rather puerile death described above was devised by the director Richard Loncraine, perhaps to make more of the character because a well-known American actor, Robert Downey Jr, was playing the part. However, it goes against the nature of the text, which deliberately keeps the deaths of Rivers, Vaughan, Grey, Hastings, Lady Anne and Buckingham off-stage.⁶¹ Shakespeare seems to have made a deliberate choice not to show the executions of the characters in Richard III. This may have been a practical staging decision, or perhaps was partly due to a desire for the audience to share in the delight Richard experiences from his plotting in the first half of the play. The murder of Clarence, is the only onstage murder apart from Richard's death, and is not actually committed by Richard. The horror of the murder is diffused by the comedy that precedes it (as the murderers argue) and to some extent by the guilt one of the murderers feels after it. Because he never bloodies his hands the audience is able to divorce Richard from the brutal mechanics of the murders. Loncraine and McKellen do the opposite. Although in the film Richard does not physically commit the murders, they are all executed by Tyrell⁶² (which again built up the character of Tyrell, played by Adrian Dunbar, who has made menacing, dangerously violent men a speciality) and all of them are witnessed by the

⁶⁰ McKellen, p.149

⁶¹ Eyre did show the deaths of Rivers and Grey in his stage production. They were strangled with ropes: Ratcliffe oversaw their execution. Vaughan was cut from the scene.

⁶² The cause of Lady Anne's death remains ambiguous. She is seen laid out on her bed, the fact that she is dead is indicated by a spider running over her unmoving face. The film does not make clear whether Tyrell has murdered her or she has died of an overdose: the film presents her as a drug addict.

audience. Buckingham's murder is also watched by Richard. Indeed the audience see the murders twice as they are replayed as Richard's dream before the battle:

The deaths of Richard's murdered victims are re-enacted with the camera as the victim's eyes. Richard sees what they saw at the moment of their deaths.⁶³

Loncraine and McKellen omit the speeches of the ghosts from Richard's dream. This highlighting and embellishing of the violence in the play indicates where the interest of the director seems to lie.

McKellen's film Richard is less distant than the figure he presented on stage. This is partly achieved by having him deliver his soliloquies straight to the camera. This breaks the conventions of 'realist' film-making but it allows McKellen to establish an intimacy with the audience by sharing his emotions with them: in scene 26 having wooed Lady Anne he encourages the audience to join him in his delight as he dances through the corridor of the public hospital and then prances up the stairs. At the top of the stairs he raises his arm in a triumphant flourish - a more animated Richard than that seen on stage.

McKellen tried to sell the play to 'junior studio-executives' on the basis that it was a story of 'intrigue and murder' but seems not to have envisaged the unsubtle, blood-thirsty, action-film treatment it was given.⁶⁴ Although he likes the film he has admitted that it 'lacks the kind of gravitas I might have hoped at the beginning.'⁶⁵

CONCLUSION

McKellen's interpretation of Richard III on film is a thin, narrow, less interestingly complicated version of the intelligent, loquacious, damaged, frightened, redundant soldier he presented on stage. On stage McKellen found the role

⁶³ McKellen, p.273

⁶⁴ McKellen, p.25.

⁶⁵ Steve Grant, 'Acid Reign', *Time Out*, 10-17 April 1996, pp.22-24, (p.22).

‘unnervingly easy’ to play.⁶⁶ He explored the areas of Richard’s character that he could personally understand, his intellect, his ability to hide true feelings, his discipline and his need for power. The humour and the sexuality were underplayed resulting in a rather distant, unsympathetic Richard. Some critics felt that the production failed to reflect McKellen’s talent, limiting what could have been an exciting interpretation. Nightingale wrote that McKellen was trapped by the concept of the production and prevented ‘from exploring Richard as thoroughly as he did the stealthy, ravenous Macbeth he presented in the 1970’s or the dry, cold Iago he concocted last year.’⁶⁷ Robert Hewison felt that McKellen moved from ‘character to caricature’.⁶⁸ The production, perhaps emphasising the 1930’s resonances too strictly, nevertheless struck a chord in audiences across the world who responded to its showy, theatrical flamboyance. McKellen’s personal confidence in his interpretation made it an exciting, unnerving, riveting performance to watch.

⁶⁶ Ben Brantley, ‘Out and About with Sir Ian’, *Vanity Fair*, June 1992, pp.16-25 (p.21).

⁶⁷ Benedict Nightingale, *The Times*, 26 July 1990.

⁶⁸ Robert Hewison, *The Sunday Times*, 29 July 1990.

CONCLUSION

McKellen's success in Shakespeare is inextricably linked to the rise of the academic director. Peter Hall's creation of the RSC in 1961 marked the beginning of the domination of Shakespeare in the theatre by university educated directors - a domination that still continues. The merging of the theatre and academia in Shakespeare production, over the last forty years, is without precedent. This development is also reflected in the rise of theatre performance as an field of academic study. McKellen's scholarly approach to Shakespeare is part of this movement, and he has brought an intellectual rigour to his Shakespeare performances which has coincided with the general approach to the play of the academically trained directors he has worked with.

Shakespearean interpretation in the last four decades has been concerned with revisiting and reappraising the texts and the focus has shifted to explaining the plays rather than simply presenting them. McKellen's work has reflected this interest. His performance as Richard II has led to a rethinking of the character. The ineffectual, effete, dandy lyrically intoning the text is no longer an inevitability on stage. His portrayals of Macbeth, Iago and Richard III challenged the idea that they are simply evil and McKellen gained sympathy for them not through wit and sexual charisma but through understanding.

The publication in English of Jan Kott's Shakespeare Our Contemporary in 1964 contributed to the growing desire to make Shakespeare 'relevant' - here indicative of a text's capacity to comment on current society. The RSC made relevancy central to their approach to Shakespeare. McKellen always tries to find a modern parallel for the character he is playing: John McEnroe for Coriolanus, Mohammed Ali for Macbeth, the Dalai Lama and a Hollywood film star for Richard II. However, perhaps the modernity

audiences have appreciated most in McKellen's performances has been psychological. McKellen's characterisations have been absorbing in their portrayal of repression. The psychological credibility of Shakespeare's characters has been hotly debated by scholars and audiences in the latter half of this century, and he has contributed to this process. His performance as Richard III discarded the assumption that Richard is simply evil and presented the psychological profile of a man who murders because he has been denied affection due to his physical disabilities. His anger at his rejection, which had been sublimated in war, before the action of the play began, in peacetime was turned on his immediate circle. His evil was all the more frightening for being coldly rational.

McKellen's work has also benefited from the increasing enthusiasm on the part of theatre companies, directors and actors for staging Shakespeare in small, intimate spaces. The Other Place, at Stratford-upon-Avon, through Buzz Goodbody's King Lear (1974) and Hamlet (1975) and Nunn's Macbeth (1976) 'pointed the way'¹ in this development. The small scale work presented at The Other Place has earned a reputation for having 'freshness, energy, clarity.'² Presenting Shakespeare with minimum set, props and costume has resulted in memorable effects being achieved simply. The haunting noise of the daggers knocking against each other in the shaking hands of McKellen's Macbeth would not have been possible on a large stage.

McKellen's performances as Macbeth, Coriolanus, Iago and Richard III have illuminated Shakespeare's comments on the nature of soldiers and their response to peace. The realism that he has brought to his explorations of these characters is testimony to his intellectual approach to the text and paramount desire for the audience

¹ Colin Chambers, Other Spaces (London: Eyre Methuen; TQ Publications, 1980), p.67.

² Peter Holland, English Shakespeares (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.119.

to identify with them as modern people. The complexity of his characters (simultaneously sympathetic and repugnant) has challenged audiences.

McKellen is an actor who excels at playing ambition and power. His own temperament can be seen to be influential in his successful performances of Richard II, Macbeth, Coriolanus, Iago and Richard III. He has a strong sense of his own authority which enables him to communicate power. He has the energy and drive that is required to achieve ambition: he doggedly persevered for four years to raise the finance to film Richard III. He likes control, that is affirmed by the Actors' Company, the McKellen/Petherbridge group at the National and his management of the 1990 National Theatre Tour.

McKellen's attitude to his sexuality has also affected his presentation of Shakespeare's characters. His ability to present the schism between a character's public persona and private reality must in part be due to his experience as a publicly closeted gay man. He can appreciate the energy and determination required for Macbeth, Iago and Richard III to keep up their public masks. His sexuality has encouraged him to explore the humanity behind the exterior - he knows that a character's public personality is not necessarily the true man.

McKellen's performances have contributed to our understanding of Shakespeare's characters. He has challenged his audiences to consider the complexity and sympathy with which Shakespeare presents the human personality.

APPENDIX A

STAGE APPEARANCES BY IAN McKELLEN IN
PROFESSIONAL SHAKESPEARE PRODUCTIONS

1962	Claudio	<u>Much Ado About Nothing</u>	Belgrade, Coventry dir Graham Crowden
1963	Henry	<u>Henry V</u>	Wolsey, Ipswich dir Robert Chetwyn
1963/4	Aufidius	<u>Coriolanus</u>	Nottingham Playhouse dir Tyrone Guthrie
1964	More	<u>Sir Thomas More</u>	Nottingham Playhouse dir Frank Dunlop
1965	Claudio	<u>Much Ado About Nothing</u>	National Theatre dir France Zeffirelli
1968	Richard	<u>Richard II</u>	Prospect Theatre Company Tour 1968, Tour 1969 Piccadilly Theatre, London 1969/70 dir Richard Cottrell
1971	Hamlet	<u>Hamlet</u>	Prospect Theatre Company Tour, Cambridge Theatre London dir Robert Chetwyn
1974	Edgar	<u>King Lear</u>	Actors' Company Tour New York and Wimbledon dir David William
1975	The Bastard	<u>King John</u>	RSC Aldwych dir John Barton
1976	Romeo	<u>Romeo and Juliet</u>	RSC Stratford and Aldwych dir Trevor Nunn and Barry Kyle
	Leontes	<u>The Winter's Tale</u>	RSC Stratford dir John Barton and Trevor Nunn

	Macbeth	<u>Macbeth</u>	RSC Stratford and Warehouse dir Trevor Nunn
1978	Sir Toby Belch	<u>Twelfth Night</u>	RSC Tour dir John Amiel
1984	Coriolanus	<u>Coriolanus</u>	National Theatre and Athens dir Peter Hall
1989	Iago	<u>Othello</u>	RSC Stratford and Young Vic dir Trevor Nunn
1990	Kent	<u>King Lear</u>	National Theatre World Tour dir Deborah Warner
1990	Richard III	<u>Richard III</u>	National Theatre World Tour and US Tour dir Richard Eyre

Since 1977 McKellen has also intermittently toured his one-man show Acting Shakespeare.

APPENDIX B

PRODUCTION INFORMATION

The production information has been compiled from programmes and reviews of the productions. The information has been arranged in chronological order.

BELGRADE THEATRE COVENTRY, 1962

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

Opened: 6th March 1962

Leonato, governor of Messina	Norman Henry
A Messenger	Christopher Tranchell
Don Pedro, Prince of Arragon	Bernard Brown
Don John, his bastard brother	Bernard Horsfall
Benedick, a young lord of Padua	Bernard Kilby
Claudio, a young lord of Florence	Ian McKellen
Antonio, brother of Leonato	Peter French
Conrade } followers of	David Warner
Borachio } Don John	Denzil Ellis
Boy (Page)	Michael Everitt
Balthasar, musician and attendant on Don Pedro	Christopher Tranchell
Dogberry, a constable	Roy Godfrey
First Watchman	Anthony Boden
Second Watchman	Christopher Tranchell
Third Watchman	Peter Cartwright
Fourth Watchman	Patrick Chapman
Friar Francis	Richard Simpson
A Sexton	Peter Cartwright
Hero, daughter to Leonato	Bridget Turner
Beatrice, niece to Leonato	Gillian Raine
Margaret } waiting-gentlewomen	Gillian Martell
Ursula } to Hero	Kristine Howarth
A Lord	Anthony Boden
A Lady	Penelope Verney

Director	Graham Crowden
Designer	Christopher Morley

ARTS THEATRE IPSWICH, 1963

HENRY V

Opened: 5th February 1963

Chorus	Robert Gillespie
Henry V	Ian McKellen
Duke of Exeter	David Tudor Jones
Earl of Westmoreland	Alan Gray
Duke of Gloucester	David MacKechnie
Duke of York	Chris Winnera
Archbishop of Canterbury	Stephen MacDonald
Bishop of Ely	Roger Hammond
A Herald	Geoffrey Greenleaf
Bates	Robert Gillespie
Williams	Douglas Ditta
Pistol	Gawn Grainger
Nym	Anthony Ditchburn
Bardolph	Brian Cant
Mistress Quickly	Doreen Andrew
A Boy	John McGee
Sir Thomas Erpingham	Colin Kaye
Gower	Roger Hammond
Fluellen	Antony Webb
MacMorris	Chris Winnera
Jamy	Douglas Ditta
Charles the Sixth of France	Brendan Barry
Lewis, The Dauphin	Stephen MacDonald
Duke of Burgundy	Robert Gillespie
Duke of Orleans	Jonathan Meddings
Constable of France	Leon Sheppardson
Governor of Harfleur	Colin Kaye
Montjoy	Brian Cant
Katherine	Josie Kidd
Alice	Brigid Panet
Isabel, Queen of France	Doreen Andrew
A French girl	Susan Wherrett
Director	Robert Chetwyn
Designer	Juanita Waterson

NOTTINGHAM PLAYHOUSE, 1963

CORIOLANUS

Opened: 12th December 1963

Coriolanus	John Neville
Menenius	Leo McKern
Volumnia	Dorothy Reynolds
Virgilia	Helen Ryan
Cominius	James Cairncross
Tullus Aufidius	Ian McKellen
Sicinius	Christopher Hancock
Brutus	George Selway
First Citizen	Ronald Magill
Second Citizen	Ronald Crawford
Officer	Kenneth McReddie
Titus Lartius	David Savile
Volscian Senator	Anthony Howell
First Soldier	John Collins
Second Soldier	John Toye
Volscian Soldier	Roger Clissold
Third Citizen	John Collins
First Aedile	John Collins
Second Aedile	John Toye
Citizen of Antium	Ronald Magill
First Servingman	John Toye
Second Servingman	Michael Crawford
Third Servingman	John Collins
Volscian Sentries	John Toye, John Collins
Young Martius	Peter Deakes
Valeria	Marielain Douglas
Gentlewoman	Maggie Jordan
Director	Tyrone Guthrie
Designer	Patrick Robertson

NOTTINGHAM PLAYHOUSE 1964

SIR THOMAS MORE

Opened: 10th June 1964

In order of speaking:

Doll Williamson	Josephine Tewson
De Barde	John Collins
Caveler	Michael Cadman
Williamson	Antony Brown
Sherwin	Steven Berkoff
Lincoln	John Golightly
George Betts	Geoffrey Hutchings
Lord Mayor	Christopher Hancock
Thomas More	Ian McKellen
Justice Suresby	Ronald Magill
Smart	Roger Clissold
Lifter	Martin Jenkins
Recorder	David Savile
Earl of Shrewsbury	George Selway
Earl of Surrey	Ian McCulloch
Sir Thomas Palmer	Job Stewart
Sir Roger Cholmley	Kenneth McReddie
Ralph Betts	George Layton
Crofts	Roger Mutton
William Roper	Eric Allan
Lady More	Edith Macarthur
First Player	Job Stewart
Lady Mayoress	Josephine Shore
Margaret Roper	Maggie Jordan
Cecily Heron	Jennifer Young
Porter	Roger Clissold
Second Player	Steven Berkoff
Third Player	John Collins
Boy Player	Michael Cadman
Duke of Norfolk	Antony Brown
First Warder	Geoffrey Hutchings
Second Warder	John Tordoff
Third Warder	Vivian Mackerrell
Gough	Martin Jenkins
Catesby	George Layton
Lieutenant of the Tower	Roger Mutton
Hangman	John Golightly
Director	Frank Dunlop
Designer	Patrick Robertson
Music	Anthony Bowles

NATIONAL THEATRE - OLD VIC 1965

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

Opened: 16th February 1965

The Army	Don Pedro, Prince of Arragon Don John, his bastard brother Claudio, a young nobleman of Florence Benedick, a gentleman of Padua A Lord, attendant on Claudio	Albert Finney Derek Jacobi Ian McKellen Robert Stephens Neil Fitzpatrick
The Town	Leonato, governor of Messina Antonio, his brother Hero, his daughter Beatrice, his niece Ursula, a gentlewoman Margaret, a serving girl Conrade } Borachio } followers of Don John Balthasar, a singer The Messenger Women of Leonato's household	Gerald James Harry Lomax Caroline John Maggie Smith Elizabeth Burger Lynn Redgrave Edward Petherbridge Tom Kempinski Bruce Purchase Michael Byrne Jennie Heslewood Pauline Taylor
The Law	Dogberry, a constable Verges, his deputy The Sexton First Watchman Second Watchman Other Watchmen	Frank Finlay Michael Rothwell Reginald Green Peter John Ron Pember Dan Meaden Ronald Pickup Michael York
The Church	Friar Francis	Frank Wylie

Directed and Designed	Franco Zeffirelli
Costume Designer	Peter J. Hall
Textual Revisions	Robert Graves
Music	Nino Rota
Lighting	Brian Freeland

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING TOUR

During its run at the Old Vic Much Ado About Nothing went on a short tour, playing in repertory with Noel Coward's Hay Fever. From March 22nd - 25th it played at the Hippodrome in Bristol and from March 29th - April 1st at the Theatre Royal, Nottingham. It returned to the Old Vic on 7th April and the last performance in that season was on 19th June. The production was revived the following year returning to the Old Vic on 24th August 1966. It went on another short tour from 31st October - November 17th 1966. This time it visited His Majesty's, Aberdeen; King's Theatre, Glasgow and the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-Upon-Avon. It returned to the Old Vic on 25th November and then played intermittently until its last performance on 1st December 1967. McKellen had left the National Theatre Company at the end of the 1965 season so over the next two years the part of Claudio was played by Michael Byrne, David Belcher (for two performances) and Jeremy Brett.

PROSPECT THEATRE COMPANY TOUR 1968

RICHARD II

Opened on tour on 1st November 1968 at Arts Theatre, Cambridge

King Richard the Second	Ian McKellen
John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster	Paul Hardwick
Edmund, Duke of York	John Byron/Robert Eddison
Henry Bolingbroke, Duke of Hereford	Neil Stacy/ Timothy West
Duke of Aumerle	Terence Wilton
Thomas Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk	Keith Buckley/ Stephen Grief
The Earl of Salisbury	Richard Morant
The Earl of Northumberland	David McKail/ Trevor Martin
Henry Percy	Andrew Robertson
Lord Ross	Peter Rocca
Lord Willoughby	Sylvester Morand
The Bishop of Carlisle	Ronald Adam/ Andrew Crawford
Sir William Bagot	Luke Hardy
Sir Henry Green	Harry Meacher
Sir John Bushy	Raymond Burke
The Abbot of Westminster	Thomas Chesleigh
Owen Glendower	Nigel Lambert
Sir Pierce Exton	Harry Meacher
Groom	Keith Buckley
Keeper	Andrew McCulloch
Isabel, Queen to King Richard	Amanda Reiss/ Lucy Fleming
Duchess of York	Wynne Clark
Duchess of Gloster [sic]	Kathleen Moffat
Lady in Waiting to the Queen	Lynn Dickeson
Director	Richard Cottrell
Designer	Tim Goodchild
Lighting	John B. Read
Music	Benjamin Pearce Higgins

/ indicates that there was a change of actor in 1969 when it played in repertory with Edward II.

RICHARD II TOUR

After Cambridge Richard II toured to Theatre Royal, Brighton; Theatre Royal, Newcastle; Grand Theatre, Leeds and Yvonne Arnaud Theatre, Guilford. In August 1969 the production went on a second tour in repertory with Edward II. It went to Forum Theatre, Billingham; Assembly Hall, Edinburgh; Mermaid Theatre, London; Volkstheater, Vienna (Richard II only); Nova Scena, Bratislava (Richard II only); New Theatre, Cardiff; Grand Theatre, Leeds and Alexandra Theatre, Birmingham. It returned to London and went into the Piccadilly Theatre, London.

PROSPECT THEATRE COMPANY BRITISH AND EUROPEAN TOUR 1971

HAMLET

Opened on tour on 24th March at the Nottingham Playhouse

Francisco	Kit Jackson
Marcellus	Terence Wilton
Barnardo	Tim Pigott-Smith
Horatio	Julian Curry
Claudius	Ronald Lewis
Laertes	Stuart Wilson
Polonius	Geoffrey Chater
Gertrude	Faith Brook
Hamlet	Ian McKellen
Ophelia	Susan Fleetwood
Reynaldo	James Cairncross
Rosencrantz	William Ellis
Guildestern	Simon Prebble
Voltimand	Richard Beale
Cornelius	Colin Kaye
Actor who plays the King	Tim Pigott-Smith
Actor who plays the Queen	Nickolas Grace
Actor who plays Lucianus	Stephen O'Rourke
Fourth Actor	Kit Jackson
Gentleman	Colin Kaye
Attendant to Claudius	Tim Pigott-Smith
Sailor	Stephen O'Rourke
First Gravedigger	James Cairncross
Second Gravedigger	Nickolas Grace
Priest	Richard Beale
Osric	Russell Hunter
Fortinbras	Terence Wilton
Ladies of the court	Clare Shenstone
	Marcia Warren
Lords, Soldiers, Actors,	Jonathan Brooke
Attendants, etc	Kit Jackson
	Colin Kaye
	Chris Walsh
Director	Robert Chetwyn
Designer	Michael Annals
Lighting	Michael Outhwaite
Music	Marc Wilkinson

PROSPECT THEATRE COMPANY - CAMBRIDGE THEATRE, LONDON

HAMLET

Opened 5th August 1971

Francisco	David Ashton
Marcellus	Robert Grange
Barnardo	Eric Carte
Horatio	Julian Cury
Claudius	John Woodvine
Laertes	Tim Pigott-Smith
Polonius	James Cairncross
Gertrude	Faith Brook
Hamlet	Ian McKellen
Ophelia	Susan Fleetwood
Reynaldo	Duncan Preston
Rosencrantz	Terence Wilton
Guildenstern	Simon Prebble
Voltimand	Alan Bennion
Cornelius	Colin Kaye
First Player	Tim Pigott-Smith
Player Queen	Ian Pigot
Lucianus	Stephen O'Rourke
Fourth Player	Christopher Morley
Fifth Player	Terence Dougherty
Gentleman	Colin Kaye
Fortinbras' Captain	Duncan Preston
Attendant to Claudius	Eric Carte
Sailor	Stephen O'Rourke
First Gravedigger	James Cairncross
Second Gravedigger	Ian Pigot
Priest	Alan Bennion
Osric	Brendan Barry
Fortinbras	Terence Wilton
Ladies of Court	Anna Barry
	Clare Shenstone
Lords, Soldiers, Actors	Roger Adamson, David Ashton, Ian Bamforth
Attendants etc	Eric Carte, Terence Dougherty, Colin Kaye, Roy Montague, Christopher Morley, Ian Pigot
Director	Robert Chetwyn
Designer	Michael Annals
Lighting	Michael Outhwaite
Music	Marc Wilkinson

HAMLET TOUR

Hamlet toured to: Nottingham, Edinburgh, Aberdeen, Glasgow, Wolverhampton, Brighton, Amsterdam, Antwerp, Frankfurt, Rome, Vienna, Zurich, Leeds and then opened in London. On the British tour Hamlet played in repertory with Charles Macklin's The Man of the World. In a letter to the author Tim Pigott-Smith states; 'Russell Hunter played the lead. Marcia Warren and Susan Fleetwood played important roles, as did Faith Brook... I played some kind of lawyer/Sergeant - and it was directed by John David.' The fact that Russell Hunter did not play Osric in London suggests that his interest lay in his lead role in The Man of the World rather than in Hamlet. The Man of the World was not performed either in Europe or in London. Due to the numerous changes in the cast when the production opened in London I have included both cast lists: pre and post European tour.

ACTORS' COMPANY NEW YORK AND WIMBLEDON THEATRE SEASON

1974

KING LEAR

Opened at Brooklyn Academy of Music: 24th January 1974

Opened at Wimbledon Theatre: 19th March 1974

Cast in order of speaking

Earl of Kent	John Woodvine
Earl of Gloucester	Ronald Radd
His sons: Edmund	Matthew Long
Edgar	Ian McKellen
His daughters: Goneril	Caroline Blakiston/ Paola Dionisotti
Cordelia	Sharon Duce
Regan	Sheila Reid
Duke of Albany	Robin Ellis
Duke of Cornwall	Juan Moreno
Duke of Burgundy	John Tordoff
King of France	John Bennett/ Tenniel Evans
Oswald	Tenniel Evans
Chief Knight	John Bennett/ Milton Cadman
Lear's Fool	Edward Petherbridge
Cornwall's servant	Peter Holt/ Patrick Cadell
1st Gloucester servant	Robin Ellis
2nd Gloucester servant	John Tordoff
Old Man	Edward Petherbridge
[Old Woman	Margery Mason in Norwich programme instead of Old Man]
Doctor	Juan Moreno
Captain	Tenniel Evans
Herald	Juan Moreno
Servants, knights and attendants	Marian Diamond, Paola Dionisotti, Margery Mason, Elaine Strickland, Patrick Cadell, Milton Cadman, Peter Holt
[Servants, knights etc	Sean Baker, John Benjamin, Patrick Cadell - in Norwich programme]
Director	David William
Design	Alan Barlow in association with Brenda Hartill Moores
Lighting	Mark Pritchard

/ = cast changes made after Wimbledon Theatre run

KING LEAR TOUR 1974

King Lear opened at the Brooklyn Academy of Music on 24th January 1974. King Lear played in repertory with The Way of the World, The Wood Demon and Knots. It opened at Wimbledon Theatre on 19th March 1974. At Wimbledon the production was in repertory with the same three plays as in New York and the company also reprised their 1972 production of 'Tis Pity She's a Whore. The Wimbledon season was ten weeks long. The production then toured to Theatre Royal, Newcastle; New Theatre, Oxford and Theatre Royal, Norwich. The cast changes appear to have been made after the Wimbledon run. This seems to be because the tour only involved the King Lear production.

RSC - ALDWYCH THEATRE 1975

KING JOHN

Opened: 9th January 1975

Constance	Sheila Allen
Melun	Ray Armstrong
Queen Elinor	Hilda Braid
Duke of Austria	Gavin Campbell
Cardinal Pandulph	Jeffrey Dench
Salisbury	Denis Holmes
King John	Emrys James
Blanche of Spain	Lousie Jameson
Louis the Dauphin	Jonathan Kent
Pembroke	Richard Mayes
Philip of France	Clement McCallin
Philip the Bastard	Ian McKellen
Hubert	David Suchet
Prince Henry	Benedict Taylor
Lady Faulconbridge	Janet Whiteside

(1975 only: Death, The Presenter Mike Gwilym)

Director	John Barton, Barry Kyle
Designer	John Napier with Martyn Bainbridge and Ann Curtis
Lighting	David Hersey
Music	James Walker

RSC - ROYAL SHAKESPEARE THEATRE 1976

ROMEO AND JULIET

Opened: 1st April 1976

The House of Montague

Montague	Ivan Beavis
Lady Montague	Judith Harte
Romeo	Ian McKellen
Benvolio	Roger Rees
Balthasar	Greg Hicks
Abraham	Duncan Preston

The House of Capulet

Capulet	John Woodvine
Lady Capulet	Barbara Shelley
Juliet	Francesca Annis
Tybalt	Paul Shelley
Old Capulet	Norman Tyrrell
Nurse	Marie Kean
Peter	Richard Griffiths
Sampson	David Howey
Gregory	Leonard Preston

Chorus	John Bown
Escalus	Griffith Jones
Count Paris	Richard Durden
Mercutio	Michael Pennington
Paris' Page	Paul Whitworth
Mercutio's Page	Leonard Preston
Friar Lawrence	David Waller
Friar John	Dennis Clinton
An Apothecary	Clyde Pollitt

Director	Trevor Nunn with Barry Kyle
Designer	Chris Dyer
Lighting	Clive Morris
Music	Stephen Oliver

RSC - ROYAL SHAKESPEARE THEATRE 1976

THE WINTER'S TALE

Opened: 3rd June 1976

Sicilia

Leontes	Ian McKellen
Hermione	Marilyn Taylerson
Mamillius	Richard Porter or Dorian Wathen
Camillo	Bob Peck
Antigonus	Griffith Jones
Paulina	Barbara Leigh-Hunt
First Lord	Dennis Clinton
Cleomenes	Clyde Pollitt
Dion	Richard Howey
Paulina's Steward	Richard Durden
Mariner	Peter Woodward
First Lady	Susan Dury
Second Lady	Judith Harte
Emilia	Lea Dregorn
Bohemia	
Polixenes	John Woodvine
Florizel	Nickolas Grace
Archidamus	David Lyon
Old Shepherd	David Waller
Young Shepherd	Roger Rees
Autolycus	Michael Williams
Perdita	Cherie Lunghi
Mopsa	Pippa Guard
Dorcas	Frances Viner
Shepherd's Servant	Leonard Preston
Other Shepherds	Dennis Clinton, David Lyon, Peter Woodward
Other Shepherdesses	Lea Dregorn, Susan Dury, Judith Harte
Time	
	John Nettles (until 8 June)
	Michael Pennington (10-17 June)
	Robin Ellis (19 June to 3 July)
Director	John Barton with Trevor Nunn
Designer	Di Seymour
Lighting	Clive Morris
Music	Guy Woolfenden

RSC - THE OTHER PLACE 1976

MACBETH

Opened: 4th August 1976 (Official first night 9th September 1976)

The Weird Sisters	Marie Kean
	Judith Harte
	Susan Dury
Duncan, King of Scotland	Griffith Jones
Malcolm, his son	Roger Rees
Donalbain, his second son	Tim Brierley
Macbeth	Ian McKellen
Banquo	John Woodvine
Macduff	Bob Peck
Ross	Ian McDiarmid
Lennox	John Bown
Angus	Duncan Preston
Lady Macbeth	Judi Dench
Lady Macduff	Susan Dury
A Gentlewoman	Judith Harte
A Sergeant	
An Old Man }	David Howey
A Doctor	
Seyton	Tim Brierley
A Porter	Ian McDiarmid
Fleance, Banquo's son	Tony Valls
Young Macduff	Malcolm Milne
Director	Trevor Nunn
Designer	John Napier
Lighting	Leo Leibovici
Music	Guy Woolfenden

RSC TOUR 1978

TWELFTH NIGHT

Opened: 13th July 1978 (Arts Centre, Christ's Hospital, Horsham)

Orsino	Edward Petherbridge
Curio	Alec Wallis
Valentine	Clyde Pollitt
Viola	Emily Richard
A Sea Captain	Griffith Jones
Sir Toby Belch	Ian McKellen
Maria	Bridget Turner
Sir Andrew Aguecheek	Roger Rees
Feste	Christopher Hancock
Olivia	Suzanne Bertish
Malvolio	Bob Peck
Antonio	Patrick Godfrey
Sebastian	Jeremy Blake
Fabian	Clyde Pollitt
Priest	Griffith Jones
Officer	Alec Wallis
Director	John Armiel
Designer	John Napier
Lighting	Brian Harris
Music	Henry Ward

TWELFTH NIGHT TOUR

Twelfth Night toured in repertory with Three Sisters and Is There Honey Still

For Tea?

13-15 July	Arts Centre, Christ's Hospital, Horsham
21,22 July	Victoria Hall, Tunbridge Wells
24-26 July	Towngate Theatre, Poole Centre for the Arts, Poole
31 July - 2 August	Guildhall, Portsmouth
3 August	Gulbenkian Theatre, University of Kent, Canterbury
7-9 August	Key Theatre, Peterborough
14 August	Theatre Royal, Bury St Edmunds
17 and 19 August	Corn Exchange, Ipswich
21 - 24 August	Daniel Stewart's and Melville College, Edinburgh
1 and 2 Sept	Daniel Stewart's and Melville College, Edinburgh
4 - 6 Sept	MacRobert Centre, University of Stirling
11 and 12 Sept	Music Pavilion, Dunfermline
14 and 15	Johnston Community Centre, Paisley
18 and 20 Sept	Dewsbury Town Hall, West Yorkshire
21 and 22 Sept	Hurfield Campus, Sheffield
25 and 27 Sept	Grange Arts Centre, Oldham
28 and 30 Sept	Bletchley Leisure Centre, Milton Keynes
2 and 4 Oct	Pavilion Theatre, Exmouth
5 and 6 Oct	Carn Brea Leisure Centre, Redruth, Cornwall
9 and 11 Oct	College of Further Education, Plymouth
12 and 13 Oct	Plough Theatre, Torrington, Devon
16 and 18 Oct	Merlin Theatre, Frome, Somerset
19 and 20 Oct	Bryanston School, Blandford, Dorset

NATIONAL THEATRE - THE OLIVIER THEATRE 1984

CORIOLANUS

Opened: 15th December 1984

In order of speaking:

First Citizen	Geoffrey Burridge
Second Citizen	Bill Moody
Menenius Agrippa	Frederick Treves
Caius Martius	Ian McKellen
Messenger	Mark Dowse
First Senator	Michael Barrington
Cominius	John Savident
Titus Lartius	Basil Henson
Sicinius Velutus	David Ryall
Junius Brutus	James Hayes
First Volscian Senator	Daniel Thorndike
Tullus Aufidius	Greg Hicks
Seond Volscian Senator	Glenn Williams
Volumnia	Irene Worth/Yvonne Bryceland from 16th July 1985
Virgilia	Wendy Morgan
Gentlewoman	Sarah Mortimer
Valeria	Judith Paris
Messenger	Paul Stewart
First Soldier	Lewis George
Second Soldier	Peter Dineen
First Roman	Brian Kent
Second Roman	Peter Gordon
Third Roman	Paul Stewart
Volscian Lieutenant	Timothy Hick
Herald	Geoffrey Burridge
First Servingman	Peter Gordon
Second Servingman	Bill Moody
Third Servingman	Paul Stewart
Lieutenant to Aufidius	Nigel le Vaillant
Young Martius	Andrew Rigby/ Tod Welling
Director	Peter Hall
Design and Lighting	John Bury
Music	Harrison Birtwistle

On 20th and 21st September 1985 Coriolanus was performed at the Herod Atticus Theatre, Athens - as part of the Common Market's first Cultural Capital of Europe Festival.

RSC - THE OTHER PLACE AND THE YOUNG VIC 1989

OTHELLO

Opened: The Other Place, Stratford-Upon-Avon, 9 August 1989

The Young Vic, London, 20 September 1989

In order of speaking:

Roderigo	Michael Grandage
Iago	Ian McKellen
Brabantio	Clive Swift
Othello	Willard White
Cassio	Sean Baker
First Senator	Brian Lawson
Servant to the Senate	David Hounslow
Duke of Venice	John Burgess
Desdemona	Imogen Stubbs
Montano	Philip Sully
First Cyprus Soldier	David Hounslow
Second Cyprus Soldier	Brian Lawson
Emilia	Zoe Wanamaker
First Othello Soldier	David Hounslow
Second Othello Soldier	Brian Lawson
Bianca	Marsha Hunt
Lodovico	John Burgess
Gratiano	Clive Swift
Director	Trevor Nunn
Designer	Bob Crowley
Lighting Designer	Chris Parry
Music	Guy Woolfenden

NATIONAL THEATRE - THE LYTTTELTON THEATRE 1990

KING LEAR

Opened: 26th July 1990

In order of speaking

The Earl of Kent	Ian McKellen
The Earl of Gloucester	Peter Jeffrey
Edmund	Hakeem Kae-Kazim
Lear, King of Britain	Brian Cox
Goneril	Susan Engel
Regan	Clare Higgins
Cordelia	Eve Matheson
The Duke of Albany	Richard Bremmer
The Duke of Cornwall	Richard O'Callaghan
The Duke of Burgundy	Mark Strong
The King of France	David Collings
Edgar	Derek Hutchinson
Oswald	Nicholas Blane
Third Knight	Peter Sullivan
Lear's Fool	David Bradley
Curan	Stephen Marchant
Gentleman	Colin Hurley
First Servant	Mark Strong
Second Servant	Stephen Marchant
Third Servant	Richard Simpson
Old Man	Sam Beazley
Messenger	Phil McKee
Doctor	Bruce Purchase
Captain	Mark Strong
Herald	Richard Simpson
Director	Deborah Warner
Designer	Hildegard Bechtler
Lighting	Jean Kalman
Music	Dominic Muldowney

KING LEAR TOUR 1990

King Lear toured in repertory with Richard III. King Lear played at the Lyttelton Theatre from July 26th-1st September 1990 and then went on tour to Tokyo, Nottingham, Cardiff, Leeds, Belfast, Hamburg, Milan, Madrid (the performance did not take place due to strike action), Paris, Cork and Cairo. King Lear returned to the Lyttelton on January 9th 1991 and then went on tour again (with Richard III) in the middle of February. This time the production visited Prague, Bucharest, Leipzig, Dresden and Edinburgh.

NATIONAL THEATRE - THE LYTTTELTON THEATRE 1990

RICHARD III

Opened: 25th July 1990

The House of York

King Edward IV

George, Duke of Clarence

Richard, Duke of Gloucester

Edward, Prince of Wales

Richard, Duke of York

Duchess of York

Bruce Purchase

Peter Jeffrey

Ian McKellen

Theo Cronin/ Nicholas Gordon/Simon Blake

Matthew Hearne/ Ross Munro/ Alex Scott

Joyce Redman

The House of Lancaster

Queen Margaret

Lady Anne

Ghost of Henry VI

Susan Engel

Eve Matheson

Sam Beazley

The Woodvilles

Queen Elizabeth

Antony Woodville, Earl Rivers

Marquess of Dorset

Lord Grey

Clare Higgins

Peter Sullivan

Stephen Marchant

Colin Hurley

Politicians

Lord Hastings

Duke of Buckingham

Lord Stanley

Bishop of Ely

Lord Mayor of London

David Bradley

Brian Cox

David Collings

Richard Simpson

Sam Beazley

Followers of Richard

Sir William Catesby

Sir Richard Ratcliffe

James Tyrell

First Murderer/ Lovel

Second Murderer

Derek Hutchinson

Richard O'Callaghan

Hakeem Kae-Kazim

Mark Strong

Phil McKee

Officials

Sir Robert Brackenbury

Keeper in the Tower

Scrivener/ Second Citizen

First Citizen

Richard Bremmer

Nicholas Blane

Richard Bremmer

Nicholas Blane

The Tudors

Henry, Earl of Richmond

Sir James Blunt

Colin Hurley

Richard Simpson

Sir Walter Herbert
Earl of Oxford

David Bradley
Bruce Purchase

Director
Designer
Lighting
Music

Richard Eyre
Bob Crowley
Jean Kalman
Dominic Muldowney

NATIONAL THEATRE - LYTTTELTON THEATRE 1991

RICHARD III

5th April 1991

The House of York

King Edward IV

George, Duke of Clarence

Richard, Duke of Gloucester

Edward, Prince of Wales

Richard, Duke of York

Duchess of York

Bruce Purchase

David Collings

Ian McKellen

Oliver Grig/ Richard Puddifoot

Anthony Mellor/ Jack Williams

Joyce Redman

The House of Lancaster

Queen Margaret

Lady Anne

Ghost of Henry VI

Antonia Pemberton

Helene Kvale

Sam Beazley

The Woodvilles

Queen Elizabeth

Anthony Wodville, Earl Rivers

Marquess of Dorset

Lord Grey

Clare Higgins

Crispin Redman

Stephen Marchant

Derek Hutchinson

Politicians

Lord Hastings

Duke of Buckingham

Lord Stanley

Bishop of Ely

Lord Mayor of London

Richard Simpson

Peter Jeffrey

Richard Bremmer

Seymour Matthews

Sam Beazley

Followers of Richard

Sir William Catesby

Sir Richard Ratcliffe

James Tyrell

First Murderer - Lord Lovel

Second Murderer

David Beames

Peter Sullivan

Alan Perrin

Mark Strong

Phil McKee

Officials

Sir Robert Brackenbury

Keeper in the Tower

Scrivener - Second Citizen

First Citizen

Simon Kunz

Ian Burfield

Simon Kunz

Ian Burfield

The Tudors

Henry, Earl of Richmond

Derek Hutchinson

Sir James Blunt
Sir Walter Herbert
Earl of Oxford

Director
Designer
Lighting
Music

Seymour Matthews
Richard Simpson
Bruce Purchase

Richard Eyre
Bob Crowley
Jean Kalman
Dominic Muldowney

RICHARD III TOUR

September 13, 15, 16, 19, 21, 22	Globe Theatre, Tokyo
October 2, 5, 6,	Theatre Royal, Nottingham
October 9, 12, 13	New Theatre, Cardiff
October 15, 17, 18, 20	Grand Theatre, Leeds
October 23, 25, 26, 27	Opera House, Belfast
November 2, 3, 4	Schauspielhaus, Hamburg
November 7, 8, 12	Teatro Lirico, Milan
No performance at the Centro Dramatico Nacional due to strike action by Spanish state theatre technicians	
November 22, 23, 25, 27, 30 December 1	Odeon, Paris
December 4, 6, 7	Opera House, Cork
December 14, 15	Opera House, Cairo
January 1 1991 the production returned to the Lyttelton	
February 8, 9, 10	National Theatre, Prague
February 16, 17, 18	National Theatre, Bucharest
February 26	Schauspielhaus, Leipzig
March 1	Schauspielhaus, Dresden
March 6, 7, 9	King's Theatre, Edinburgh

April 5th 1991 the production returned to the Lyttelton Theatre. Richard III was no longer playing in repertory with King Lear. The last performance of King Lear was on 9th March in Edinburgh. The production was re-cast. Brian Cox was replaced by Peter Jeffrey. The last performance of Richard III at the Lyttelton in 1991 was on 18th September. After this, the production went back out on tour. From September 30th-November 2nd it played at: His Majesty's Aberdeen; Theatre Royal, Newcastle; Alhambra, Bradford; Theatre Royal, Plymouth; and the Apollo, Oxford. In 1992 it returned to the Lyttelton Theatre from 20th-26th May and then went on to the USA: Brooklyn Academy and Kennedy Centre.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

UNPUBLISHED MATERIALS

a) Promptbooks

Coriolanus (NT 1984) National Theatre archive, London

King John (RSC 1974) Shakespeare Centre, Stratford-upon-Avon

King Lear (NT 1990) National Theatre archive, London

Macbeth (RSC 1976) Shakespeare Centre, Stratford-upon-Avon

Othello (RSC 1989) Shakespeare Centre, Stratford-upon-Avon

Richard III (RSC 1984) Shakespeare Centre, Stratford-upon-Avon

Richard III (NT 1990) National Theatre archive, London

Romeo and Juliet (RSC 1973) Shakespeare Centre, Stratford-upon-Avon

Romeo and Juliet (RSC 1976) Shakespeare Centre, Stratford-upon-Avon

The Winter's Tale (RSC 1976) Shakespeare Centre, Stratford-upon-Avon

Twelfth Night (RSC 1978) Shakespeare Centre, Stratford-upon-Avon

b) Theses

Dollman, D.M., 'Studio Shakespeare; a consideration of the Shakespeare productions at the Other Place, Stratford-upon-Avon' (unpublished master's thesis, University of Birmingham, 1978)

Mason, Pamela, 'Olivier's Shakespeare' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Birmingham, 1978)

Shannon, Laurence, Paul, 'F.R. Leavis' Criticism of Shakespeare' (unpublished master's thesis, University of Birmingham, 1986)

Steadman, Maire, Jean, 'Sir Thomas More in the Twentieth Century' (unpublished master's thesis, University of Birmingham, 1989)

PUBLISHED MATERIALS

BOOKS

Agate, James, Brief Chronicles (London: Jonathan Cape, 1943)

Alexander, Peter, Shakespeare's Life and Art (London: James Nisbet, 1939)

Andrews, John, F., ed., Romeo and Juliet: Critical Essays (New York; London: Garland Publishing Inc., 1993)

Annan, Noel, Our Age: Portrait of a Generation (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1990)

Barrs, Myra, ed., Shakespeare Superscribe, (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1980)

Bartholomeusz, Dennis, The Winter's Tale in Performance in England and America, 1611-1976 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982)

Barton, John, Playing Shakespeare (London: Methuen, 1984)

Bate, Jonathan and Russell Jackson eds., Shakespeare An Illustrated Stage History (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996)

Bates, Brian, The Way of the Actor (London: Century, 1986)

Bedford, Kristina, Coriolanus at the National (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 1992)

Berry, Ralph, Changing Styles in Shakespeare (London: Allen & Unwin, 1981)

Berry, Ralph, On Directing Shakespeare (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1988)

Billington, Michael, One Night Stands (London: Nick Hern Books, 1993)

Bogdanov, Michael and Michael Pennington, The English Shakespeare Company (London: Nick Hern Books, 1990)

- Branagh, Kenneth, Beginning (London: Chatto & Windus, 1989)
- Brook, Peter, The Shifting Point, (London: Methuen, 1988)
- Callow, Simon, Being An Actor (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1985)
- Chambers, Colin, Other Spaces: New Theatre and the RSC (London: Eyre Methuen; TQ Publications, 1980)
- Chambers, Colin, Peggy (London: Nick Hern Books, 1997)
- Cook, Judith, Directors' Theatre (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1989)
- Cousin, Geraldine, Shakespeare in Performance *King John* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994)
- Coveney, Michael, Maggie Smith: A Bright Particular Star (London: Victor Gollancz, 1992)
- Cox, Brian, The Lear Diaries (London: Methuen, 1992)
- Cox, Murray ed., Shakespeare Comes to Broadmoor (London: Jessica Kingsley, 1992)
- David, Richard, Shakespeare in the Theatre, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978)
- Dawson, Anthony, B., Watching Shakespeare: A Playgoers' Guide (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988)
- Dawson, Anthony, B., Shakespeare in Performance *Hamlet* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995)
- De Jongh, Nicholas, Not in Front of the Audience (London: Routledge, 1992)
- Dollimore, Jonathan and Alan Sinfield eds., Political Shakespeare (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985)
- Draper, R.P., The *Winter's Tale* Text and Performance (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1985)
- Eagleton, Terry, Literary Theory (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983)

- Erickson, Peter and Coppelia Kahn eds., Shakespeare's "Rough Magic" (Newark: University of Delaware Press; London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1985)
- Eyre, Richard, Utopia and Other Places (London: Bloomsbury, 1993)
- Eyre, Richard, Utopia and Other Places (London: Vintage, 1994)
- Fay, Stephen, Power Play: The Life and Times of Peter Hall (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1995)
- Garrett, John, ed., Talking of Shakespeare (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1954)
- Geckle, George, L., Tamburlaine and Edward II Text and Performance (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988)
- Gibson, Joy Leslie, Ian McKellen (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1986)
- Gielgud, John, An Actor and his Time (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1989)
- Gielgud, John, Shakespeare - Hit or Miss? (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1991)
- Goldman, Michael, Shakespeare and the Energies of Drama (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972)
- Granville-Barker, Harley, Prefaces to Shakespeare, Vol. 1 (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1930)
- Guinness, Alec, Blessings in Disguise (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1985)
- Hall, Peter, Peter Hall's Diaries: The Story of a Dramatic Battle (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1983)
- Hall, Peter, Making an Exhibition of Myself (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1993)
- Hancock, Sheila, Ramblings of an Actress (London: Hutchinson, 1987)
- Hayman, Ronald, British Theatre since 1955 - A Reassessment (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979)

- Hewison, Robert, Too Much: Art and Society in the Sixties 1960-75 (London: Methuen, 1986)
- Hobson, Harold, Theatre in Britain (Oxford: Phaidon, 1984)
- Holden, Anthony, Olivier (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1988)
- Holding, Peter, Romeo and Juliet Text and Performance (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992)
- Holland, Peter, English Shakespeares (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997)
- Jacobs, Gerald, Judi Dench - A Great Deal of Laughter (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1985)
- Jackson, Russell, and Robert Smallwood eds., Players of Shakespeare 2, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988)
- Jackson, Russell, and Robert Smallwood eds., Players of Shakespeare 3, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993)
- Kemp T.C. and J.C. Trewin, The Stratford Festival, (Birmingham: Cornish Bros., 1953)
- Kitchin, Laurence, Drama in the Sixties (London: Faber, 1966)
- Kott, Jan, Shakespeare Our Contemporary (New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday & Company Inc., 1966)
- Levenson, Jill, Shakespeare in Performance Romeo and Juliet (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987)
- Lewis, Peter, The National A Dream Made Concrete (London: Methuen, 1990)
- Lewis, Roger, Stage People (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1989)
- Miller, John, Ralph Richardson (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1995)
- Morley, Sheridan, Our Theatre in the Eighties (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1989)
- Nightingale, Benedict, Fifth Row Center (New York: Times Books, 1986)

- Olivier, Laurence, On Acting (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1986)
- Pater, Walter, Appreciations (London: Macmillan and Co., 1889)
- Pennington, Michael, Hamlet A Users Guide (London: Nick Hern Books, 1996)
- Poole, Adrian, Harvester New Critical Introductions *Coriolanus* (Hemel Hemstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1988)
- Porter, Joseph A., Shakespeare's Mercutio: His History and Drama (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1988)
- Price, Joseph ed, The Triple Bond, (University Park; London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1975)
- Rosenberg, Marvin, The Masks of Othello (Berkeley: London: California University Press; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961)
- Rosenberg, Marvin, The Masks of King Lear (Berkeley: London: University of California Press, 1972)
- Rosenberg, Marvin, The Masks of Hamlet (Newark: University of Delaware Press; London Associated University Presses, 1992)
- Ryan, Kiernan, New Casebooks *King Lear* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993)
- Sales, Roger, ed., Shakespeare in Perspective, 2 Vols (London: Ariel Books BBC, 1982).
- Salgado, Gamini, *King Lear* Text and Performance (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1984)
- Sanderson, Michael, From Irving to Olivier (London: Athlone, 1984)
- Shakespeare, William, *Coriolanus*, ed. by G.R. Hibbard (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1967)
- Shakespeare, William, *Coriolanus*, ed. by Philip Brockbank (London: Methuen, 1976)

Shakespeare, William, Hamlet, ed. by T.J.B. Spencer (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1980)

Shakespeare, William, Hamlet, ed. by Harold Jenkins (London: Methuen, 1982)

Shakespeare, William, Hamlet, ed. by G.R. Hibbard, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987)

Shakespeare, William, King Lear, ed. by Kenneth Muir (London: Methuen, 1966)

Shakespeare, William, King Richard II, ed. by Peter Ure (London: Methuen, 1956)

Shakespeare, William, King Richard II, ed. by Andrew Gurr (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984)

Shakespeare, William, Macbeth, ed. by G.K. Hunter (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1967)

Shakespeare, William, Much Ado About Nothing, ed. by A.R. Humphreys (London: Methuen, 1981)

Shakespeare, William, Othello, ed. by Kenneth Muir (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1968)

Shakespeare, William, Othello, ed. by Julie Hankey (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1987)

Shakespeare, William, Richard III, ed. by E.A.J. Honigmann (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1968)

Shakespeare, William, Richard III, ed. by Julie Hankey (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1988)

Shakespeare, William, Richard III, screenplay by Ian McKellen and Richard Loncraine (London: Doubleday, 1996)

Shakespeare, William, Romeo and Juliet, with alterations, and an additional scene by David Garrick 1750 (London: J. and R. Tonson and S. Draper Cornmarket Press, 1969)

Shakespeare, William, Romeo and Juliet, ed. by T.J.B. Spencer (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1967)

Shakespeare, William, The Winter's Tale, ed. by Ernest Schanzer (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1969)

Shakespeare, William, Twelfth Night, ed. by J.M. Lothian and T.W. Craik (London: Methuen, 1975)

Shakespeare, William, The Complete Works, ed. by Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988)

Sinfield, Alan, ed., Shakespeare's Tragedies (London: Sussex Books, 1979).

Shewring, Margaret, Shakespeare in Performance King Richard II (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996)

Smith, Peter J. and Nigel Wood, eds., Theory in Practice Hamlet (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1996)

Snyder, Susan, The Comic Matrix of Shakespeare's Tragedies (Princeton; Guildford: Princeton University Press, 1979)

Sprague, A.C., Shakespeare and the Actors: the stage business in his plays (1660-1905) (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1948)

Sprague, A.C., Shakespeare's Histories (London: The Society for Theatre Research, 1966)

Stephens, Robert and Michael Coveney, Knight Errant: Memoirs of a Vagabond Actor (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1995)

- Stilling, Roger, Love and Death in Renaissance Tragedy (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976)
- Styan, J.L., The Shakespeare Revolution (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977)
- Trewin, J.C., Five and Eighty Hamlets (London: Hutchinson, 1987)
- Tydeman, William, Doctor Faustus Text and Performance (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1984)
- Tynan, Kenneth, A View of the English Stage 1944-63 (London: Davis-Poynter, 1975)
- Tynan, Kenneth, Profiles (London: Nick Hern Books, 1989)
- Vaughan, Virginia, Mason, Othello - a contextual history (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994)
- Wandor, Michelene, Carry On Understudies (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986)
- Wells, Stanley, Royal Shakespeare: Four Major Productions at Stratford-upon-Avon (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977)
- Wells, Stanley, ed., Shakespeare in the Theatre: An Anthology of Criticism (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997)
- Wilson, John Dover, What Happens in Hamlet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935)
- Wine, Martin, L., Othello Text and Performance (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1984)
- Wolfit, Donald, First Interval (Long Acre, London : Odhams Press, 1954)
- Zeffirelli, Franco, Zeffirelli (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1986)

ARTICLES IN NEWSPAPERS

- Ansorge, Peter, Plays and Players, October, 1971, pp.28-29

Appleyard, Bryan, 'Portrait of the Actor as a Gay Man', Independent, 22 February 1990

B., E.A., Theatre World, January 1964, p.31

Barron, Andrew, Daily Telegraph, 4 July 1990

Barber, John, Daily Telegraph, 6 August 1971

Barber, John, Daily Telegraph, 22 March 1974

Barber, John, Daily Telegraph, 11 January 1975

Barber, John, Daily Telegraph, 5 June 1976

Barber, John, Daily Telegraph, 29 August 1978

Bergens Tidende, 11 March 1980

Billington, Michael, The Times, 5 November 1968

Billington, Michael, The Times, 26 September 1969

Billington, Michael, Illustrated London News, 17 January 1970

Billington, Michael, 'A pride of players', Guardian, 1 September 1972

Billington, Michael, Guardian, 29 March 1973

Billington, Michael, Guardian, 30 March 1974

Billington, Michael, Guardian, 6 September 1974

Billington, Michael, Guardian, 5 June 1976

Billington, Michael, Guardian, 14 September 1977

Billington, Michael, Guardian, 25 November 1981

Billington, Michael, 'Bringing Magic to the Stage', Sunday Telegraph, 14 February 1982

Billington, Michael, Drama, Vol.2 1984, p.33.

- Billington, Michael, 'Plateau of High Consistency', Plays International, December 1985, pp. 26-30
- Billington, Michael, Guardian, 26 August 1989
- Billington, Michael, Guardian, 27 July 1990
- Billington, Michael, Guardian, 11 November 1994
- Birmingham Post, 1 February 1975
- Brantley, Ben, 'Out and About with Sir Ian', Vanity Fair, June 1992, pp.16-25
- Bryson, Emrys, Nottingham Evening Post, 11 June 1964
- Bryson, Emrys, Nottingham Evening Post, 30 March 1965
- Bryson, Emrys, Nottingham Evening Post, 24 March 1971
- Bunce, Alan, Christian Science Monitor, 5 May 1969
- C., E., Stratford-Upon-Avon Journal, 31 August 1989
- Cambridge News, 26 March 1971
- Chesshyre, Robert, 'The Age of McKellen', Sunday Telegraph, 15 August 1992
- Chapman, Don, Oxford Mail, 2 April 1976
- Conrad, Peter, 'When Less Means Moor', Observer Magazine, 29 April 1990, pp.24-26
- Cook, Judith, Plays and Players, November, 1976, p.35
- Coveney, Michael, Plays and Players, December 1974, pp.18-19
- Coveney, Michael, Plays and Players, August 1976, p.29
- Coveney, Michael, Financial Times, 21 June 1984
- Coveney, Michael, 'Ode to a Grecian Turn', Plays and Players, November 1985, pp. 19-21
- Coveney, Michael, Financial Times, 26 August 1989
- Coveney, Michael, Observer, 29 July 1990

- Coveney, Michael, Observer, 3 February 1991
- Coveney, Michael, Observer, 29 May 1994
- Cushman, Robert, Spectator, 6 September 1969
- Cushman, Robert, Observer, 12 January 1975
- Cushman, Robert, Observer Magazine, 29 January 1978
- Cushman, Robert, New York Times, 5 February 1978
- Cushman, Robert, The Sunday Times, 27 August 1978
- Curtis, Anthony, Financial Times, 3 July 1970
- Daily Mirror, 7 October 1969
- Daily Telegraph, 11 May 1954
- Darlington, W.A., Daily Telegraph, October 1935
- Day-Lewis, Sean, Daily Telegraph, 29 January 1970
- De Jongh, Nicholas, Guardian, 24 August 1978
- Dodsworth, Martin, Times Literary Supplement, 10 August 1990
- Donnelly, Gabrielle, 'Acting on Intuition', Woman and Home, May 1984, pp.91-93
- Dunlop, Frank, 'Dwarfed by Shakespeare' Plays and Players, April 1974, pp.11-12
- Eastaugh, Kenneth, Daily Mirror, 7 October, 1969
- Edwards, Christopher, 'Crunching Butterflies for Breakfast', Drama, 1985, pp. 21-22
- Edwards, Christopher, Plays and Players, January 1985, p.21
- Edwards, Christopher, Spectator, 2 September 1989
- Evans, Gareth, Lloyd, Guardian, 11 September 1971
- Evans, Gareth, Lloyd, Stratford Herald, 11 June 1976
- Evening Standard, 6 August 1971
- Eyres, Harry, The Times, 26 August 1989

G., A.G., East Anglian Times, February 1963

Garratt, Pat, 'The best actor of his generation?' Woman's Journal, 1976

Gilbey, Liz, What's On, 11 July 1990.

Gilliatt, Penelope, Observer, 18 February 1965

Gore-Langton, Robert, 'A Round Unvarnish'd Tale', Listener, 1 February 1990

Gow, Gordon, 'The Actors' Company', Plays and Players, September 1972, pp.34-37.

Grant, Steve, Observer, 6 August 1979

Grant, Steve, 'Acid Reign', Time Out, 10-17 April 1996, pp.22-24

Graves, Robert, 'Making sound sense of Shakespeare', The Sunday Times, 14 February 1965

Gross, John, Sunday Telegraph, 29 July 1990

Gross, John, Sunday Telegraph, 27 August 1989

Guardian, 6 August 1971

Guardian, 23 March 1974

Guardian, 3 April 1976

Guardian, 3 August 1977

Hall, Peter, 'J' Accuse', Plays and Players, April 1985, pp.6-7

Hewes, Henry, Saturday Review, 12 April 1969

Hewison, Robert, The Sunday Times, 23 December 1984

Hewison, Robert, The Sunday Times, 29 July 1990

Hobson, Harold, The Sunday Times, 21 February 1965

Hobson, Harold, The Sunday Times, 8 December 1968

Hobson, Harold, The Sunday Times, 23 February 1969

Hobson, Harold, The Sunday Times, 31 August 1969

- Hobson, Harold, The Sunday Times, 1 April 1973
- Hobson, Harold, The Sunday Times, 1 September 1974
- Hobson, Harold, The Sunday Times, 19 January 1975
- Hobson, Harold, The Sunday Times, 4 April 1976
- Hobson, Harold, The Sunday Times, 6 June 1976
- Hodgson, Harold, Peterborough Evening Times, 2 August 1978
- Holden, Anthony, 'McKellen's Big Chance', Sunday Express, 16 December 1984.
- Hope Wallace, Philip, Guardian, 5 December 1968
- Hope Wallace, Philip, Guardian, 29 August 1969
- Hoyle, Martin, Financial Times, 27 July 1990
- Hughes-Onslow, James, Evening Standard, 25 February 1985
- Illustrated London News, 2 July 1955
- Johnson, Paul, Daily Telegraph, 16 February 1985
- Kellaway, Kate, 'Shakespeare's kings take to the road', Observer, 29 July 1990
- Kretzmer, Herbert, Daily Express, 2 April 1976
- L., G., Birmingham Post, 25 March 1971
- Lambert, J.W., The Sunday Times, 12 September 1976
- Lambert, J.W., The Sunday Times, 27 August 1978
- Lapworth, Paul, Stratford-Upon-Avon Herald, 1 September 1989
- Lewis, Peter, Daily Mail, 3 December 1968
- Lewis, Peter, 'McKellen and his foot soldiers', The Sunday Times, 22 July 1990
- Levin, Bernard, Daily Mail, 13 December 1963
- Lustig, Vera, 'Badge of Pride', Plays and Players, February 1990, pp.10-12
- McKellen, Ian, 'A distant fabled place', The Times, 9 October 1976

McAfee, Annalena, Evening Standard, 27 July 1990

McKellen, Ian, 'A Titan of the Theatre', Sunday Telegraph Magazine, 11 September 1983, pp.45-46.

McKellen, Ian, Sunday Express, 16 December 1984

M., J.E., Birmingham Post, 7 March 1962

Marcus, Frank, Sunday Telegraph, 15 August 1971

Marcus, Frank, Sunday Telegraph, 1 April 1973

Marcus, Frank, Sunday Telegraph, 4 April 1976

Marriott, R.B., The Stage, 18 February 1965

Mars-Jones, Adam, Independent, 26 August 1989

Mavor, Ronald, Scotsman, 14 December 1963

Meyer, Caren, Evening News, 6 September 1974

Miller, Carl, City Limits, 2-9 August 1990

Morley, Sheridan, Punch, 23 June 1976

Morley, Sheridan, 'McKellen on the road', The Times, 12 June 1978

Morley, Sheridan, Radio Times, 14-20 January 1989

Morning Star, 23 August 1979

Murin, Lynda, Evening Standard, 7 January 1985

Murray, Dick, Northampton Chronicle and Echo, 3 April 1976

Nathan, David, 'When the Unforeseen Happens', Plays International, December 1985, pp16-17

Nationen, 7 March 1980

New Yorker, 18 February 1974

Nightingale, Benedict, Guardian, 12 June 1964

- Nightingale, Benedict, New Statesman, 23 May 1969
- Nightingale, Benedict, New Statesman, 5 September 1969
- Nightingale, Benedict, New Statesman, 6 April 1973
- Nightingale, Benedict, New Statesman, 13 September 1974
- Nightingale, Benedict, New Statesman, 8 November 1974
- Nightingale, Benedict, New Statesman, 11 June 1976
- Nightingale, Benedict, New Statesman, 20 December 1984
- Nightingale, Benedict, New York Times, 6 January 1985
- Nightingale, Benedict, New Statesman, 2 February 1985
- Nightingale, Benedict, The Times, 30 January 1990
- Nightingale, Benedict, The Times, 26 July 1990
- Nightingale, Benedict, The Times, 4 July 1997
- Nunn, Trevor, 'Back to Stage One', The Sunday Times, 28 March 1976
- O'Callaghan, John, Guardian, 13 December 1963
- O'Connor, Gary, Plays and Players, Vol 21, May 1974, pp.38-40
- Observer, 17 November 1968
- Observer, 28 September 1969
- Observer, 6 August 1971
- Observer, 21 March 1976
- 'Downstage National Treasure', Observer, 16 December 1984
- Osborne, Charles, Daily Telegraph, 26 August 1989
- Osborne, Charles, Daily Telegraph, 30 July 1990
- Owen, Michael, Evening Standard, 3 March 1978
- Pannifer, Bill, Listener, 7 September 1989

Parr, Ronald, 'Dwarfed by Shakespeare', Plays and Players, July 1964, pp.11-12

Peter, John, The Sunday Times, 27 August 1989

Potter, Lois, Times Literary Supplement, 3-9 August 1990

Pratt, Desmond, Yorkshire Post, 13 December 1963

Punch, 29 June 1955

Ratcliffe, Michael, Observer, 23 December 1984

Ratcliffe, Michael, Observer, 27 August 1989

Reade, Simon, Independent, 20 June 1990

Renton, Alex, 'Honest Conversation', Independent, 17 August 1989

Roberts, Peter, Plays and Players, July 1969, pp.30-33

Rutherford, Malcolm, Spectator, 26 February 1965

S., L.G., The Stage, 12 August 1971

S., N., Glasgow Evening Citizen, 21 April 1971

S., N.Y.T., South China Morning Post, 11 September 1971

Scotsman, 22 February 1965

Scotsman, 15 April 1971

Seaton, Ray, Wolverhampton Express and Star, 29 April 1971

Senter, Al, 'Hicks' Will', Plays and Players, December 1984, p.7

Shorter, Eric, Daily Telegraph, 7 November 1968

Shorter, Eric, Daily Telegraph, 16 April 1971

Shulman, Milton, Evening Standard, 29 March 1973

Shulman, Milton, Evening Standard, 6 September 1974

Shulman, Milton, Evening Standard, 27 July 1990

Small, Christopher, Glasgow Herald, 27 August 1969

Sokolov, Raymond, A., Newsweek, 12 May 1969

Spencer, Charles, Surrey Advertiser, 19 July 1978

Spurling, Hilary, Spectator, 23 May 1969

Stratford Herald, 9 March 1962

Stratford Herald, 2 April 1976

Stott, Catherine, Guardian, 10 February 1969

Sunday Telegraph, 28 September 1969

Taylor, Paul, Independent, 27 July 1990

The Times, 14 December 1963

The Times, 11 June 1964

The Times, 26 September 1969

Tinker, Jack, Daily Mail, 26 August 1989

Tinker, Jack, Daily Mail, 26 July 1990

Trewin, J.C., The Times, 23 June 1955

Trewin, J.C., Birmingham Post, 13 December 1963

Trewin, J.C., Birmingham Post, 27 February 1965

Trewin, J.C., Birmingham Post, 10 September 1971

Trewin, J.C., Birmingham Post, 23 March 1974

Trewin, J.C., Birmingham Post, 10 January 1975

Trewin, J.C., Illustrated London News, Vol 283, January 1975, p.69

Trewin, J.C., Birmingham Post, 2 April 1976

TV Times, 19-25 October 1985

Vandenbroucke, Russell, 'The London Theatre: 1973-1974,' Drama & Theatre, Vol 12, 1974

- W, N.K., Coventry Evening Telegraph, 7 March 1962
- Walker, John, 'Stage Hero', Observer Magazine, 21 March 1976
- Wall, Stephen, Times Literary Supplement, 28 December 1984
- Wardle, Irving, The Times, 18 February 1969
- Wardle, Irving, The Times, 16 May 1969
- Wardle, Irving, The Times, 30 August 1969
- Wardle, Irving, The Times, 3 July 1970
- Wardle, Irving, The Times, 16 April 1971
- Wardle, Irving, The Times, 6 August 1971
- Wardle, Irving, The Times, 21 March 1974
- Wardle, Irving, The Times, 22 March 1974
- Wardle, Irving, The Times, 6 September 1974
- Wardle, Irving, The Times, 30 October 1974
- Wardle, Irving, The Times, 11 January 1975
- Wardle, Irving, The Times, 29 March 1976
- Wardle, Irving, The Times, 5 April, 1976
- Wardle, Irving, The Times, 5 June 1976
- Wardle, Irving, The Times, 14 September 1977
- Wardle, Irving, The Times, 17 December 1984
- Wardle, Irving, Independent, 23 June 1991
- Weaver, Maurice, Manchester Daily Telegraph, 28 July 1971
- What's On in London, 29 March 1974
- Whitehouse, Peter, Sunday Mercury, 4 April 1976
- Whittaker, Sue, Northern Echo, 20 November 1968

Williams, Matthew, Stratford-Upon-Avon Observer, 31 August 1989

Wright, Alan, Scotsman, 24 August 1978

Young, B.A., The Times, 17 February 1965

Young, B.A., Financial Times, 6 August 1971

Young, B.A., Financial Times, 17 April 1971

Young, B.A., Financial Times, 29 March 1973

Young, B.A., Financial Times, 21 March 1974

Young, B.A., Financial Times, 6 March 1975

Young, B.A., Financial Times, 4 April 1976

Young, B.A., Financial Times, 26 August 1978

ARTICLES IN PERIODICALS

Evans, Gareth, Lloyd, Shakespeare Quarterly, Vol 28 (1977), pp. 193-195

Maguin, J.M., 'The 1976 Season of the Royal Shakespeare Company at Stratford',
Cahiers Elisabethains, No.10, Octobre 1976, pp.85-95

McKellen, Ian, interview, Shakespeare Quarterly, Vol 33 (1982), pp.135-141

Potter, Lois, 'The Antic Disposition of Richard II', Shakespeare Survey 27 (1974),
pp.33-41

Rosenberg, Marvin, 'Trevor Nunn's *Macbeth*', Shakespeare Quarterly, Vol 28 (1977),
pp.195-6

Smallwood, Robert, 'Shakespeare Unbalanced: The Royal Shakespeare Company's
King John', Deutsche Shakespeare - Gesellschaft West Jahrbuch, 1976, pp.79-99.

Speaight, Robert, 'Shakespeare in Britain', Shakespeare Quarterly, Vol.20 (1969)
pp.435-441

Speaight, Robert, 'Shakespeare in Britain', Shakespeare Quarterly, Vol.22 (1971), pp.359-364

Speaight, Robert, 'Shakespeare in Britain', Shakespeare Quarterly, Vol 28 (1977), pp.184-190

Thomson, Peter, 'Shakespeare Straight and Crooked: a Review of the 1973 Season at Stratford', Shakespeare Survey 27 (1974), pp.143-154.

Thomson, Peter, 'The Smallest Season: The Royal Shakespeare Company at Stratford in 1974', Shakespeare Survey 28 (1975), pp.137-148.

Warren, Roger, 'Theory and Practice: Stratford 1976', Shakespeare Survey 30 (1977), pp.169-180.

PRODUCTION PROGRAMMES

Acting Shakespeare programme UK and Ireland Tour 1988

Coriolanus programme NT 1984

Hamlet programme, Prospect Theatre Company, Cambridge Theatre, London 1971

King Lear programme Actors' Company, Wimbledon Theatre 1974

King Lear programme Actors' Company, Theatre Royal, Norwich 1974

King Lear and Richard III programme RNT 1990

Othello programme RSC 1989

Richard II programme, Prospect Theatre Company, Cambridge Arts Theatre, 1968

Richard II programme, Prospect Theatre Company, Piccadilly Theatre 1970

Romeo and Juliet programme RSC 1976

Ruling the Roost programme, Actors' Company, Cambridge Arts Theatre 1972

The Winter's Tale programme RSC 1976

Twelfth Night programme RSC Tour 1978

VIDEOS

Acting Shakespeare. Dir. Kirk Browning. Produced by Andrew Suskind. CBS. 1982

Macbeth. Dir. Philip Casson. Produced by Trevor Nunn. Thames Television. Thames Video. 1979

Othello. Dir. Trevor Nunn. Produced by Greg Smith. Primetime. 1990

Richard II. Dir. Toby Robertson. Produced by Mark Shivas. BBC. 1970

Richard III. Dir. Richard Eyre. National Theatre. Theatre Museum, London.

Richard III. (1996) Dir. Richard Loncraine. Produced by Lisa Katselas Pare and Stephen Bayly. 20th-Century Fox. Guild Home Video. 1997.

Romeo + Juliet. Dir. Baz Luhrmann. Produced by Gabriella Martinelli. 20th-Century Fox. Home Entertainment. 1997.

Wars of the Roses. Dir. Peter Hall and John Barton. RSC 1963. Shakespeare Centre, Stratford-upon-Avon.