

REWRITING HISTORY:  
EXPLORING THE INDIVIDUALITY OF  
SHAKESPEARE'S HISTORY PLAYS

by

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## **Abstract**

‘Rewriting History’ is a reappraisal of Shakespeare’s history cycle, exploring its origins, its popularity and its effects before challenging its dominance on critical and theatrical perceptions of the history plays.

A critical history of the cycle shows how external factors such as patriotism, bardolatry, character-focused criticism and the editorial decision of the First Folio are responsible for the cycle, more so than any inherent aspects of the plays.

The performance history of the cycle charts the initial innovations made in the twentieth century which have affected our perception of characters and key scenes in the texts. I then argue how the cycle has become increasingly restrictive, lacking innovation and consequently undervaluing the potential of the histories.

Having accounted for the history of the cycle to date, the second part of my thesis looks at the consequent effects upon each history play, and details how each play can be performed and analysed individually.

I close my thesis with the suggestion that a compromise between individual and serial perceptions is warranted, where both ideas are acknowledged equally for their effects and defects. By broadening our ideas about these plays we can appreciate the dramatic potential locked within them.

# Dedication

Derick W. Orford

In life, my father encouraged and provided for me to go to university, and I would never have started my PhD without his support. Since his death, I have endeavoured to honour his investment in me. This thesis is dedicated to his memory.

‘Me thinks ’tis prize enough to be his son.’  
(3HVI.2.1.20)

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Robert K. Sarlos incorrectly assumed that the readers of his essay would be able to understand German quotations: I am especially grateful therefore to Kerstin Woerster of the Shakespeare bookshop for translating these passages. Equally I am thankful to Richard Pearson for his time and insights into adapting the histories.

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## Introduction: Rewriting the Histories

Shakespeare might have written a great and closely integrated cycle of plays on English history from Richard II to Richard III. But he did not. He wrote eight plays, each capable of standing by itself, though to varying degrees related to others.<sup>1</sup>

This comment, from Stanley Wells' introduction to *Richard II*, offers a brief consideration of the phenomenon we now regard as Shakespeare's history cycle, a grand series of plays running from *Richard II* through the two parts of *Henry IV* to *Henry V*, then on through the three parts of *Henry VI* to its finale in *Richard III*. Wells' analysis strikes a cautionary note, and contrasts the popular theory of the cycle with the practical experience of presenting any one of these eight plays alone on the stage. But the context of the comment itself provides a contradictory interpretation, for the introduction, along with Wells' edition of the play, has since been repackaged in 1994 amongst an edition of Shakespeare's histories, presenting what was once an individual text alongside *Henry IV Part One*, *Henry IV Part Two* and *Henry V*. No rationale was given in the collected edition for why these plays should have been presented together, save a cursory note on the back cover which claimed that while 'Each play possesses its own distinctive mood, tone and style [...] together they inhabit the period of change from the usurpation of Richard II by Bolingbroke to the triumph [...] of heroic kingship in Henry V'. The balanced views of Wells' edition were absorbed into a larger volume with little explanation: in this example the concept of the cycle has absorbed the individual presentation into its larger framework.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Stanley Wells, ed., William Shakespeare, *Richard II*, New Penguin Shakespeare (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Stanley Wells and others, eds, William Shakespeare, *Four Histories: Richard II, Henry IV Part 1, Henry IV Part 2, Henry V*, New Penguin Shakespeare (London: Penguin, 1994).



In the pages that follow I shall explore the theories surrounding the history cycle: its beginning, its justification and the consequent effects upon our critical and theatrical perception of each drama. My thesis comes at a curious time when to argue for the individuality of the plays is to be in the minority. For many centuries discussions of links between the history plays were sporadic and brief, and on stage the histories were performed individually, but my argument must be read in the wake of an incredible revolution which has taken place in our approach to Shakespeare's history plays. It is astounding that the first history cycle on the English stage can be as recent as 1901, and yet the idea of a continuing saga stretching from the narrative of *Richard II* through the reign of kings to *Richard III* has now monopolised the way in which we approach and appreciate these eight plays.

I do not wish to suggest that the plays cannot be performed as a cycle; indeed, while reviewing the many productions of the history cycle on the English stage, I have been able to appreciate the pioneering spirit and exploration of themes which some of these productions have offered. Equally, however, I have also seen the strain and limitations that a cycle can inflict upon individual plays and characters: the plays are unfairly accused of having poor structure, weak characterisation and no conclusion and are thus considered as inferior to Shakespeare's other works. When the English Shakespeare Company presented their history cycle, *The Wars of the Roses*, in the late 1980s, the director Michael Bogdanov noted the unsatisfactory consequences of presenting epic Shakespeare:

The problem with getting even 75% of *The Wars of the Roses* right, however, is that while out of twenty-four hours eighteen might be

passable, that still leaves six whole hours that are naff! That's two whole plays!<sup>3</sup>

Bogdanov identified the feat of producing twenty-four hours of sustained high-quality drama as too much to expect from a director; ultimately some of the production would be below standard. Unfortunately, what can seem to be just a dull patch from the director's viewpoint of the complete cycle, can, from an audience perspective, translate to an entire evening at the theatre. The sheer length of an epic cycle can prove to be a deterrent to many audiences; Michael Ewans notes of Aeschylus' tetralogy, *Oresteia*, that 'These plays present an almost intolerable challenge to any subsequent dramatist; for [...] such uncompromising works have never since proved capable of holding the attention of a mass audience in the west.'<sup>4</sup> The presentation of a large amount of material under the pretence of a coherent unit can prove too arduous an undertaking for some, especially when they are presented, as the RSC has chosen to do on numerous occasions, as all-day marathons. Robert Shaughnessy rightly comments that 'Attending a morning to midnight cycle of histories [...] is a day's work rather than a good night out'.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, the presentation of the plays as a continuous whole can weaken the clarity of each individual play. Criticism of the histories as an endless repetition of battles arises from a consideration of them as one story, rather than individual dramas of a common genre. The history parody *1066 and All That* accordingly offers the following summary of the reign of Richard II:

Richard II was only a boy at his accession: one day, however, suspecting that he was now twenty-one, he asked his uncle and, on learning that he was, mounted the throne himself and tried first being

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<sup>3</sup> Michael Bogdanov and Michael Pennington, *The English Shakespeare Company* (London: Nick Hern, 1990), p. 118.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Ewans, *Wagner and Aeschylus: The Ring and the Oresteia* (London: Faber and Faber, 1982), p. 19.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Shaughnessy, *Representing Shakespeare: England, History and the RSC* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994), p. 37.

a Good King and then being a Bad King, without enjoying either very much: then, being told that he was unbalanced, he got off the throne again in despair, exclaiming gloomily: 'For God's sake let me sit on the ground and tell bad stories about cabbages and things.' Whereupon his cousin Lancaster (spelt Bolingbroke) quickly mounted the throne and said he was Henry IV Part I.<sup>6</sup>

Though intentionally elaborating upon points of confusion, the passage nonetheless highlights some of the barriers which prevent an audience from understanding the histories; we find it difficult to extract the plot of one individual play without becoming confused by the wealth of events, characters and names which permeate the entire cycle: Lancaster is Bolingbroke is Henry IV Part I. But to what extent is such confusion self-inflicted? Gary Taylor suggests that confusion and concerns of inconsistencies within the histories 'bother us less' if we respond to the plays 'not as fragments of a "tetralogy" but as whole, individual plays'.<sup>7</sup> I would argue that any criticism of structure or clarity in the histories may be remedied if we were to focus on each play individually rather than in the context of a grand saga.

To offer a parallel, suppose a student unfamiliar with Shakespeare was presented with a summary of ten tragedies in one lesson. If that student were then asked later that day to define *Macbeth*, he would have difficulty differentiating between the many similarities of event and character that the tragedies as a corpus present: Banquo's ghost might become confused with that of Hamlet's father, the villainess of Lady Macbeth with Tamora, Macbeth's doubts with those of Brutus. By presenting all of these plays as one group, the task of discerning the individual characters and events of each individual drama is going to be rendered more difficult, regardless of genre.

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<sup>6</sup> W. C. Sellar and R. J. Yeatman, *1066 and All That* (London: Methuen, 1930), pp. 49-50.

<sup>7</sup> Gary Taylor, 'The Fortunes of Oldcastle', *Shakespeare Survey*, 38 (1985), 85-100 (p. 87).

The question of conclusion is a matter which, at first glance, seems to differentiate the histories from the other plays in the canon: at its most simple level, comedies are plays with happy endings, tragedies have sad endings, whilst histories appear to have no ending. David Oyelowo remembers the reaction of the audience to the close of Michael Boyd's *Henry VI Part One* in 2000:

The main reason I loved hanging back to watch that ending was to see the wave of disappointment and anticipation that rippled through the audience as they realised that the lights were going down and they would have to wait till *Part II* to see what happens.<sup>8</sup>

Oyelowo summarises the key emotions that the apparent inconclusiveness of the histories evokes: disappointment and anticipation. The dissatisfaction that many feel with the lack of closure each play offers is answered by anticipating the next instalment. Challenging this theory, David Scott Kastan discusses the open-endedness of the histories as a key element of their form and structure, arguing that it is 'organically related to the perception of historical time':

Individual actions may be brought to completion, but the open-endedness of the history play recognises the impossibility of isolating the action from its place on the temporal continuum.<sup>9</sup>

Kastan believes the plays' actions rest in a historic, not a dramatic context, and specifically rejects the view that any inconclusiveness in the plays suggests 'merely their organisation into the two so-called "tetralogies"' (p. 51), yet he is outnumbered by the

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<sup>8</sup> David Oyelowo, *Actors on Shakespeare: Henry VI Part One*, (London; Faber and Faber, 2003), p. 52.

<sup>9</sup> David Scott Kastan, *The Shapes of Time* (London: MacMillan, 1982), p. 48.

many critics who have drawn precisely on the open-endedness of the histories as a means of determining the need for a sequel or series. This reading in turn has fostered an inability to appreciate each play on its own merit, and as a consequence, the histories are criticised for their poor structure. Robert C. Jones counters this by arguing that ‘there is a difference between a form that calls attention to its inconclusiveness and an absence of any form at all.’<sup>10</sup> I believe that the ‘quick-fix’ cure of using a sequel to conclude a history play has disabled us from appreciating how an individual history may achieve closure by itself. Our reliance upon a continuing narrative to link the plays has consequently drawn our focus towards a narrative conclusion, whereas we may find greater satisfaction by searching within the boundaries of each play for character growth, or a thematic resolution, rather than national actions.

I also believe that whilst our reliance on sequels has focused attention on the open-endedness of the histories, they offer no less conclusion than Shakespeare’s other plays. Indeed, if we were to work through the other plays of the canon, there would be very few that could be said to have a satisfactory conclusion; *Macbeth* ends without fulfilling the witches’ prophecy concerning Banquo’s sons, *Twelfth Night* leaves Malvolio’s revenge unresolved, and *Hamlet* ends with the royal family dead and a former invader on the throne. But these plays are successfully presented alone precisely because we do not concern ourselves with the greater context of each play, nor do we expect the plot to continue after the end of the fifth act. Paulina Kewes challenges the assumption that ‘history plays use a range of strategies which prompt the audience to look beyond the

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<sup>10</sup> Robert C. Jones, *These Valiant Dead: Remembering the Past in Shakespeare’s Histories* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1991), p. xvi.

confines of the play and contemplate the broader historical significance of the plot' by querying why the same contemplation does not occur with the Roman plays:

Why should these assumptions hold true for representations of the native past, which thus earn the label 'history plays,' and not for those dealing with foreign matter, which, perforce, must be labelled tragedies?<sup>11</sup>

The concept of open-endedness is one that can be asked of all Shakespeare's plays, but is specifically asked of the histories not because it is more apparent in them, but because we ourselves approach these plays with a different mentality: we look for aspects of history itself in the plays. If we focus on the here and now, rather than what is to come, we can find moments of great drama in the history plays.

Accusations of inconclusiveness in each of the histories can be best answered with an individual production; equally, the majority of open endings in the histories at the theatre are present only because of the desire to continue the story in a following play. As an example, take two productions of *Richard II* from recent years: the first, by Michael Attenborough at The Other Place in 2000, and the second by Tim Carroll at the Globe Theatre in 2003. The 2000 production was offered as part of the RSC's 'This England' season, so the ending was deliberately incomplete. David Troughton's Bolingbroke, left alone on stage, began to recite Richard's speech from the tower, linking himself with the tragic king, and ending with an indication that further resolution was necessary:

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<sup>11</sup> Paulina Kewes, 'The Elizabethan History Play: A True Genre?' in *A Companion to Shakespeare's Works*, ed. by Richard Dutton and Jean E. Howard, 4 vols (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), II (*The Histories*), pp. 170-193, (p. 178).

I have been studying how I may compare  
This prison where I live unto the world;  
And for because the world is populous,  
And here is not a creature but myself,  
I cannot do it. Yet I'll hammer it out.  
(5.5.1-5)

The production left the character alone, weeping on stage; the tone was foreboding and suggested that the tragedy was to continue, encouraging the audiences to see Troughton continue the role in *Henry IV Part One*. In contrast the Globe's production of *Richard II* was not performed as part of a cycle, and the ending left no dissatisfaction. Richard was the play's tragic figure, and his death a conclusion of the narrative. After he died, and Bolingbroke had lamented, all of the cast entered the stage and took part in a jig to mark the end of the play. As part of this, Richard and Bolingbroke took hands and danced together at the front of the stage. The dance showed Bolingbroke and Richard in harmony, and provided an upbeat conclusion to the production. The audience applauded and left satisfied, without the feeling that they needed to return to see the story continued. The unresolved ending which Troughton's solitary, weeping king brought to the RSC production was not an inherent part of the play, but a construct which sought to incorporate the play into a cycle.

However, what concerns me most of all is the level of faith which so many critics and theatre practitioners have in the idea of the cycle, to the extent that so much of this theory is now taken for granted, and neither questioned nor justified. Kewes remarks that 'Unfortunately, those who speak about the first or second tetralogy, or of Shakespeare's York-Lancaster cycle, often appear to treat these labels as if they possessed some sort of

immanent validity'.<sup>12</sup> By tracing the development of the history cycle over the last fifty years, I have noticed a depressing trend of predictability in each director's approach to the plays: as the cycle has dominated our appreciation of the histories, so the opportunity for innovation has been hindered and reduced. Much of this relates to our concept of the plays having character continuity between each work: why should we present Richard, the young son of York who acts so valiantly in *Henry VI Part Two*, as a villain, simply because the character called Richard in the following two histories is a villain? Why should we not approach each history play with the same freedom and opportunity for innovation that we might apply to any other play in the canon?

Too often, characters are defined by their appearance in other plays; critics question Hal's motives in *Henry IV Part One* because they include the rejection of Falstaff as part of the character's arc, even though the event does not occur in the play. Certainly, we can offer insights into characters by comparing them with their namesakes in other works, but we should always do so with an awareness that we are straying beyond the play's boundaries, which has consequences for the relevance of any character study. Roger Warren stresses the point in his consideration of the *Henry VI* plays.

Another advantage of presenting the three plays as a group is that it allows those characters who appear in more than one of them to develop beyond the limitations imposed by appearance in one play only [...]. On the other hand, each of the plays needs to stand on its own in performance, and has its own structure.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Kewes, p. 186.

<sup>13</sup> Roger Warren, ed., William Shakespeare, *Henry VI Part Two*, Oxford Shakespeare (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 3-5.



It is inappropriate to read or interpret these plays without first considering to what extent they are being seen individually or as part of a cycle, and how this affects our understanding of each drama; modern critics adopt a cycle interpretation too often without consciously making the decision to do so, and therefore they do not question the implications. Gary Taylor highlights the need for critics to acknowledge the manner in which these plays are actually experienced by an audience: ‘Any adequate description of audience perception must state as its starting point the simple fact that audiences respond to one moment at a time’.<sup>14</sup> In practice, any play will be experienced as a single entity whilst it is being performed, and this in turn provokes different responses to characters and situations; while critics may choose to refer to *Henry IV Part One* to draw conclusions on the character of Bolingbroke, in contrast a theatre audience watching *Richard II* on the stage is unlikely to consider the character’s fate beyond the end of the play, and so may not view Bolingbroke as sympathetically as the critics would suggest.

Approaching the plays as a cycle also confuses the tone and genre of each play: if we assume the cycle to be a unit, presenting one story, how do we define the genre of that story? The tragedy of *Richard II* ill-prepares the reader or audience for the comedy of *Henry IV Part One*, which in turn contradicts the scenes of national despair in *Henry VI Part One*. The history plays embrace a variety of genres which invoke entirely different responses in an audience, and to try to limit these contrasts to fit the plays into a unified structure will ultimately reduce the potency of each. Kewes says that ‘Multi-part plays [...] present a special problem, for in them the “comic” or “tragic” shaping will be “spread” over two or more “instalments.” Individual parts may – but often do not – share the slant of

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<sup>14</sup> Gary Taylor, *Moment by Moment by Shakespeare* (London: MacMillan, 1985), p. 13.

the whole.’<sup>15</sup> The *Henry VI* plays, taken as a whole, may be perceived as the tragedy of Henry, especially as he dies at the end. But when we look at *Part One* or *Two*, Henry is alive at the close of each play, which challenges the identifying of him as the tragic hero. As critics we must recognise that whatever our judgement on where the story begins and ends, be it the boundaries of each play, or the superstructure of the cycle, that judgement has a direct effect on our interpretation of character, plot and genre.

It is my firm hope that through the ideas communicated in this thesis others may begin to appreciate and explore the individual structure of each history. Even if the reader disagrees with my conviction in the individuality of the history plays, I trust at least that in expressing my views I may prompt opposing critics to justify their own ideas, rather than take the serial nature of the histories for granted. I would consider even this a triumph, for it is when we no longer question a theory but accept it as solemn truth that we fail ourselves as critics.

### The Structure of the Thesis

I have divided my thesis into two halves; the first, ‘Making the Cycle’ charts the beginning and development of the cycle up until the present day; the second, ‘Breaking the Cycle’ offers my own argument, which highlights the flaws and consequences of the cycle upon each play.

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<sup>15</sup> Kewes, p. 177.

In charting the making of the cycle I consider critical perceptions in chapter one, and then concentrate on its stage history in chapter two. Theoretical ideas of a Shakespearean history cycle first took form in the writings of Schlegel and his contemporaries in Germany in the early nineteenth century, but, as chapter one will show, our view of the histories was being shaped towards a serial perspective long before this. This chapter details how the series is a construction of critical interpretations, rather than an inherent aspect of the plays.

In chapter two I have focused my attention upon professional productions on the English stage as a means of limiting the range of productions to consider; it should not be read as a complete account of the cycles on stage. Not only was the first history cycle performed in Germany, but other significant cycles have been produced since in the rest of Europe, such as Denis Llorca's *Kings* in France in 1978, or Giorgio Strehler's Brechtian *Il gioco dei potenti* in 1965, just one year after the RSC's *Wars of the Roses*. Had I opportunity, I would certainly have offered an investigation into the many Shakespeare festivals in America and Canada which have accommodated cycles in the twentieth century, especially the presentation of the complete history cycle, including *King John* and *Henry VIII*, as early as 1935 at the Pasadena Playhouse in California.

In the second part of the thesis, 'Breaking the Cycle', I have shied away from treating each of the histories in turn so as to avoid needless repetition. Instead I have approached each play within a context that explores how the cycle affects the way we evaluate Shakespeare's history plays. In chapter three, I attend to *Richard II*, *Henry V* and *Richard III*, three plays embedded in the central eight of the history cycle which have nonetheless

maintained an individual presence in the twentieth century. I chart the success of each play, both before and after the emergence of the cycle, and thereby investigate how the individuality of a history play may be successfully achieved on stage. By showing how these three plays can be presented individually, I hope to prompt consideration of why the other five in the cycle are not also presented on their own. I also take the opportunity to show how even these seemingly individual plays have not been unscathed by the cycle, and demonstrate some of the key changes in our appreciation of these plays, both individually and in a cycle, that a serial perspective of the histories has prompted.

Chapter four focuses on the three *Henry VI* plays as an opportunity to explore the individual structure of a history play. The key to appreciating how a history may be presented alone on stage is dependent on reconsidering our priorities in each text, drawing away from a focus on the narrative and consequence of events that a cycle production encourages, and instead looking to character arcs, themes and emotional journeys to find closure in each of these plays much as we would register the end in a comedy or tragedy. This chapter is further informed by a strong conviction that these three plays are unfairly maligned as inferior works, and my hope that a fresh consideration of each drama outside of the context of the history cycle might enable each of these plays to be welcomed by other critics with a renewed vigour.

Chapter five makes use of the two *Henry IV* plays to query the received attitude to sequels. It is the common assumption that a sequel is inferior to the original, and certainly this criticism has been directed at *Henry IV Part II* on numerous occasions. I consider once more how each play can be appreciated as an individual drama separated from the other,

but I also wish to redress the dichotomy which has formed in criticism that claims *Henry IV Part II* is either a planned sequel and a good play, or else an unplanned sequel and therefore a bad play. I believe the sequel was unplanned, but that this neither detracts from its quality, nor demands the presence of the original to justify it on the stage.

In the epilogue I turn to the histories which have as yet remained unmentioned: *King John* and *Henry VIII*. Though they appear in the First Folio under the title of ‘History’ alongside the other eight, I will show in this chapter how they are distanced from the cycle both in criticism and the theatre, enduring a half-existence as history plays excluded from the rest of the genre in Shakespeare’s canon. I chart the fortune of the two plays in contrast to the recent acceptance of *Edward III* as being, at least in part, one of Shakespeare’s histories. All the histories have been criticised for their structure, but while many have been excused purely through a sequel, *King John* and *Henry VIII* continue to be persecuted until we can find another way to justify their structure without resorting to the cycle. Subsequently in the last century they have suffered a dwindling presence on the English stage. Conversely, *Edward III* is rising in popularity and being claimed as being partly written by Shakespeare, for which it has a distinct advantage in its apparent connection to the events depicted in the history cycle. This chapter therefore recognises the impact of the cycle on other plays outside the central eight and ends with the question of how far the cycle may go unchecked.

Whilst writing this thesis two new cycle productions were performed: at the National Theatre Nicholas Hytner directed *Henry IV Parts One and Two*, and at the Dream Factory in Warwick Stewart McGill directed Richard Pearson’s two-play conflation of *Henry VI*.

Given that chapter two focuses on twentieth century productions, these productions are not discussed, but, where relevant, I have referred both to Hytner's and McGill's productions in other sections of the thesis.

From my review of past criticism, I have noticed an ambiguity over which tetralogy should be referred to as the first, and the second. I have named the tetralogies in the order in which Shakespeare wrote them, so in this thesis, the *Henry VI* plays and *Richard III* are referred to collectively as the first tetralogy, and *Richard II*, *Henry IV Parts One and Two* and *Henry V* are identified as the second tetralogy. All references made to Shakespeare's plays in the thesis are taken from the Oxford Complete Works. However, for sake of clarity, I have not followed the editors' decision to separate 2.2 of *Henry IV Part One* into two scenes; accordingly, the play extempore scene continues to be referred to as 2.4, though the line numbers remain the same.

Given time, it would have made a fitting conclusion to have been able to consider the Complete Works Festival which the RSC are offering throughout 2006 and 2007. Given that so many of the cycles presented in the twentieth century arose from a motivation towards presenting a multitude of plays as a cultural event, rather than a theatrical production, this new development seems to me to be the ultimate conclusion of that mentality, and how the histories are presented within this larger cycle will prove interesting. From what was announced of the productions in the national press, I note that *Richard III* is being offered as an individual interpretation outside its historical context 'as the story of Saddam Hussein's bloodthirsty rise within the Baath party in Iraq', whilst in contrast Michael Boyd plans to 'take command of this sprawling triptych', *Henry VI*, by

simply reviving his productions from the 2000 season, which strikes me as a wasted opportunity for innovation, especially given the plan to then incorporate the trilogy into a complete octology under Boyd's sole direction in 2007.<sup>16</sup> But, as the season is still in progress, I leave this as an area of development for future scholars.

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<sup>16</sup> Benedict Nightingale, 'Raising the Bard: the full Shakespeare', *The Times*, 12 July 2005.

Part One:

Making the Cycle



# Chapter One: Critical Histories

## Section One: The Origin of the History Cycle

### Shakespeare's Intentions and Contemporary Practice

A consideration of how and why Shakespeare's histories should or should not be seen as a unified whole must begin with the bard himself. The editors of the Oxford Shakespeare suggest that the order in which Shakespeare wrote the histories to be *Henry VI Part Two*, *Henry VI Part Three*, *Henry VI Part One*, *Richard III*, *Richard II*, *King John*, *Henry IV Part One*, *Henry IV Part Two*, *Henry V* and *Henry VIII*. The idea of *Henry VI Part One* as a prequel is still contested by critics wishing to confirm the series, Michael Hattaway suggesting that the *Henry VI* plays were all written before 1592, and 'in the order of the events it portrays', but regardless of whether *Henry VI Part One* should appear before or after the other two parts, the overall order of the histories, as listed above, does not present a coherent saga.<sup>1</sup> So when did the cycle come into effect, and how much of this reflects the intentions of the author?

Sadly we do not have definite confirmation either that Shakespeare did conceive the plays as a unified whole, or that he did not. Therefore to help us understand Shakespeare's plans, and theorise both his intentions and the reception which the plays may have received on the Renaissance stage, it is illuminating to look at the evidence which other historical

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Hattaway ed., William Shakespeare, *The First Part of King Henry VI*, New Cambridge Shakespeare (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 36-41.

and dramatic works of the era present on the subject of single works and consecutive episodes. Each example provides a model which could theoretically be applied to Shakespeare's work; each can be used to argue a different perspective on how inter-related the history plays may be.

The most extensive contemporary series of histories in print is *A Mirror for Magistrates*. At first glance this sprawling work of narrative poems, albeit by multiple authors, might lend support for a dramatic equivalent in Shakespeare's plays; like Shakespeare's histories, these poems taken from the chronicles draw out particular characters and their stories from the larger context of history. Additionally, the original collection of poems, published in 1599, was added to in later editions from 1571 to 1587, so that one unified historical work became an even larger unified historical work, as might be said of Shakespeare's first tetralogy and the later octology.<sup>2</sup>

However, the parallels between these poems and Shakespeare's plays can only be taken so far given that *A Mirror for Magistrates* is piece of fiction to be read, not performed; if we take this as a precedent for a historical series, it can only be said to have shown that a series could work in print, where each poem appears side by side, but not necessarily on the stage. As such it warrants the presentation of Shakespeare's plays as ordered in the First Folio, where they too would be read, but does not provide confirmation that such a series would have been performed as one unit.

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<sup>2</sup> See Lily B. Campbell, ed., *A Mirror for Magistrates* (London: Cambridge Press, 1938).

It is therefore more prudent to search for evidence in other plays of the time; there are many Renaissance plays which have sequels, each one providing a different model for how we might view Shakespeare's histories. Marlowe's unplanned sequel to *Tamburlaine the Great* proves that Elizabethan playwrights were open to opportunism. Martin Wiggins says that 'The impact of *Tamburlaine the Great* [...] was immediate and awesome, and the first to exploit it was Marlowe himself'.<sup>3</sup> In the prologue to *The Second Part of Tamburlaine the Great*, Marlowe openly admits that 'The general welcome Tamburlaine receiv'd,/When he arrive last upon our stage,/Hath made our poet pen his Second Part', whilst the very title of the play suggests that its success relied upon the audience's knowledge of the first play.<sup>4</sup>

Though not originally planned as a play of two parts, the link between both plays was further strengthened by their performance on subsequent days. Henslowe's diary first records this occurring on the 30 December 1594 and 1 January 1595, after which the performance of both plays on successive days is often repeated.<sup>5</sup> Nor was Marlowe's drama alone in this, for Henslowe's diary also notes similar performances happening for the two parts of *Hercules*; the first part being premiered on 7 May 1595, and the second part on 23 May 1595, before both plays were then performed on the 27 and 28 of the same month (pp. 28-9). Given the close proximity of the opening performances and the subsequent 'double bill' presentation, this would suggest that, unlike *Tamburlaine*, these two parts were intentionally written as a pair. However, it is important to note that while the two parts of *Tamburlaine* or *Hercules* were often presented in succession, each individual play was just

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<sup>3</sup> Martin Wiggins, *Shakespeare and the Drama of his Time*, Oxford Shakespeare Topics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 34.

<sup>4</sup> Christopher Marlowe, *The Second Part of Tamburlaine*, Prologue, Lines 1-3, in J. B. Steaned, ed., Christopher Marlowe, *The Complete Plays* (London: Penguin, 1969).

<sup>5</sup> Richard Foulkes, ed., *Henslowe's Diary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 26.

as regularly presented in isolation, suggesting that they were enjoyed both as a combined whole and as independent drama.

In *Tamburlaine* and *Hercules* there exists both a model for a successful play with an unplanned sequel, and a play planned and written in two parts; a further model for plays and sequels exists in Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* and its anonymous prequel *The First Part of Jeronimo*. While Marlowe himself penned *Tamburlaine's* sequel, here we have evidence of a playwright seizing upon the success of another's work, creating a false sense of interdependency which Kyd never intended for his drama. Like the case of *Tamburlaine*, the play seems opportunistic, for while *The Spanish Tragedy* has a title which is self-serving and not reliant upon any other drama, *The First Part of Jeronimo* specifically references the hero of the earlier drama and identifies itself in relation to that play. Emma Smith suggests that 'Whoever did write it [...] took care to link the play to its famous sibling.'<sup>6</sup> This in turn offers a precedent for the popular argument that Shakespeare wrote *Henry VI Part One* as a prequel to the existing plays of another author. With these three examples of different approaches to sequels, any one of which could be applied to Shakespeare's plays, we are no closer to determining which model Shakespeare followed, if any.

Aside from the multiplicity of these contemporary models, one factor which further discourages any definite conclusion we might draw in relation to Shakespeare's plays is that of genre. As history plays, Shakespeare's dramas were drawing from a much large narrative continuum and therefore have involuntary connections as opposed to the

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<sup>6</sup> Emma Smith ed., Thomas Kyd, *The Spanish Tragedy* (London: Penguin, 1998), p. xxiv.

constructed links that the author of *The First Part of Jeronimo* would have created in the name of unity. It is therefore appropriate to consider the evidence which contemporary history plays offer in relation to what interpretation we can make about Shakespeare's intentions. There are two historical series worth noting here, both attributed to Thomas Heywood: the two-part plays of *Edward IV* and *If You Know Not Me, You Know Nobody, or The Troubles of Queen Elizabeth*. Both, like Shakespeare's histories, dramatise the lives of post-conquest English monarchs by drawing on historical events, but each one presents a startlingly different model of dramatic unity. If a scholar were to identify *Edward IV* as a model for Shakespeare's histories, then they would have an example in support of a pre-conceived historical series. Richard Rowland writes of the two parts that 'all six early modern editions of *Edward IV* printed the two parts together.'<sup>7</sup> He argues that 'Although the two parts of *Edward IV* are far too long to have been played in a single continuous performance there is no evidence to suggest that the plays were not planned and composed together, in the course of 1599, to provide a coherent theatrical event' (p.57). The lack of evidence against their unity, coupled with their shared print history, strengthens the notion that these two plays were intended as one.

However, a scholar opposed to the idea of a historical series could just as easily draw reference to Heywood's other attributed historical drama, *If You Know Not me, You Know Nobody*, of which both parts differ not only in characters but genre. While the first play is a tense drama focusing on the young Queen Elizabeth in peril during her sister's reign, the second part bears more similarity to London comedies such as *The Shoemakers' Holiday*. In this latter play Queen Elizabeth and her court are absent for the majority of the play, her

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<sup>7</sup> Richard Rowland, ed., Thomas Heywood, *The First and Second Parts of King Edward IV* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), p. 58.

first appearance in the play being at line 2,048, over two thirds of the way into the drama.<sup>8</sup>

The only two characters to appear in both parts are Elizabeth and Sussex, though neither role shows evidence of character continuity.

The disparity between the two parts is intensified given Madeleine Doran's belief that the concluding episode in *Part Two* of the Spanish Armada may have been intended as a conclusion to *Part One*. In the 1633 quarto the Chorus takes the audience through time 'From fifty eight, the first yeare of her Raigne,/We come to eighty eight, and of her Raigne/The thirtieth yeare', which suggests that originally the episode would have appeared at the end of *Part One* with this speech as a bridge between the points of action.<sup>9</sup>

This would then suggest that *Part One* was in fact a self-contained drama, which was then altered and accompanied by a second part, which in turn would then appear to be an amalgam of the armada scene and a pre-existing play about Thomas Gresham. For an autonomous play to be developed at a later date into the first part of a two-play cycle, involving significant alterations to its original structure, is a disturbing precedent, and further confounds attempts to draw conclusive views upon Shakespeare's original intentions for his histories, when other plays of that era were open to such manipulation. Can we say that the version of the histories we have today match the originals written by Shakespeare?

So perhaps the problem in determining Shakespeare's intentions is not a lack of evidence, but an abundance of evidence supporting different arguments. Looking at the

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<sup>8</sup> Madeleine Doran, ed., Thomas Heywood, *If You Know Not Me, You Know Nobody Part II* (Oxford: Malone Society, 1935).

<sup>9</sup> Doran, *If You Know Not Me, You Know Nobody Part II*, Appendix, lines 2536-8.

texts themselves, much of the argument for Shakespeare's histories as a planned sequence lies in his sources. Aside from the chronicles of Holinshed and Hall, other dramatic histories present models for Shakespeare's plays. *The Famous Victories of Henry V* spans the length of *Henry IV Part One*, *Part Two* and *Henry V*. It is therefore possible to argue that Shakespeare's three plays are telling one unified story as popularised through the work of another playwright. It is within these plays that we get the most explicit references to other plays; *Henry IV Part Two* ends with the Epilogue's promise that 'our humble author will continue the story with Sir John in it' (Epilogue.25-6) And yet the plays themselves hold evidence which query this idea of preconceived unity: why does Falstaff not appear in *Henry V*? Why is Pistol absent from the first part of *Henry IV*, and Nym absent from both? Why does Hal appear to revert to his old ways at the start of *Henry IV Part Two*? But most of all, if all three plays are intended as a trilogy, why do the titles not reflect this unity, and how does *Richard II*, long seen as the first part of this particular tetralogy, fit into this scheme? Certainly each play shows an awareness of other works by Shakespeare, but it remains unclear how much this was seized upon in theatrical practice.

Further evidence for this can be provided by a fragmentary reference in the records of the King's Office of the Revels alluding to 'nd part of Falstaff' (presumably 2<sup>nd</sup> part of Falstaff).<sup>10</sup> Either the reference is to an early appropriation of Shakespeare's character, or more likely is an alternative title to *Henry IV Part Two*. Whether this is a new title authorised by the playing company, or a convenient short-hand used by the writer of this particular notation is unclear. Should it be the former, this would suggest that Shakespeare, or the company, restructured the plays with hindsight from a trilogy about Hal to a two-part

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<sup>10</sup> Frank Marcham, ed., *The King's Office of the Revels 1610-1622* (London: Waterlow & Sons, 1925), p. 33.

drama about Falstaff; if the latter, then it simply confirms the view of so many later audiences that, regardless of the play's actual title, Falstaff is the hero of the piece. This in turn suggests that the link between the plays hinged on this fictional character, rather than the historic narrative.

We can turn to other writers to try and draw assumptions on the early reception of Shakespeare's histories. Ben Jonson appears to link the various parts of *Henry VI* together in his prologue to *Every Man in his Humour*:

To make a child, now swaddled, to proceed  
Man, and then shoot up, in one beard, and weed,  
Past threescore years: or, with three rusty swords,  
And help of some few foot-and-half-foot words,  
Fight over York, and Lancaster's long jars:  
And in the tiring-house bring wounds, to scars.  
He rather prays, you will be pleased to see  
One such, to-day, as other plays should be,  
Where neither Chorus wafts you o'er the seas;  
Nor creaking throne comes down, the boys to please.<sup>11</sup>

The reference to a Chorus wafting the audience over the seas reminds us of the Chorus' speech before the second act of *Henry V*, which supports the idea that 'York, and Lancaster's long jars' is a reference to the *Henry VI* plays; but there is no evidence to suggest that Jonson is talking of a trilogy, or just one of the plays. The reference could easily refer to *Part Two* or *Part Three*. While Jonson's example of the child who shoots up to 'past threescore years' can be seen as a reference to Henry himself, who starts as a boy in *Part One* and finishes as an old man in *Part Three*, ultimately this reference is inconclusive, for Jonson's prologue is predominantly concerned with highlighting

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<sup>11</sup> Ben Jonson, *Every Man in his Humour*, ed. by M. Seymour Smith (London: Ernest Benn, 1966), Prologue 7-16.



discrepancies from ‘th’ill customs of the age’ (4) derived from the Aristotelian rules of drama. The prologue is actually focusing on generic examples which contradict unity of time and space, and need not necessarily be making a direct point out of *Henry VI*. When taken in context, Jonson’s prologue offers intriguing hints, but not definite proof that Shakespeare designed a trilogy of plays to be performed as such.

In contrast, the surviving quarto editions of the history plays seem to suggest a sense of autonomy, when compared to the later Folio edition. To take *Richard III* as an example, there are significant differences between the first Quarto of 1597 and the Folio twenty-six years later that, amongst other alterations, show a reduction in Q1 of references outside the play. John Jowett argues that the manuscript from which the First Folio is derived actually constitutes an earlier text than the manuscript used for Q1, and therefore identifies the alterations in Q1 as later cuts which aided the play theatrically. He notes that ‘The result of editing the play from Q1 is a theatrically cleaner and more intelligible text with fewer dramatic roles, less repeating between speeches, and less reference to historical events that might puzzle the audience – or the reader for that matter.’<sup>12</sup> An example of this may be seen in act one scene three, when Margaret reappears in the English court. The First Folio includes an interchange between Margaret and Richard which is absent from the quarto:

Richard Gloucester: Wert thou not banished on pain of death?  
Queen Margaret: I was, but I do find more pain in banishment  
Than death can yield me here by my abode.  
(After 1.3.166)

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<sup>12</sup> John Jowett, ed., William Shakespeare, *Richard III*, Oxford Shakespeare (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 132.

In this extract Richard makes direct reference to the Queen's sentence at the end of *Henry VI Part Three*, an event which a reader of the First Folio would have encountered just a few pages earlier. Though a necessary explanation for why a banished character has reappeared, it is rather clumsy and quickly passed over, which suggests that it is there for clarification rather than dramatic purpose. To support this idea, in the quarto the theatrical edit removes this text; it is not necessary to reconcile the events of this play with those of *Henry VI Part Three*: on stage the play was presented individually. Jowett's conclusion is that 'Quarto *Richard III* is breaking free from the *Henry VI* trilogy. By 1597 the play had already achieved on the stage a resilient independence that would endure' (p132): ultimately theatre practitioners in Shakespeare's time were happy to present the play as an individual work.

Another striking contrast between quarto and folio editions occurs in *Henry IV Part Two*. In contrast to *Richard III*, this time the Folio version postdates the quarto. It offers eight major additions to the text. The common critical viewpoint is that these passages, some of which refer to the deposition of Richard II, were cut from the quarto edition for their political ramifications. However, there is little matter in any of the additional passages which hint at a subversive message that might justify their absence from the quarto, and it seems a remarkable coincidence that of these scenes, six make reference to events or characters from *Richard II* and *Henry IV Part One*.<sup>13</sup> So which of the two editions do we take as the true version?

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<sup>13</sup> The six passages are 1.1.165-178, 1.1.188-208, 1.3.85-108, 2.3.23-45, 4.1.55-79 and 4.1.101-137.

Building on the idea that Q and F derive from separate sources, Jowett argues that F comes from the prompt-book: ‘Whether predominantly in Shakespeare’s own hand or not, the prompt-book, as the official text, would, once the foul papers had been transcribed, be marked with any further alterations.’<sup>14</sup> In comparison with Jowett’s views of *Richard III* in quarto, this reading of the First Folio *Henry IV Part Two* suggests that the alterations, coming from the prompt-book, were therefore determined by theatrical considerations, which offers a contradiction of ideals if we try to account for the additional references which the folio also includes. In order to make *Richard III*actable, external references were removed; to make *Henry IV Part Two*actable, external references were added. What this suggests is that while *Richard III* maintained its individuality, *Henry IV Part Two* was specifically marketed as *Part Two* ( just as *The First Part of Jeronimo* was reliant upon the self-standing *Spanish Tragedy*), drawing heavily upon its reference to the first part, which may be justified given the remarkable success of *Henry IV Part One*.

Alternatively, Alice Walker believed that ‘Q was printed from foul papers and F from a copy of Q which had been collated with a fair copy of the foul papers.’<sup>15</sup> This would suggest that the additions in F, coming from the fair copy, were written by the author but omitted from the foul copies which prompted Q. Therefore the passages would not be additions in F, but cuts in Q. These cuts may have been unintentional or adopted purely to fit the play to the necessary number of pages in the quarto. But there is a further possibility, if we suppose that Q represents the theatrical copy, thereby making the cuts part of a coherent approach to individualise the play. As an individual edition, it would be beneficial

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<sup>14</sup> John Jowett, ‘Cuts and Casting: Author and Book-keeper in the Folio Text of “2 Henry IV”’, *AUMLA*, 72 (1989), 275-295 (p. 276).

<sup>15</sup> Alice Walker, ‘Quarto “Copy” and the 1623 Folio: 2 *Henry IV*’, *The Review of English Studies*, 2, No. 7 (1951), 217-226 (pp. 218-9).

to the text to remove external references, precisely as the theatrical manuscript of *Richard III* has. The connection of each cut to another play suggests that, in trimming the play for the stage, the text which was considered most expendable was those passages which link the play to other histories. If we take Jowett's viewpoint, *Part Two* was reliant on *Part One*; if we take Walker's viewpoint, then attempts were made to give the sequel a sense of autonomy.

That the folio kept these passages is understandable given that all the histories were presented together within that one book, but this brings forward a further query of why no other collected editions of the histories had appeared before. While Heywood's *Edward IV* was printed together, in contrast there are no contemporary quarto editions that present Shakespeare's plays as tetralogies, or the trilogy of *Henry VI*. Though a version of *Henry IV* was printed in the Dering Manuscript, ultimately this did not present them as a single story stretched over two plays, but instead conflated them into one play, which suggests that the idea of presenting the two plays together might have been too large a drama for contemporary audiences, especially as it is believed that the manuscript was intended for private performance.<sup>16</sup>

The closest we have to a collected edition of Shakespeare's histories prior to the First Folio is the publication of *Henry VI Parts Two and Three* together, amongst other plays, in the Pavier edition of 1619. Rather than re-title the plays as the Folio would, this edition recognised their quarto titles, *The First Part of the Contention* and *The True Tragedy of York [...]* with the *Whole Contention* and subsequently announced the plays together as

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<sup>16</sup> See Herbert Weil and Judith Weil, eds, *The First Part of King Henry IV*, New Cambridge Shakespeare (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 42.

*The Whole Contention*. This edition is unsettling for two reasons; first, the Pavier edition has been widely criticised for being of questionable authority, especially given its inclusion of *The Yorkshire Tragedy*, *Sir John Oldcastle* and other Shakespeare apocrypha. Secondly, the presentation of these two parts as a united whole only further questions the established view of the history cycle. Whilst Pavier's choice of plays was informed by copyright and ownership, nevertheless the edition identifies that the plays are not recognised as *Henry VI Parts Two* and *Three*, and the very fact that it does not present them in collaboration with *Henry VI Part One* or *Richard III*, whatever the cause, would have suggested to a contemporary reader that there were stronger links between these plays than those between other histories. The idea that some critics, of whom the most recent is Nicholas Grene, believe that the histories were 'designed with serial production of the plays in mind' is specifically challenged by the Pavier edition, as it promotes the union of two plays above the current concept of a unified, eight-play cycle.<sup>17</sup> It also suggests co-dependence between the two plays, which perhaps explains why, in contrast, *Henry IV Part One* was never published in connection with the less popular *Henry IV Part Two*.

A conclusion on Shakespeare's intentions is ultimately one of inconclusiveness. While the First Folio editors would eventually present the plays as a coherent whole, other publishers (which may indicate theatre practitioners also) were cutting references and trimming the plays into autonomous plots, free from their historical context. Contemporary equivalents such as *Tamburlaine* and *Edward IV* show that plays were being presented with their sequels, both on stage and page, but this can only be used to make loose assumptions on whether Shakespeare's plays were also performed as such. No irrefutable

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<sup>17</sup> Nicholas Grene, *Shakespeare's Serial History Plays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 9.

evidence exists to show that the history plays were ever presented together on the Renaissance stage, but neither is there any such evidence to prove that they were not. Nor has theatrical tradition passed the cycle down to the modern age, for there are no records of the history series being performed until 1864. If Shakespeare himself has not left us with any definite evidence on whether the plays should be presented individually or together, then we must question where later critics found the basis for such confidence in the cycle. Ultimately it is not in Shakespeare's intentions, illusive as they are, but the First Folio, that we find the first conscious effort to present the histories together as a collected whole. What remains unknown is to what extent the editors were following the author's wishes, or their own.

#### Heminge and Condell Set the Questions

When Heminge and Condell compiled the First Folio they affected our perception of these plays in four ways: they defined them as history, placed them in narrative order, retitled them, and presented them as such in a printed format separate from the stage. Each one of these factors alone presents the plays in such a way that supports the concept of a historical series. The division of Shakespeare's plays into comedy, tragedy and history has resulted in subsequent critics' attempts to qualify such definitions. David Scott Kastan notes that 'scholars, following the lead of the 1623 Folio, have usually assumed that the history play was a distinct and artistically significant genre that Shakespeare's genius had

elevated to new heights.’<sup>18</sup> The First Folio laid down a system that we have been trying to explain ever since.

History as a genre holds an elusive definition. Unlike comedy or tragedy, history has neither a precedent in dramatic writing, nor a clear modern counterpart. Lawrence Danson explores how *A Warning for Fair Women*, published in 1599, includes a personification of the three genres History, Comedy and Tragedy, and argues that ‘History’s claim to be a genre equal to Comedy and Tragedy was of recent and very local origin’.<sup>19</sup> He specifies that ‘History gets onto the stage of *A Warning for Fair Women* because Shakespeare’s success put her there’ (p. 30).

The recognition of Shakespeare as a champion of histories betrays the distinction between his plays and other histories of the time: it has been claimed that Shakespeare, to an extent, invented the history play, or at the very least, as Kastan suggests, ‘elevated [it] to new heights’; but this only serves to make the genre harder to define, as consequently there are many histories of the period to which Shakespeare’s plays bear no resemblance, either in style or form. Heywood’s *Edward IV*, or *The Blind Beggar of Bethnal Green* by Henry Chettle and John Day, for example, are both a mix of history and ballad, whilst Shakespeare’s histories have a stronger political theme. If we are unable to reconcile Shakespeare’s structure with those of his contemporaries, then which should be defined as history? Richard Helgerson notes that since the First Folio’s publication ‘all subsequent discussion has taken the ten plays the Folio editors printed as “histories” to be the genre’s

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<sup>18</sup> Kastan, *Shakespeare and the Shapes of Time*, p. 37.

<sup>19</sup> Lawrence Danson, *Shakespeare’s Dramatic Genres*, Oxford Shakespeare Topics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 30.

defining exemplars', which has led to the unsatisfactory situation that 'For most of us, the English history play is what Shakespeare and his Folio editors made of it.'<sup>20</sup> The presentation of the plays in the Folio as a collective called 'History' is assumed to define both the genre and Shakespeare's own concept of it.

Consequently the search for the connecting factor in the history plays, as allocated in the Folio, has challenged critics to find a theme or super-structure within the plays, something which justifies why these plays are histories and others in the canon, like *Julius Caesar*, *Macbeth*, or even English-based plays such as *King Lear* and *Cymbeline*, are classed as tragedy. *Richard III*, *Richard II*, *King John* and *Henry IV* were all considered tragedy by Francis Meres in 1598, so what informed the Folio editors' decision?<sup>21</sup> Danson identifies the Folio's intangible definition of genre: 'Why, for instance, is *Macbeth* – a play, drawn from historical sources, about a tyrant's rise to power, his downfall and death – a tragedy, while *Richard III* – a play, drawn from historical sources, about a tyrant's rise to power, his downfall and death – a history?'<sup>22</sup> The subsequent attempt of many others to justify the history genre has, by necessity, turned away from consideration of form, as there are so many other plays which share this, and instead have focused on the time and setting of the events depicted: the perception of a grand design permeating the plays would find strength in seeming to offer a solution to the Folio's riddle.

Having arranged Shakespeare's plays according to their own subjective definition of genre, the First Folio editors went further by arranging the history plays in narrative order.

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<sup>20</sup> Richard Helgerson, 'Shakespeare and Contemporary Dramatists of History' in *A Companion to Shakespeare's Works* (see Dutton and Howard, above), II (*The Histories*), pp. 26-47, p. 26.

<sup>21</sup> Cited in Kastan, *Shakespeare and the Shapes of Time*, p. 37.

<sup>22</sup> Danson, p. 14.



Until the eighteenth century, the narrative order presented in the First Folio was considered to be the definitive sequence, so prior to this the conception of them as one of narrative order held a monopoly over each reader of the plays. The presentation of them in this order offered a sequence of unprecedented scale in renaissance theatre. Neither Heywood's *Edward IV*, Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* nor even *The Spanish Tragedy* and its unauthorised prequel stretched beyond two plays; the Folio's grouping suggested that Shakespeare had conceived a sequence of ten.

As a further step towards a unified work, the Folio editors retitled the plays. One of the most common ways of distinguishing a history play is in the format of its title: *King John* and *King Henry V* are similarly titled plays which contrast the proverbial names given to comedies such as *As You Like it*, *All's Well that Ends Well* and *Much Ado About Nothing*. It is interesting to note the corrections made to a contemporary, anonymous, history play, which was originally titled *War Hath Made All Friends*; the surviving manuscript of the quarto shows how this title was scribbled out and replaced with the new title *Edmund Ironside*.<sup>23</sup> As a means of immediate identification, this history play was renamed with a form of title that stressed the ruling monarch.

A similar process has been applied in the First Folio, with the lengthy titles of the quarto and octavo editions reduced to the name of the monarch. What had previously been *The First Part of the Contention twixt the Houses of York and Lancaster* and *The Tragedy of Richard, Duke of York* now became *The Second/Third Part of Henry the Sixth*; what was entered in the stationers' register as *The History of Henry the Fourth* now became *The First*

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<sup>23</sup> John Johnson, ed., *Edmund Ironside, or War Hath Made All Friends* (Oxford: Malone Society, 1927)

*Part of Henry the Fourth*. Little wonder then that it has since been assumed that the plays are reliant upon one another; furthermore such titles discourage theatrical companies and audiences, for who wishes to see *The Second Part of Henry the Fourth* without having seen the first? The unimaginative titles of these plays has affected their identity unconsciously in subsequent discussion and editions of the play: taking Shakespeare's *Henry IV* as an example, we can see the multiplicity of the play's identity in twentieth century editions, either as *Henry IV Part 1* (New Shakespeare), *Henry IV, Part 1* (Penguin), *King Henry IV Part 1* (Arden third series), *Henry IV Part One* (Oxford Shakespeare), *King Henry the Fourth First Part* (MacMillan), *The First Part of King Henry IV* (Cambridge) or *The History of Henry the Fourth* (Oxford Complete Works).

The functionality of Heminge and Condell's titles for the histories has allowed subsequent editors to use whichever shorthand they prefer, so whereas the name *Hamlet* has obtained an accepted consistency, the title of each history play presents an intangible and interchangeable selection, denying it a definite identity in its own right. Even individual editors are not always able to ensure continuity of format in titles; P. H. Davison produced an edition of *Henry IV, Part 1* in 1968 but then later edited a play titled *Henry IV Part Two*.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, confusion of title occurs within a single edition of a play, many editions presenting different titles on the cover and inside the book. The New Shakespeare edition by J. Dover Wilson, for example, was called *Henry VI Part 1* on the cover, *I King Henry VI* on the first page and *The First Part of King Henry VI* on the next.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, the intention of simplicity and functionality only seems to have confused the play's identity.

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<sup>24</sup> P. H. Davison, ed., William Shakespeare, *Henry IV, Part 1*, New Penguin Shakespeare (London: Penguin Books, 1968), and William Shakespeare, *Henry IV Part Two*, New Penguin Shakespeare (London: Penguin Books, 1977).

<sup>25</sup> J. Dover Wilson, ed., William Shakespeare, *Henry VI Part 1* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1952).

The final impact of the First Folio is in the medium itself. As a book the plays were presented in a manner in which they had never been performed on stage. Henslowe's diary shows that two-part plays were performed on successive days, but now in print Shakespeare's plays could be read immediately one after the other. Whilst an audience member at the Globe might not see another history for weeks, and even then not be guaranteed to see one which follows the play they have just seen, in print the reader of the First Folio needed only to turn the page to continue straight from one play to another. Furthermore a reader was now able to pause during reading while they referred back to previous plays, to confirm plots and strengthen links. Gary Taylor notes that 'Books are spatial, not temporal; any reader can skip backward or forward, dip in, pull out, pause, repeat. Books can be cut up and rearranged, as time cannot.'<sup>26</sup> When a page is all that stands between separate plays, any notion of boundaries between the individual dramas becomes drastically reduced.

The First Folio laid the foundations upon which subsequent criticism would develop the history cycle. With the closing of the theatres between 2 September 1642 and 25 May 1660, the theatrical link between Shakespeare's time and the Restoration was severely diminished, and the predominant means of connecting Shakespeare's plays to restoration theatre was the printed word. In this context the potency of the First Folio and the influence of the editor's decisions were dramatically increased.

### Drawing Characters Out

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<sup>26</sup> Gary Taylor, *Reinventing Shakespeare* (London: Vintage, 1991), p. 108.

The capacity of the printed word as a preserver of Shakespeare's plays did not immediately result in a reverence for the author's text; this would not occur until the development of critical editions in the eighteenth century. Instead, when the theatres were re-opened the Shakespearean canon offered a cheap provision of plays that could be readily adapted and transformed for the contemporary stage. Given the popular perception at the time of Shakespeare as a natural, not educated, writer, Michael Dobson notes how 'the willingness of theatrical professionals to alter Shakespeare's plays for performance seems less surprising'.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore Gary Taylor argues that 'Unless readers owned a folio edition and knew the original texts exceptionally well, they would find it difficult or impossible to know what was Shakespeare and what wasn't'.<sup>28</sup>

Consequently, Shakespeare's plays were open to adaptation and alteration, with many audiences not realising that the resulting dramas were not Shakespeare's original plays. In this environment a number of appropriations arose which developed popular characters from Shakespeare's works, either in new dramas or reworked plays with extended or additional scenes. Occasionally this was done for political purposes: in 1678 Henry Care's *The Weekly Pacquet of Advice from Rome* used the scenes from *Henry IV Part One* of Falstaff and his regiment to make a political point about the contemporary events of Irish priests allegedly preparing an invasion of England.<sup>29</sup> Alternatively, William Davenant justified his decision to reform 'some of the most ancient Playes' with his intention of

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<sup>27</sup> Michael Dobson, *The Making of the National Poet: Shakespeare, Adaptation and Authorship, 1660-1769* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 31.

<sup>28</sup> Gary Taylor, p. 33.

<sup>29</sup> See Dobson, p. 65.

‘makeinge them fitt’ for the modern stage.<sup>30</sup> Either way, as the popularity of the plays grew, their appropriation allowed artists and audiences the chance to see favourite characters in extended parts.

As this trend continued, the characters were freed from the boundaries of the plays in which they originally appeared, especially Falstaff. When Jeremy Collier attacked contemporary theatre in 1698, he identified Falstaff as distinct from the plays in which he appeared, arguing that ‘you may call *Henry the Fourth* and *Fifth* Tragedies if you please, but for all that *Falstaff* wears no *Buskins*, his Character is perfectly comical from end to end.’<sup>31</sup> Falstaff enjoyed great success in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *Henry IV Part One*, both of which were popular in the Restoration, and since neither of these portrayed his rejection or death, Falstaff remained comic and triumphant. Lois Potter notes that by this time, ‘Falstaff, in any case, had already taken on a life of his own.’<sup>32</sup> Charles Gildon included a prologue to his adaptation of *Measure for Measure* in which the ghost of Shakespeare returned to defend Falstaff from the poor quality of ‘Lifeless Actors’

Fat *Falstaff* here, with Pleasure, I beheld,  
Toss off his Bottle, and his *Truncheon* weild [...]  
But when, on yonder *Stage*, the Knave was shewn,  
Ev’n by my Self, the Picture scarce was known.<sup>33</sup>

Falstaff was no longer bigger than the play, but bigger than the stage. Gildon’s prologue, which attacked others in order to praise Thomas Betterton’s portrayal of the character,

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<sup>30</sup> William Davenant, cited in *Shakespeare: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Brian Vickers, 6 vols (London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974-1981), I (1974), p. 5.

<sup>31</sup> Jeremy Collier, ‘A Short View of the Immorality, and Profaneness of the English Stage’ (1698), repr. in *Shakespeare: The Critical Heritage* (see Vickers, above), III (1975), pp. 87-88 (p. 88).

<sup>32</sup> Lois Potter, ‘The Second Tetralogy: Performance as Interpretation’, in *A Companion to Shakespeare’s Works* (see Dutton and Howard, above), II (*The Histories*), pp. 287-307, (p. 287).

<sup>33</sup> Charles Gildon, *Measure for Measure* (1700), cited in Dobson, pp. 120-1.

suggested that the role of the knight was beyond the capabilities of many actors. Falstaff had become a definite type, a recognised character with a life of his own. The plays became united through their possession of Falstaff or other common characters, and this, coupled with the lack of reverence for the original text, allowed the plays to be reedited accordingly.

One of the results of the growing emphasis on character can be seen in the most successful adaptation of Shakespeare's work, Colley Cibber's *Richard III* of 1699. Seeking to embellish and improve Shakespeare's play, Cibber delved into *Henry VI Part Three* and brought out scenes which related to the character of Richard, such as the murder of Henry VI.<sup>34</sup> In order to prioritise the character of Richard, Cibber discarded the original design for the play; he also connected the character of Richard in *Henry VI Part Three* with the title figure of *Richard III*. The boundaries of each play were subsequently broken down and a stronger link forged between the two.

Meanwhile the popularity of Falstaff was being used to ensure audience attendance. Having adapted and revived *Henry IV Part Two* in 1704, Thomas Betterton played the part of Falstaff in both parts throughout his career, and there were occasions when he would present the plays within a week of each other. René Weis notes that 'Falstaff is an instantly recognisable figure' and therefore 'An audience who had seen him three days earlier in *I Henry IV* could be relied on to be there because they wanted to see more of him'.<sup>35</sup> Character continuity was seized upon as an opportunity for generating revenue; audiences

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<sup>34</sup> Colley Cibber, *The Tragical History of King Richard III* (1700; repr. London: Cornmarket Press 1969).

<sup>35</sup> René Weis, ed., William Shakespeare, *Henry IV Part Two*, Oxford Shakespeare (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 60.

were encouraged to return to see the same character they had seen portrayed in an earlier play.

By the time Charles Molloy wrote *The Half-Pay Officers* in 1720, he had no qualms in considering the characters from Shakespeare's plays as quite distinct from either the original drama or the author. The play was an adaptation of Davenant's earlier adaptation, *Love and Honour*, to which Molloy introduced Fluellen and Pistol into the plot, claiming that neither he nor Shakespeare were authors of the pair; Dobson notes that Molloy 'refuses the title himself, and grants Shakespeare no proprietorship over his characters, considering Fluellen simply as a well-esteemed "Thing" available for re-use much as one might retell a good joke'.<sup>36</sup> The growing independence of characters continued; Dobson notes that not only do Shakespeare's characters 'begin to migrate independently into the novel during the 1750s and 1760s, but his characters give rise to new plays entirely' (p. 214). Thus in 1759 Oliver Goldsmith wrote *Revelry at Boar's Head*, and in 1766 one could see *Falstaff's Wedding* by William Kenrick. The emergence of these plays meant that each drama, including the originals by Shakespeare, became simply one of many adventures of the character, rather than individual drama deserving individual attention.

Whilst the theatres adopted Shakespeare's characters, critical attention also began to focus on the characters within Shakespeare's plays, often treating them as subjects meriting as much discussion, if not more, than the actual dramas themselves. Stephen Orgel notes that throughout Shakespearean criticism there is 'a tendency to locate the truth of drama in the life of its characters, whether historical or not, and to assume for them an existence

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<sup>36</sup> Dobson, p. 107.

before and beyond the play.’<sup>37</sup> Indeed, in 1744 Corbyn Morris had discussed the merits of the humorous characters ‘Sir John Falstaff, Sir Roger de Coverly, and Don Quixote.’ The essay thus spanned drama and literature, paying less heed to the medium and more attention to the comedians. Morris was keen to distance Falstaff from scenes which did not do him justice, especially those presented in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, which Morris dismissed as an unfinished play and one in which Falstaff’s presence is ‘in general greatly below his true character.’<sup>38</sup> Morris saw the Falstaff of *Merry Wives* and *Henry IV* in direct relation to one another, and sought to excuse the one from the other. The concept that the different demands of each type of play might affect the requirements for each character did not occur to Morris; Falstaff was a being in his own right, and the dramas secondary to him.

Morris went on to voice what would become a common viewpoint, that Falstaff’s ‘Imprisonment and Death in the latter Part of *King Henry the IVth*, seem also to have been written by *Shakespeare* in Compliance with the *Austerity* of the Times, and in order to avoid the Imputation of encouraging *Idleness* and mirthful *Riot* by too amiable and happy an Example’ (p. 122). Affection for the character reduced the ending of *Henry IV Part Two* to a necessary mistake, and Shakespeare’s design of the play was seen as a contrast to the audience’s hopes for Falstaff. When an unsigned essay discussing the fat knight was published nine years later, the author placed Shakespeare in opposition to Falstaff. Suggesting that the stabbing of Hotspur is a vile act on Falstaff’s part, the writer supposes

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<sup>37</sup> Stephen Orgel, *Imagining Shakespeare: A History of Texts and Visions* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), p. 40.

<sup>38</sup> Corbyn Morris, ‘An Essay Towards Fixing the True Standards of Wit, Humour, Raillery, Satire, and Ridicule. To which is Added, an Analysis Of the Characters of An Humourist, Sir John Falstaff, Sir Roger de Coverly, and Don Quixote’ (1744), repr. in *Shakespeare: The Critical Heritage* (see Vickers, above), II (1974), pp. 122-129 (p. 122).



that 'Shakespeare made him guilty of it to prevent our being too fond of such a villain'.<sup>39</sup>

The concept implies that the scene in *Part One* was written with the foreknowledge of Falstaff's rejection in *Part Two*.

Falstaff had outgrown the play, the author, and even criticism itself, as Samuel Johnson found himself lost for words: 'But Falstaff, unimitated, unimitable Falstaff, how shall I describe thee?'<sup>40</sup> Falstaff's dominance over the histories continued in 1777 with Maurice Morgann's infamous *Essay on the Dramatic Character of Sir John Falstaff*, in which he concluded that Falstaff was not, in fact, a coward. The essay would be torn apart by subsequent critics, but its underlying theme remained triumphant, that in the characters of Shakespeare 'there is a certain roundness and integrity [...] which give them an independence'.<sup>41</sup> Morgann's essay draws from all three history plays that refer to Falstaff, with little regard for the boundaries of each drama, referring back and forth between all three and creating his own order of events in the process.

The *Henry IV* plays, and *Henry V*, were all linked together in the critics' eyes, and were all referred to in these essays and others to explain the character of Falstaff. Returning to Johnson's edition, we can see the effect of the characters' release when he discusses the narrative which stretched the whole length of four plays from *Richard II* to *Henry V*, and in doing so does not consider each drama as a separate story.

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<sup>39</sup> Anonymous, *Shakespeare. Containing the Traits of his Characters* (1774), repr. in *Shakespeare: The Critical Heritage* (see Vickers, above), VI (1981), pp. 133-136 (p. 134).

<sup>40</sup> Samuel Johnson, Notes on *Henry IV Part Two* (1765), repr. in *Johnson on Shakespeare*, ed. by R. W. Desai (London: Sangam Books, 1997), pp. 166-170, (p. 169).

<sup>41</sup> Maurice Morgann, *An Essay on the Dramatic Character of Sir John Falstaff* (1777), repr. in *King Henry IV Parts 1 & 2: A Selection of Critical Essays*, ed. by G. K. Hunter (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1970), pp. 25-55 (p. 34).

These scenes, which now make the fifth act of *Henry the Fourth*, might then be the first of *Henry the Fifth*; but the truth is, that they do unite very commodiously to either play. When these plays were represented, I believe they ended as they are now ended in the books; but Shakespeare seems to have designed that the whole series of action from the beginning of *Richard the Second*, to the end of *Henry the Fifth*, should be considered by the reader as one work, upon one plan, only broken into parts by the necessity of exhibition.<sup>42</sup>

Here we see the effect of Heminge and Condell's printed work, the idea of separate chapters rather than individual dramas, supported by the concept that the characters in each play are the same character continuing through linked parts. By redefining the characters as autonomous beings, rather than products of the play in which they appeared, those characters became a means to unite and connect the histories.

### The National Poet and the Poet's Nation

One more character remained to be released from Shakespeare's plays, and that was the author himself. By the time of the Stratford Jubilee in 1769, the National Poet had been christened and bardolatry was in full flow. As suggested by the planned procession of Shakespeare's characters (which included Falstaff and his followers amongst the kings), the event linked the celebration of characters with the growth of patriotic interest in the plays and their author. This view of Shakespeare as a national hero had been growing for some time already. As his plays grew in popularity, either to read or be performed, whether authentic text or appropriation, Shakespeare became as much a figure of interest as his inventions. The first critical edition of the plays by Nicholas Rowe in 1709 had included a

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<sup>42</sup> Johnson, Notes on *Henry IV Part Two*, pp. 168-9.

biography of Shakespeare; an interest existed in the man behind the drama and he became a figure of celebration for the nation. Dobson notes that ‘Whether pro- or anti-Stuart, Tory or Whig, the playwrights of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century share a growing perception and promotion of Shakespeare as [...] a national father’.<sup>43</sup>

In 1741 a statue of Shakespeare was unveiled at Westminster Abbey, in response to a succession of requests that had begun seven years before.<sup>44</sup> Significantly the figure showed Shakespeare leaning against a pillar adorned with busts of Elizabeth I, Henry V and Richard III. The three monarchs were all linked to Shakespeare, one he had written for and two he had written about, and impressed the importance of Shakespeare’s nationality upon the monument. In 1747, a patriotic view of Shakespeare caused William Guthrie to condemn his predecessors for embracing an alien culture: ‘Yet to our eternal amazement it is true, that for above half a century the poets and the patrons of poetry, in England, abandoned the sterling merit of Shakespear [sic] for the tinsel ornaments of the French academy.’<sup>45</sup> The growing perception of Shakespeare as a national figure put those plays in which he had written about the nation in a new light; the English were eager to see what their great writer had said about their country, and as conflicts occurred with the French they turned to the histories as doctrines of patriotism. As Robert Shaughnessy notes, the histories have been ‘particularly prone to overtly political appropriation, providing the basis for hierarchical and nationalist ideologies of England and Englishness’.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Dobson, p. 97.

<sup>44</sup> See Dobson, pp. 135-143.

<sup>45</sup> William Guthrie, ‘An Essay upon English Tragedy’ (1747), repr. in Dobson, p. 198.

<sup>46</sup> Shaughnessy, p. 3.

Furthermore, as Shakespeare was reinvented as a patriotic figure, his histories were looked at not in terms of drama but in relation to the events they depicted, promoting them, in Shaughnessy's words, 'to the status of quasi-factual historiography' (p. 4). The playbill for Garrick's debut in *Richard III* in 1741 had promised the important factor of the depiction of key events and 'many other true historical passages'.<sup>47</sup> With a similar thirst for truth in the plays, Charlotte Lennox drew out a number of divergences, not to recognise dramatic purpose, but to identify where '*Shakespeare's* Inattention to the History is plainly proved, and is therefore the less pardonable'.<sup>48</sup> Lennox did not concern herself with the dramatic power of York's murder in *Henry VI Part Three*, but rather with how the author 'contradicts a known Fact in History, and makes one of the greatest Captains of the Age die by the cowardly Stabs of a Woman and a Ruffian' (p. 138). The plays were no longer plays, but chronicles of history, and criticised as such. Equally, such a perception entailed that each play was merely part of a larger story being told, and followed on from the prior chapter. The narrative that runs through history itself was seen to run through Shakespeare's history plays, endorsing Johnson's view of them as one work 'only broken into parts by the necessity of exhibition.'

Dobson argues that 'The fully developed Bardolatry proclaimed at the Jubilee, declaring Shakespeare the blest Genius of the Isle, expresses a remarkably enduring version of cultural nationalism unimaginable in the time of Heminge and Condell'.<sup>49</sup> The position of Shakespeare as a symbol of cultural nationalism recommended his history plays as

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<sup>47</sup> Playbill for *Richard III*, directed by David Garrick at the Goodman's Fields Theatre, 10 October 1741.

<sup>48</sup> Charlotte Lennox, *Shakespeare Illustrated* (1754), repr. in *Shakespeare: The Critical Heritage* (see Vickers, above), IV (1976), pp. 110-146 (p. 135).

<sup>49</sup> Dobson, p. 226.

patriotic parables and celebratory pageants. Orgel notes the absurdity of pursuing history through Shakespeare:

The problems begin [...] with the very idea of construing history as drama, the notion that we can understand the forces that led to the deposition of Richard II, the Wars of the Roses, the Tudor revolution, by inventing dialogue for a few figures mentioned in the chronicles and putting them in dramatic situations.<sup>50</sup>

Orgel argues that this is a unsatisfactory viewpoint because of ‘what it implies about drama: the logical corollary to it is that the reality of drama is not what it presents but what is represented in it’ (p. 39). The histories were viewed not as drama, but history itself, and by pushing the plays firmly into their historical context, it encouraged the view of each play being merely part of a larger chronicle, rather than autonomous plots with a definite beginning and conclusion. Combined with the breaking down of boundaries as suggested by the First Folio and the rising popularity of characters, especially Falstaff and Richard III, the necessary components were in place to consider the histories as one whole epic.

### Shakespeare’s German-English History Plays

Ironically the idea of the English epic did not find so strong a support in England as it did in Germany; the nineteenth century especially would prove to be a time in which the epic permeated German culture: Wagner wrote and premiered *The Ring of the Nibelung*, an epic tetralogy of four operas intended to be seen on successive nights, which was itself influenced by Johann Gustav Droysen’s 1832 translation of the *Oresteia*, and in the same century Franz Dingelstedt produced the first serial performance of Shakespeare’s

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<sup>50</sup> Orgel, p. 39.

histories.<sup>51</sup> This was a time when practical examples of epic drama became readily available, and when the influence of the cycle would transfer to the stage and consequently gather in strength.

In critical writing, discussion of the epic in Shakespeare began as early as 1806, when Adam Müller identified the plays as one saga with his suggested title, 'The Demise of Chivalric Britain.'<sup>52</sup> He considered it impossible that Shakespeare would have ended *Richard II* with a situation so improper as the play, performed individually, suggests: 'Richard goes mad and dies. Are we to suppose that Shakespeare sees justice done in such a blatant, vulgar way?' (p. 86). Müller instead argues that in these plays 'we are not permitted to become engrossed in exclusive and monological contemplation of a single hero' (p. 85), so a single reading of *Richard II* 'is a kind of hard trial for the reader, standing guard at the entrance' (p. 86). By dismissing individual characters and drama, Richard's tragedy became insignificant to Müller when seen amongst the larger story of the histories.

The idea of a historical cycle was taken up by Schlegel in his lectures of 1808. The growing independence of character showed its influence in his consideration of the story of Hal and Falstaff running through three plays, and his belief that the beginning of Richard III's character is not in the play of that name, but instead 'is very distinctly drawn in the two last parts of *Henry VI*; nay, even his first speeches lead us already to form the most

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<sup>51</sup> For further details on the influence of Droysen on Wagner, see Ewans.

<sup>52</sup> Adam Müller, 'Fragments Concerning William Shakespeare' (1806), repr. in *The Romantics on Shakespeare*, ed. by Jonathan Bate (London: Penguin, 1992), pp. 83-7 (p. 85).

unfavourable anticipations of his future conduct.’<sup>53</sup> Looking at the plays in this way as a continuous story where each play prepares us the next, and bears its beginnings in the preceding drama, Schlegel presented a play of the English nation. Jonathan Bate remarks that ‘Given Schlegel’s model of a drama that forges national identity, it is not surprising that the lectures evince a particular interest in Shakespeare’s history plays.’<sup>54</sup>

Despite his own nationality, and even because of it, Schlegel emphasised these plays as a national corpus, a saga that proudly told of its country’s past. The view was helped in part by the contemporary events of Napoleon Bonaparte’s march across Europe. The resulting antipathy prompted Schlegel to find in *Henry V* ‘a general contrast between the French and English national characters; a contrast which betrays a partiality for [Shakespeare’s] own nation’ which extended through the cycle as a whole.<sup>55</sup> Seeing the patterns of his time in Shakespeare’s drama, Schlegel believed that ‘we may attain from them a knowledge of history in all its truth’; accordingly his own political views made him consider Shakespeare’s history plays as ‘an historical heroic poem in the dramatic form, of which the separate plays constitute the rhapsodies’:

But this series of drama is intended as the vehicle of a much higher and much more general instruction; it furnishes examples of the political course of the world, applicable to all times. This mirror of kings should be the manual of young princes (pp. 419-20).

Stuart Hampton-Reeves suggests that ‘the history plays only started to be performed as *history* plays once they began to be seen as works which are part of a wider narrative’;

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<sup>53</sup> Augustus William Schlegel, *A Course of Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature* (London: Bell and Daldy, 1871), p. 435 (first publ. as *Vorlesungen über dramatische Kunst und Literatur*, 1808).

<sup>54</sup> Bate, p. 13.

<sup>55</sup> Schlegel, p. 430.

ultimately it was at this period in history when the critical foundations were being laid to promote the plays as being specifically historic plays.<sup>56</sup> Ironically Shakespeare's plays had become viewed in the same manner as the chronicles he had referred to himself; no longer dramas, they were a political manual which modern states would do well to read: Müller had presented the plays as a warning to contemporary states: 'mark my words, ye kings, as you watch Richard decline into madness [...] ye nations mark my words'.<sup>57</sup>

Back in England the plays continued to be seen primarily in the context of retelling English history; the Duke of Marlborough had already claimed that all he learned from history he learned from Shakespeare, but Samuel Taylor Coleridge disagreed with such an unquestioning faith in the accuracy of Shakespeare's history plays:

[Shakespeare] has bequeathed as a legacy the pure spirit of history, not that the facts are implicitly to be relied on, or is he to be read, as the Duke of Marlborough read him, as an historian: but as distance is destroyed by a telescope, and by the force of imagination we see in the constellations, brought close to the eye, a multitude of worlds, so by the *law of impressiveness*, when we read his plays, we seem to live in the era he portrays.<sup>58</sup>

Size mattered to Coleridge and, taking the plays as a combined whole, he suggested a grand viewpoint of the plays similar to Schlegel's vision. In order to 'Fully comprehend' the plays, Coleridge felt that we must first understand the difference between epic and tragic, for where 'An Epic play begins and ends arbitrarily; its only law is, that it possesses beginning, middle, and end [...] in the Tragic, the free will of man is the first cause, and

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<sup>56</sup> Stuart Hampton-Reeves, 'Theatrical afterlives' in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare's History Plays*, ed. by Michael Hattaway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 229-244 (p. 229).

<sup>57</sup> Müller, p. 87.

<sup>58</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lectures on the Characteristics of Shakespeare* (1813), repr. in *The Romantics on Shakespeare* (see Bate, above), pp. 129-147 (p. 139).



accidents are never introduced' (p. 139). In short the histories, seen thus as a blend of both, allowed for characters to have their own stories, but for each play to lack a beginning or end of any design.

As an Englishman, Coleridge reinforced the nationalism in the plays, declaring that Shakespeare's intention in the histories was 'to make his countrymen more patriotic; to make Englishmen proud of being Englishmen' (p. 139). In 1817 William Hazlitt revolted against this. Considering *Henry V*, he acknowledged that the protagonist 'is a very favourite monarch with the English nation, and he appears to have been also a favourite with Shakespear', but ultimately felt that Henry 'scarcely deserves this honour.'<sup>59</sup> If the plays could inspire national pride, they could also evoke national shame. Hazlitt disliked Henry as a king because 'He was fond of war and low company' and connected the histories by suggesting that Hal's 'adventure on Gadshill was a prelude to the affair of Agincourt, only a bloodless one' (p. 156). Viewing them as a whole Hazlitt could not accept the victor of Agincourt as a hero: King Henry V was let down by Hal. If Shakespeare's histories were to be considered as a national epic, rather than works of drama, they consequently became susceptible to criticism for failing to uphold values which the author may never have intended to present.

On the whole, however, the national poet's epic poem was well received by the critics; by 1828 Hartley Coleridge had proudly proclaimed the Englishness of the bard with his claim that 'Shakespeare was a Tory' who 'saw and admired the whole structure of the

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<sup>59</sup> William Hazlitt, *Characters of Shakespear's Plays* (London: J. M. Dent & Co, 1906), p. 156.

British state, the most perfect system of representation ever devised.’<sup>60</sup> Thomas Carlyle felt none of Hazlitt’s concerns over *Henry V*; he said of the battle of Agincourt that ‘There is a noble Patriotism in it.’<sup>61</sup> Carlyle subscribed to Schlegel’s epic vision, but furthermore saw it not only as a celebration of the country, but the author, and through him the country once more:

There are really, if we look to it, few as memorable Histories. The great salient points are all admirably seized; all rounds itself off, into a kind of rhythmic coherence; it is, as Schlegel says, *epic*, - as indeed all delineation by a great thinker will be. There are right beautiful things in those Pieces, which indeed together form one beautiful thing (p. 254).

Carlyle used the histories as a defence of the author, crying that ‘we cannot do without Shakespeare’ and concluding that ‘it is a great thing for a Nation that it get an articulate voice; that it produce a man who will speak-forth melodiously what the heart of it means’ (pp. 255-6).

The histories had been embraced as a national chronicle; now they would become a dramatic epic. In Shakespeare’s tercentenary year, Germany saw the world’s first production of Shakespeare’s history cycle on the stage, directed by Dingelstedt at the Weimar Theatre, in which the plays were divided into five acts according to the reign of each king. Twelve years later in 1876, the same year in which Wagner premiered the *Ring* cycle, the effect of Dingelstedt’s production could already be seen in Ulrici’s work, who considered the histories as ‘the great tragedy, of which the reign of Henry VI. forms the

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<sup>60</sup> Hartley Coleridge, *Shakespeare a Tory, and a Gentleman* (1828), repr. in *The Romantics on Shakespeare* (see Bate, above), pp. 232-7 (p. 232, p.237).

<sup>61</sup> Thomas Carlyle, *The Hero as Poet* (1840), repr. in *The Romantics on Shakespeare* (see Bate, above), pp. 246-256 (p. 254).

*fourth act.*<sup>62</sup> From this point forth criticism of the historical series would no longer be suggesting a theoretical possibility but working from a practical example set forth on the stage.

### History as Legion

There was one other motivating factor which led to the serialisation of Shakespeare's history plays prior to the twentieth century; a factor working specifically to the detriment of the individual plays, especially the three parts of *Henry VI*. As criticism mounted against these plays, accusations of shared authorship were made not as an unbiased issue but with a direct link to the quality of the plays, and in trying to defend them, critics did not draw on their individual strengths, but on their links within the grander scheme of Shakespeare's history epic.

Reacting to the claims of doubtful authorship raised by Warburton and Theobald in their editions, Johnson claimed that the plays of *Henry VI* 'seem to be declared genuine by the voice of Shakespeare himself, who refers to the second play in his epilogue to *Henry V* and apparently connects the first act of *Richard III* with the last of the third part of *Henry VI*.'<sup>63</sup> In 1768 Edward Capell picked up the argument for the plays by using their consistency with the other histories as a proof of their authorship and worth, especially in the 'preservation of character':

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<sup>62</sup> Hermann Ulrici, *Shakespeare's Dramatic Art* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1908), p. 260.

<sup>63</sup> Samuel Johnson, *The Plays of William Shakespeare*, 12 vols (London: C Bathurst and others, 1778; repr. London: Routledge, 1995), VI, p. 563.

All the personages in them are distinctly and truly delineated, and the character given them sustain'd uniformly throughout. The enormous *Richard's*, particularly, which in the third of these plays is seen rising towards its zenith; and who sees not the future monster [...] let him never pretend discernment hereafter in any case of nature.<sup>64</sup>

The *Henry VI* plays were placed in an uncompromising position, either praised as part of the cycle by the bard or else condemned as independent works not by Shakespeare. Edward Malone's famous attack on the *Henry VI* plays in 1790 was accompanied by a chronology of Shakespeare's plays, in which he expanded earlier attempts in Johnson's edition to set a date for the conception of each play. Malone dated the three parts of *Henry VI* as the earliest plays, written between 1589-91, and then placed in order *King John*, *Richard II*, *Richard III*, *Henry IV Part One*, *Henry IV Part Two*, *Henry V*, suggesting they were all written between 1596 and 1599, and finally dating *Henry VIII* in 1601, much closer in time to the other histories than we now believe it to be. Such an order challenges the unity of the sequence as presented in the First Folio, but rather than pursue this challenge, Malone used the information to separate the much earlier *Henry VI* plays as Shakespeare's revisions of poor quality drama written by someone else.<sup>65</sup>

However, Malone's argument merely prompted other critics to unite the histories and celebrate *Henry VI* as a part of that whole. Schlegel responded to the claim that the plays were not Shakespeare's by arguing that 'The assertion is so ridiculous, that in this case *Richard the Third* might also not be Shakespeare's, as it is linked in the most immediate manner to the three other pieces, both by the subject, and the spirit and the style of

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<sup>64</sup> Edward Capell, 'Introduction to Complete Works' (1768), repr. in *Shakespeare: The Critical Heritage* (see Vickers, above), V (1979), pp. 303-327 (p. 317).

<sup>65</sup> Edward Malone, *The Plays and Poems of William Shakespeare* (1790), repr. in *Shakespeare: The Critical Heritage* (see Vickers, above), VI, pp. 521-555 (p. 527).

handling.’<sup>66</sup> A curious sense of fraternity appeared to arise within the histories, Schlegel’s argument being that to question one history play was to question all of the history plays; the plays of *Henry VI* became acceptable through association. F. G. Fleay summarised the general argument:

*Richard III* has always been regarded as entirely Shakespeare’s, and its likeness to *3 Henry VI*. has more than anything kept alive the untenable belief that this last-named play was also, in part or wholly, written by our greatest dramatist.<sup>67</sup>

Promoting the cycle not only answered criticism of the *Henry VI* plays, but to some extent of Shakespeare himself. He was revered as a great, if not the greatest, dramatist, so when other dramatic cycles became popular, be it Wagner’s or Aeschylus’, it is unsurprising that defenders of Shakespeare should look for a similar, if not better, cycle in his work. Whilst one critic asked exaltingly ‘Is there anything in all the realm of art, to set besides *Der Ring des Nibelungen*?’ others have acknowledged that for Wagner ‘Shakespeare was [...] no less a guiding star than Beethoven’.<sup>68</sup> Just as pride in Shakespeare prompted critics to identify him as an inspiration for Wagner, so others sought to connect Shakespeare’s work back to the *Oresteia*. A. W. Pollard remarked:

At the outset of his enquiries almost every student of the modern drama is found instinctively peering through long centuries of darkness for some glimmerings of the brilliant torch-light of Greek tragedy. [They have a] pious desire to connect new things with old, to link together the names of Aeschylus and Shakespeare.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Schlegel, p. 442.

<sup>67</sup> Frederick Gard Fleay, *A Chronicle History of the Life and Work of William Shakespeare Player, Poet and Playmaker* (London: John C. Nimmo, 1886), p. 276.

<sup>68</sup> M. Owen Lee, *Wagner’s Ring: Turning the Sky Round* (New York: Limelight, 1994), p. 17; H. F. Gatten, *Wagner the Dramatist* (London: John Calder, 1977), p. 11.

<sup>69</sup> A. W. Pollard, *English Miracle Plays: Moralities and Interludes*, 4th edn (Oxford: Clarendon, 1903), p. xi.

Pollard himself identified another potential inspiration in the Miracle plays. He noted that 'The last performance of the York Miracle plays took place in 1579, when Shakespeare had attained his Roman majority' and argued that 'They had prepared the ground from which the Shakespearian harvest was to spring in all its glorious abundance' (p. lix). Taken as single units, the *Oresteia*, the *Ring* and the Miracle plays may all be praised for their scale, and the vision of the author to create such an epic: consequently the same praise was heaped upon Shakespeare's histories. To interpret them as individual plays would deny Shakespeare the right to be praised for the same bold enterprise that Wagner and Aeschylus were commended for: it was the quantity, rather than the quality, that mattered.

The danger of accepting the plays only as part of a larger scheme is that individually the plays themselves were still discriminated against. Johnson had argued that in Shakespeare 'real progress is not shown in the splendour of particular passages, but by the progress of his fable', and his willingness to look beyond the specific to the overall effect is central to the merging of the history plays into one.<sup>70</sup> Alexander Pope once remarked of all Shakespeare's plays that 'Nor does the Whole fail to strike us with greater reverence, tho' many of the Parts are childish, ill-plac'd, and unequal to its grandeur.'<sup>71</sup> To accept *Henry VI* on such terms within the cycle is not a positive approach to exploring the plays. The history cycle proved to be greater than the sum of its parts, which would prove detrimental to the interests of those individual parts.

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<sup>70</sup> Samuel Johnson, *Preface* (1765), repr. in *Johnson on Shakespeare* (see Desai, above), pp. 96-137 (p. 98).

<sup>71</sup> Alexander Pope, *The Works of Shakespeare, Collated and Corrected*, 6 vols (1725), repr. in *Shakespeare: The Critical Heritage* (see Vickers, above), II, pp. 403-418 (p. 415).

## Section Two: Post-production Criticism in the Twentieth Century

Edward Berry argues that ‘twentieth-century criticism of Shakespeare’s histories has probably been more uniform in its interests than that of any other group of plays. The central critical effort – sometimes explicit, sometimes implicit – has been to define the genre [...]. The most influential critics have concentrated upon three distinctive features: the patriotism of the plays (they are all English histories), their preoccupation with politics, and their sequential nature.’<sup>72</sup> Starting from the editorial decisions of Heminge and Condell, the discussion of patriotism and politics that had already begun in the previous centuries was now developed in the twentieth century with a conscious focus on the sequential nature of the plays, supported by practical examples on the stage that allowed critics to talk more confidently about the historical cycle as an accepted concept rather than a theoretical possibility.

### Criticism in the Early Twentieth Century

One of the first works of the century, Felix E. Schelling’s *The English Chronicle Play*, extended the consideration of Shakespeare’s histories to a review of all the history plays written for the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage. Championing Shakespeare above the ‘lesser dramatists’, Schelling maintained an enthusiasm for the history plays as a higher form of drama arising from the chronicle plays.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Edward Berry, ‘Twentieth Century Criticism: The Histories’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare Studies*, ed. by Stanley Wells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 249-256 (p. 249).

<sup>73</sup> Felix E. Schelling, *The English Chronicle Play* (New York: MacMillan, 1902), p. 58.

Of the old epic type of the English Chronicle Play nothing artistic could be expected and nothing came [...]. The unifying artistic motive that crystallised this amorphous mass into a form of beauty came in the first instance from Marlowe, and secondly from Shakespeare himself (pp. 62-3).

Schelling's work suggested an alternative framework to narrative sequence by which we might explore the histories. He believed the unity of the history series was based upon artistic growth, so analysed themes of unity and design, rather than a chronicle of the reign of successive kings. Berry notes in Schelling a celebration of the cycle's 'patriotic energy': in this sense Schelling appears to have been continuing the national zeal of earlier critics, but the triumphant tone he identified in the plays arose specifically from Shakespeare's treatment of history rather than an arbitrary focus on plot and narrative.<sup>74</sup>

Meanwhile the view of the plays as actual history continued. In 1918 J. A. R. Marriott's book *English History in Shakespeare*, as the title suggests, qualified history through Shakespeare's narrative, rather than acknowledging history as a source for the dramatic works. Marriott expressed his desire 'to treat the Chronicle Plays as a contribution to the history of England'.<sup>75</sup> Similarly H. B. Charlton declared that the chronicle play arose because 'A wave of exuberant national sentiment cried out for such stimulus as visible reminders of England's past could give it', a sentiment which applies equally well to the post-war Britain in which Charlton was writing.<sup>76</sup> Charlton believed that the Elizabethan history play was 'catering primarily for a political, and not for an artistic, demand. It was exercising and fostering patriotism. Hence the pageantry of the chronicle play, and its undramatic structure' (p. 8).

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<sup>74</sup> Berry, p. 249.

<sup>75</sup> J. A. R. Marriott, *English History in Shakespeare* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1918), p. 10.

<sup>76</sup> H. B. Charlton, *Shakespeare, Politics and Politicians* ([n.p.]: The English Association, 1929), p. 7.



The growing belief in the plays' undramatic structures would create the false necessity for a serial perception; only in the context of recreating history and fostering patriotism could the histories succeed. Equally, in his edition of *Henry VI Part One* H. C. Hart viewed the *Henry VI* plays negatively by suggesting that their only worthy aspect is their depiction of English history:

All critics, all readers, will probably agree or have agreed that it is one of the least poetical and also one of the dullest of all the plays in the Folio. It is redeemed by few passages of merit - its verse is unmusical, its situations are usually poorly developed - and were it not for the essential interest of the subject-matter, to any English reader it would be unreadable.<sup>77</sup>

If these plays were indeed a patriotic or triumphant retelling of English history, then that history became their best feature; without it, the plays were worth nothing. The consequent reading of the plays was more akin to a pageant than a coherent dramatic work, and like a pageant, the plays would be best enjoyed as a series of events rather than an individual motif.

### Providence and Parallels

As subsequent stage productions were being mounted in the 1920s and 1930s, critics began to search for a central theme that might connect these particular episodes from history. In the mid-century three theories were put forward, by E. M. W. Tillyard and Una Ellis-Fermor, both in 1945, and Lily B. Campbell in 1946. All three reached the conclusion

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<sup>77</sup> H. C. Hart, ed., William Shakespeare, *The First Part of Henry the Sixth*, Arden 1<sup>st</sup> Series (London: Methuen, 1909; repr. 1930), p. x.

that there was a unifying theme in the series, though its definition varied between the three works.

Tillyard decided that the First Folio's definition of history related to 'plays treating mainly of English history after the conquest', neatly resolving the issue of *King Lear*, *Cymbeline* and others.<sup>78</sup> He considered that while 'the picture we get from Shakespeare's histories is that of disorder [...] behind disorder is some sort of order or "degree" on earth' (pp. 15-6): a pattern existed in the histories for Tillyard, even through the chaos. The

structure which he identified was based on the execution of divine judgement:

What were the sins God sought to punish? There had been a number, but the pre-eminent one was the murder of Richard II, the shedding of the blood of God's deputy on earth. Henry IV had been punished by an uneasy reign but had not fully expiated the crime; Henry V, for his piety, had been allowed a brilliant reign. But the curse was there; and first England suffers through Henry V's early death (p. 171).

The curse would be personified by Richard III, and resolved by the triumphant coronation of the first Tudor king, Henry VII, where Tillyard's interpretation of Shakespeare's history plays ended. This theory involved 'disregarding the other two plays' *King John* and *Henry VIII* from consideration, so that Tillyard could focus on the 'single unit' that was left (p. 153).

Tillyard went further than any critic before by suggesting not only that the central eight histories made a coherent whole, but Shakespeare planned them as such, despite the chronology in which they were written: 'Why Shakespeare wrote the second half first we can only guess [...]. He may well have written early versions of the plays of the second

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<sup>78</sup> E. M. W. Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1944; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p. 104.

tetralogy, *Richard II*, *Henry IV*, and *Henry V*, now lost but recast in the plays we have' (p. 155). Tillyard believed the first tetralogy was all written by Shakespeare, and in the order suggested in the Folio. Any points of inferiority in the plays were excused by the grander scheme they inhabited; Tillyard excused *Henry VI* by proposing that 'the chief virtue of the play must reside in the vehement energy with which Shakespeare both shaped this single play and conceived it as an organic part of a vast design' (p. 179). Tillyard suggested that the reason the cycle ended on *Henry V* was because in depicting this perfect king Shakespeare grew tired. This view comes directly from the perception of the play as the last of a cycle, rather than one play amongst an entire canon: 'That Shakespeare wanted to do something new is not at all to be wondered at. He had written his epic of England and had no more to say on the matter' (p. 318).

Ellis-Fermor focused her attention on the second tetralogy, which she saw as the centre of the histories. In them, she argued, 'we have primarily a group of four central plays supported by at least four or five more (one of which is of unquestioned dramatic power).'<sup>79</sup> Needless to say *Richard III* was that one play of dramatic power outside the tetralogy; unlike Tillyard, Ellis-Fermor excluded the *Henry VI* plays from her celebration of Shakespeare's grand theme. Looking through the remaining histories for that element by which to 'distinguish in them something which relates what would else be isolated units', she found 'the central and continuous images in these plays' to be 'the statesman-king, the leader and public man' (p. 47). Ellis-Fermor saw the plays as 'a series of explorations' (p. 48), investigating the subject of kingship, which only make sense when viewed as a whole.

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<sup>79</sup> Una Ellis-Fermor, *Shakespeare's Political Plays* (1945), repr. in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Henry V*, ed. by Ronald Berman (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1968), pp. 46-59, (p. 46).

These separate images are but statements or qualifications contributing to that vaster image, no one of them in itself coextensive with the composite whole. It is this which gives coherence to the material of the history plays (p. 48).

*Henry V*, as the culminating play of the second tetralogy, was where Ellis-Fermor's theory came to its zenith: 'All the implications of the foregoing plays point to this ultimate emergence of the complete figure' (p. 56). As with Tillyard though, the implication of Ellis-Fermor's view of the plays as a coherent whole is that *Henry V*, as Shakespeare's final contribution to the cycle, must therefore be the point at which he had had enough of history: 'For the truth is that Shakespeare himself, now that he has built the figure with such care, out of the cumulative experience of eight plays, begins to recoil from it. It has been an experiment' (p. 58).

Both Tillyard and Ellis-Fermor viewed *Henry V* in this way by taking it out of the context of the canon; although we know Shakespeare wrote many other plays after the histories, by viewing the two tetralogies alone, *Henry V* is Shakespeare's last play and the one in which he had had enough. Lily B. Campbell's exploration of the plays pushed them all firmly back into the context of events contemporary to the plays' conception: 'so will history be better understood when we stop talking about it in terms of the ancient classical dramatic genres and consider it in relation to general principles of historical writing exemplified alike in dramatic and non-dramatic literature.'<sup>80</sup> Campbell drew on Schelling's work arguing that 'He alone recognised that the history play was more closely affiliated with historical literature than with other varieties of the drama' (p. 10), whilst she was also

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<sup>80</sup> Lily B. Campbell, *Shakespeare's Histories* (London: Methuen and Co, 1964), Preface.

inspired by Charlton who 'went further with the statement that a better name for the history plays would be political plays' (p. 12).

Consequently Campbell's analysis of the central theme dismissed individual characters and, having subscribed to the view that a dramatist's 'most important business is with plot', she considered that 'the chief function of history was considered to be that of acting as a political mirror' (pp. 14-5). Campbell believed that in the plays 'the details are often altered to make them more reminiscent of the present' (p. 125). She therefore interpreted each play in relation to Queen Elizabeth and her court: King John's murder of Arthur, and Richard's of Edward IV mirrored Elizabeth's execution of Mary, Richard II again represented Elizabeth in her precarious position, *Henry IV* showed the concerns of rebellion in the state and *Henry V* demonstrated the threat of war. *Henry VI* was once more excluded from the cycle because, as Campbell explained in her preface, a study of them would be 'too long and too much involved in the consideration of problems other than that of dramatic genre' which led her to believe a separate investigation was needed. The doubts concerning the actual order in which the history plays were written brought Campbell to the nature of the history cycle:

If we are to talk in terms of cycles, then, we cannot ignore the fact that the completion of a cycle depends upon following a path to the original starting point. If the First Folio editors rightly attributed the ten plays to Shakespeare, he wrote of two cycles of history; from the seizing of the crown by Henry IV to its loss by 'the third heir', Henry VI; and from the seizing of the crown from Henry VI by Edward IV to its loss by 'the third heir,' Richard III. Whether or not Shakespeare did write the plays dealing with this second cycle of history, it is clear that in *Richard II*, *Henry IV*, and *Henry V* he saw the developing pattern of the cycle, from usurpation to usurpation (pp. 124-5).

For Campbell, the link between plays was not their narrative sequence so much as their repetition of themes and their reflective quality upon contemporary politics. Though her analysis of these events was questionable and open to criticism, just as Tillyard's work was, nonetheless the motivation behind both works is admirable; Tillyard aimed to help the *Henry VI* plays be 'enjoyed by the common reader' and challenge the 'common opinion in looking on [the histories] less as self-sufficient dramas than as experiments in a solemn mode leading [Shakespeare] to the goal of tragedy' (p. 324). In critical and theatrical practices, the histories were beginning to gain credibility, albeit at a price where each lost its individuality. The increased credibility of the series allowed these critics to overlay ambitious superstructures on the histories which were interpretive, rather than analytical. The willingness of critics, and later theatre directors, to accept the cycle allowed for these structures to be more readily accepted than they would have been in previous centuries.

#### Criticism in the Second Half of the Century

The post-war years saw a succession of cycles upon the stage: Anthony Quayle's *Henriad* of 1951 and John Barton and Peter Hall's *Wars of the Roses* of 1963 and 1964 in Stratford, while Douglas Seale had produced the *Henry VI* plays between 1951 and 1953 at the Birmingham Rep and the Old Vic. These productions would provide ready examples and strong impressions on subsequent critical discussion of the plays. Quayle's provided an immediate critical influence in the associated book by J. Dover Wilson and T. C. Worsley, *Shakespeare's Histories at Stratford*, that in its title alone misleadingly stated that these

plays are the only histories.<sup>81</sup> The production also influenced Derek Traversi's work *Shakespeare from Richard II to Henry V*. Traversi centred solely on those plays that had been presented as a whole on the Stratford stage that decade. His consideration that this tetralogy 'represents [Shakespeare's] most extended treatment of material derived from English history' suggests either an ignorance or denial of the first tetralogy, or simply the cultural dominance of the second after a successful and celebrated production.<sup>82</sup>

Traversi's argument of 'the thriftless cynicism which Richard already shows' (p. 20) and his consideration that the Prince's playful banishment of Falstaff in the play extempore of *Henry IV Part One* is an 'anticipation of his own future action as much as in parody of his father's present attitude' (p. 77) correlate to the characterisation and direction of the 1951 production. Equally, his opinion that the tragedy of Henry IV 'has its origin in the past' and 'owes its existence to the original crime' of Richard's usurpation and murder relate to the opinions put forward in Tillyard's work. The views in the book and on the stage had, in the second half of the twentieth century, soaked into the consciousness of an unquestioning critical body.

J. P. Brockbank's 1961 essay on *Henry VI* was written consciously in the wake of the productions at the Birmingham Rep, the opening line of the work stating that 'The four plays about the Wars of the Roses were staged fully and in sequence, probably for the first time, in 1953'.<sup>83</sup> Though Brockbank claimed that 'The experience was arresting and

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<sup>81</sup> J. Dover Wilson and T. C. Worsley, *Shakespeare's Histories at Stratford 1951* (London: Max Reinhardt, 1952)

<sup>82</sup> Derek Traversi, *Shakespeare from Richard II to Henry V* (London: Hollis and Carter, 1957), p. 1.

<sup>83</sup> J. P. Brockbank, 'The Frame of Disorder - *Henry VI*', in *Stratford-Upon-Avon Studies 3; Early Shakespeare*, ed. by John Russell Brown and Bernard Harris (London: Edward Arnold, 1961), pp. 73-99 (p. 73).

moving' (p. 73), he made an obvious error in claiming that four plays were staged; only the three *Henry VI* plays were performed at Birmingham that year. Either Brockbank unconsciously associated *Richard III* with those plays, which suggests the dangers of an unexplored serial perspective, or alternatively simply used the stage production as an enticing entrance to his work which is more theoretically than theatrically focused, which proves if nothing else that actual staged productions of the plays as cycles were being harnessed as a useful tool for cyclical theories of the time and proof of their validity.

Writing with an awareness of staged productions of Shakespeare's history cycle, Brockbank claimed that 'If we are now more sympathetically disposed towards Shakespeare's history plays than were the readers and audiences of seventy years ago, it is largely because we have more flexible ideas about the many possible forms that history might take' (p. 73). In the wake of recent performances, the follies of the *Henry VI* plays become triumphs, Brockbank glorifying what had previously been condemned as the non-poetic nature of the plays by claiming that 'The originality of Shakespeare's accomplishment is in the shedding of all literary artifices except that which serves to express the temper and structure of the history' (p. 77).

The influence of staged productions was shown once more in Arthur Colby Sprague's *Shakespeare's Histories: Plays for the Stage*, published in 1964 (though written a year before and therefore unable to comment on the RSC's *Wars of the Roses*). Sprague's work promoted not only the histories, but also the combination of critical and theatrical analysis, for he recognised that although 'there has come a somewhat general recognition of the fact that Shakespeare wrote not transcripts of reality, or moral treatises, but plays, the gap



between study and stage remains largely unbridged.<sup>84</sup> Acknowledging the power of the stage in swaying popular opinions, Sprague noted that ‘The difference in our present attitude toward the *Henry VI* plays and that of a generation or two ago is remarkable. To deny these plays a central theme, as was formerly done, would be absurd in the light of what we now know about them’ (pp. 9-10). What was known, in fact, is what Sprague and his contemporaries had been shown on stage, rather than the result of critical and objective investigation. At the same time Sprague emphasised the dramatic qualities of these plays as a driving force to ridicule recent critical attitudes to the histories, suggesting that ‘the merely political aspects of Shakespeare’s histories can be exaggerated [...]. Shakespeare, it should not be necessary to insist, wrote plays and not treatises (p. 10). Sprague’s theories upon the cycles were more assured, confident and less laboured than the writing of Campbell and Tillyard, barely two decades earlier, who had needed to dedicate the first half of each of their books to explaining the contextual and theoretical background to their ideas: Sprague merely referred to successful stage productions as illustrations of his observations.

Whilst stage productions were popularising and confirming the opinion of a history series, critical debate focused on defining the phenomenon. In 1957 Irving Ribner’s *The English History Play in the Age of Shakespeare* was published in response to ‘a remarkable revival of interest in Shakespeare’s histories’, but within it Ribner expressed his dissatisfaction with the idea of a grand series.<sup>85</sup> For Ribner the histories were best sectioned into two units of four plays; he decided that the first tetralogy focused more on

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<sup>84</sup> Arthur Colby Sprague, *Shakespeare Histories; Plays for the Stage* (London: The Society for Theatre Research, 1964), p. ix.

<sup>85</sup> Irving Ribner, *The English History Play in the Age of Shakespeare* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. vii.

‘the sins committed during the reign of Henry VI rather than the initial crime against Richard II’ and therefore disagreed specifically with Tillyard’s view that Richard’s death formed the origin of ‘one vast epic unit’ (p. 109). Three years later Ribner wrote again on the plays and actually dismissed the genre of history altogether. Ridiculing the idea that ‘a concern with history precluded involvement in the ethical questions which are the province of tragedy’, he claimed that ‘the very fact that these plays do accomplish the ends of the Tudor historian, that they use the past in order to teach political wisdom to the present, condition their scope as tragedy.’<sup>86</sup>

At the same time A. P. Rossiter took the opposite viewpoint and claimed that it was through comedy that Shakespeare mastered history, that ‘the *heart* is in the middle of the sequence: in the *Henry IV* plays, where he [Shakespeare] turned back from the sentimental seriousness of *Richard II*, back to the kind of Comic History he had made rough beginnings with in *Parts 2 and 3 of Henry VI*.<sup>87</sup> To Rossiter any other type of history was merely ‘obscure tragedy’ (p. 44). The critics were unable to agree on a unified genre that the histories might be defined by; in contrast the idea of a continuing narrative, presented on stage and previously suggested by Tillyard, Campbell and Ellis-Fermor, offered the opportunity to find a conclusive definition of the plays, and consequently many discussions of the histories now hinged on searching for unity through plot and narrative rather than form and structure.

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<sup>86</sup> Irving Ribner, *Patterns in Shakespearian Tragedy* (London: Methuen, 1960), pp. 36-7.

<sup>87</sup> A. P. Rossiter, *Angel with Horns and other Shakespeare Lectures*, ed. by Graham Storey (London: Longmans, Green, 1961), p. 58.

At this point Jan Kott's *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* would prove to be hugely influential. While Kott's work continued to promote the concept of the histories as one unit, it provided a radically alternate view of the histories compared to that of Tillyard. Kott suggested that in the cycle 'History unfolds on the stage, but is never merely enacted. It is not a background, or a setting. It is itself the protagonist of tragedy.'<sup>88</sup> From this he related the 'image of history itself' to 'the image of the Grand Mechanism' and his famous allusion to 'a great staircase' (p. 9) upon which each king rises only to fall as he snatches at the crown at the top.

Kott's work proved to be a conduit through which German political theatre could influence the English stage. The image of the staircase was taken directly from Leopold Jessner's 1920 production of *Richard III* in Berlin, of which Michael Patterson writes:

As the curtain rose at the end of the interval after the third act, a monumental flight of blood-red steps was revealed, its base filling almost the whole breadth of the stage, rising in three narrowing sets to just below the height of the wall. It was these steps that were to become inextricably associated with the 'Jessner style'.<sup>89</sup>

Kott specifically referred to Jessner's production and the subsequent 'metaphor of the grand staircase of history' (p. 31). But Kott was also influenced by the work of Bertolt Brecht, whose own concept of epic theatre involved distancing his audience from the characters: Patterson notes that 'It is the incitement of the spectator to view the action on stage critically that distinguishes Brecht's particular conception of epic theatre'.<sup>90</sup> Jessner

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<sup>88</sup> Jan Kott, *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* (London: Routledge, 1965), p. 30.

<sup>89</sup> Michael Patterson, *The Revolution in German Theatre 1900-1913* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), p. 93.

<sup>90</sup> Patterson, p. 153.

and Brecht's ideas would prove to not only inform Kott's views, but through Kott's writing would also form some of the key ideas behind the RSC's history cycles in 1963 and 1964.

Kott's writing was thus closely linked to the theatre of the period, both in what inspired him and what he in turn would inspire. This is the irony of Kott's title, *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, for Kott's writing was very much a product of his own time; in his foreword to Kott's book, Peter Brook claimed that 'Kott is undoubtedly the only writer on Elizabethan matters who assumes without question that every one of his readers will at some point or other have been woken by the police in the middle of the night'.<sup>91</sup> Whilst the general argument that Shakespeare can be relevant to the modern age may still be true, ultimately the specific examples which Kott draws out from that relate directly to the late twentieth century; James Loehlin identifies that Kott's writing was 'relevant to a Europe struggling with the legacy of Hitler and Stalin'.<sup>92</sup> Kott's overview of the histories was specifically relevant to his own time, rather than a universal approach to understanding and appreciating the histories, and consequently, while the work made a deep impact in the theatre and our approach to the histories, there are flaws in his argument.

Kott did not question the First Folio's retitling of the plays, but simply assumed that 'Shakespeare's History plays take their titles from the names of kings' (p. 5). Consequently, Kott arranged his series into 'chapters corresponding to reigns' (p. 6) rather than each play, every chapter ending in the death of one king and the succession of another. But ultimately in Kott's view the kings themselves are reduced in importance,

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<sup>91</sup> Peter Brook cited in Jan Kott, *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, p. ix.

<sup>92</sup> James N. Loehlin, 'Brecht and the rediscovery of *Henry VI*' in *Shakespeare's history Plays: Performance, Translation and Adaptation in Britain and Abroad*, ed. by Ton Hoenselaars (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 133-150 (p. 133).

‘For history itself is more dramatic than the particular dramas of John, the Henrys and the Richards’ (p. 12). Kott’s re-imagining of the cycle meant the characters became secondary to the proceeding of events; for Kott the history cycle demanded that individual characters were merged into an indefinable whole:

When we finish reading one chapter and begin to read the next one, when we read the Histories in their entirety, the faces of kings and usurpers become blurred, one after the other. Even their names are the same. There is always a Richard, an Edward and a Henry. They have the same titles [...] the drama that is being played out between them is always the same (pp. 8-9).

It was Kott who thus gave the clearest notion of the history plays as a cycle, rather than a series. As a consequence of considering the histories through the reign of kings, rather than the individual structure of each play, he believed that ‘Every chapter opens and closes at the same point. In every one of these plays history turns full circle’ (p. 6). It is little wonder that Kott should have seen such repetition in the plots when he defined each chapter’s close by ‘the monarch’s death and a new coronation’ (p. 6); had he approached the plays as written by Shakespeare, Kott may have recognised the variety of plot and structure in each drama. Instead, Kott’s influential work promoted the idea of ‘blurred’ faces, of successive chapters, each of which was ‘merely a repetition’ (p. 9); a cyclical plot that failed to develop, consisting of identical and interchangeable chapters.

David Riggs took an opposing view to Kott’s grand mechanism, instead identifying heroes in the *Henry VI* plays as a focus point when watching these plays. With this in mind he decided to ‘pursue through all three plays Shakespeare’s treatment of one very general theme: the gradual deterioration of heroic idealism between the Hundred Years’ War and

the Yorkist accession.<sup>93</sup> Riggs deliberately stepped back from the exploration of new genres for the plays, suggesting that they be ‘read as “histories” rather than as overgrown tragedies [as] the sequence of episodes provides us not with a conventional plot based on historical materials, but rather with a continuous commentary on an irreducible set of historical facts’ (p. 94-5).

Through Riggs, history was once more raised as an essential part of what these plays were trying to convey, only to be dismissed by Moody E. Prior two years later when he wrote that ‘Shakespeare is so much a dramatist that he will readily sacrifice historical accuracy in matters of detail to dramatic effectiveness and dramatic logic.’<sup>94</sup> Prior warned against the idea of a uniting theme as a danger to the individuality of the plays:

Is there not something specious about the unity which has been imposed? Does the view of the tetralogy thus achieved do justice to the originality and dramatic power of the early plays? (p. 35)

Prior’s answer was to consider the first tetralogy separately from the second, as ‘once the plays are given an independent identity the compelling influence of the providential idea seems to disappear. The grand organising theme is lost, but as a result the distinctive character of the trilogy becomes more evident’ (p. 35). Prior’s individualising of the plays, refreshing as it was, was still shaped by the time in which he was writing, and though happy to disintegrate the grand cycle, he continued to consider the *Henry VI* plays as one story, with ‘a well-defined line of progression discernible’ throughout (p. 36). His main argument was not to free each play independently, but rather to expose flaws in Tillyard’s

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<sup>93</sup> David Riggs, *Shakespeare’s Heroical Histories: Henry VI and its Literary Tradition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 97.

<sup>94</sup> Moody E. Prior, *The Drama of Power: Studies in Shakespeare’s History Plays* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1973), p. 34.

argument: Prior suggested that the curse of Richard II's murder did not apply to *Henry VI* because the protagonist's father 'Henry V had made his authority legitimate and respected because he had exercised power with talent and public approval' (p. 118). The first tetralogy was freed from the main cycle, but still remained a collective whole in its own right. Emrys Jones' essay on the *Henry VI* plays went a step further to argue their singularity:

To a large extent the three plays are designed as self-contained wholes. Since they were meant to be acted on separate days, they needed to make their effect as single works.<sup>95</sup>

However, by the time of Jones' essay he was already working against not only a critical majority but also what was becoming a stage tradition: the *Henry VI* plays had been performed together in the last twenty years to great success, not only by Seale and Barton and Hall, but additionally by Terry Hands in 1977. In assessing the success of Hands' productions, G. K. Hunter produced an essay which argued that they were the result of the growth in critical acceptance of the plays, suggesting that this occurred because 'Tillyard had rescued' the histories.<sup>96</sup> Hunter argued that critical arguments had promoted the view that 'the eight history plays were found to offer continuity and consistency of viewpoint to the attentive reader. Each play was conceived to be more meaningful and therefore better when seen in sequence rather than in isolation' (p. 92). Having seen the plays as a series on stage, Hunter asked if the idea was sound:

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<sup>95</sup> Emrys Jones, *The Origins of Shakespeare* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), p. 161.

<sup>96</sup> G. K. Hunter, 'The Royal Shakespeare Company Plays *Henry VI*', in *Renaissance Drama*, ed. by Leonard Barkin, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1978), 9, pp. 91-108 (p. 92).

Are the Henry VI plays (and so by implication the Henry IV plays) so written that advantage lies with the spectator who has seen them all in sequence, with the same actors playing the major roles [...] The theatrical conditions of Shakespeare's age were not much like those of Wagner's *Festspielhaus*; the separate plays had to be separately intelligible to casual theatregoers (p. 92).

Hunter's argument, working with Jones against the tide of serialism, argued that serialising the histories 'is an interpretive decision, not a merely executive one' (p. 93). That Hunter should have reached this conclusion after seeing the plays performed shows how, by this time, the production of Shakespeare's cycles on the stage, whilst popularising the serial perspective, was also exposing the weaknesses in such a perception.

David Scott Kastan tried to progress the historical cycle by accepting time as the key factor of the play. His interest lay in 'the structures of [Shakespeare's] plays rather than in the sentiments of his characters.'<sup>97</sup> Accordingly, he dismissed arguments of genre from his work, deciding that 'no concept of genre can be exclusive or precise' yet acknowledging that 'The conventions of genre are the necessary mediations of form' (pp. 32-3): genre merely provided Shakespeare with a set of rules to follow as closely or loosely as he saw fit. Considering the quest for purpose in the histories, Kastan argued that 'we do not have any proof that dramatists did in fact share the concerns of the Renaissance historians' (p. 40) and therefore that the political and historical readings of the plays are flawed. Kastan opted to look at the structure of each play first for an indication of pattern and form.

Doubts against the grand cycle were also raised by John Blampied, who presented an argument in favour of 'the idea of a nine-part sequence [...] not as a mere succession of

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<sup>97</sup> Kastan, *Shakespeare and the Shapes of Time*, p. 6.



plays, but as a fundamental imaginative category.’<sup>98</sup> Blanpied wanted to define the genre, not create a series, and his caution against doing so was due to the lack of practical examples from Shakespeare’s own time: ‘I would never argue that the plays were meant to be read, performed, or witnessed as such a sequence, or that Shakespeare executed them as such. But I do argue that they are bound by an essential and distinguishable coherence [...] the peculiar sustained note of attention, on the dramatist’s part, to the evolving relationship of subject to medium, history to drama’ (pp. 11-12). Blanpied and Kastan both sidestepped the conventional arguments on genre and theme by focusing on structure and medium as the means to connecting the plays.

Other critics continued to explore familiar themes, such as the political narrative of the plays; Robert Smallwood claimed that ‘one must seek one’s answer to the question of why Shakespeare wrote history plays in the man’s fascination with politics.’<sup>99</sup> He also argued that dividing the histories into two tetralogies ‘reflects an obvious aspect of their conception’ (p. 144): whilst others speculated, the plays’ unity was a certainty for Smallwood. Barbara Hodgdon’s *The End Crowns All* aimed to coordinate the contradictory elements of the unity of a historical series and the individual structure of each play, of ‘closure and its contradictions in the ten plays’ by ‘mapping how these plays, which close with and on sovereignty, fashion a sense of ending’.<sup>100</sup> By analysing the plays through their endings, Hodgdon’s approach presented two themes by which to anchor the series:

That the representation of sovereignty on the stage closes with  
and addresses the immense prestige and power of the monarchy

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<sup>98</sup> John W. Blanpied, *Time and the Artist in Shakespeare’s English Histories* (London: Associated University Press, 1983), p. 11.

<sup>99</sup> Robert Smallwood, ‘Shakespeare’s Use of History’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare Studies* (see Wells, above), pp. 143-162 (p. 147).

<sup>100</sup> Barbara Hodgdon, *The End Crowns All* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 3.

and that closure in the history plays constitutes a territory that generates and seeks to legitimise new kings, operating as a magnification mirror for the values and ideology of absolutism as well as for the incoherence of those beliefs (p. 13).

Politics was once more a theme through which to unite the histories. Hodgdon questioned their genre, perceiving the plays as a combination of comedy and tragedy. Assuming comedy to end with lovers united and tragedy with the death of the hero, she concluded that 'Certainly in Shakespeare's practice, the history play can accede to the determined closural predictabilities of tragedy or comedy, as in *Richard III* or *Henry V* respectively' (p. 10).

Alexander Leggat agreed, suggesting that 'Our habitual division of Shakespeare's plays [since] the layout of the Folio obscures the fact that the history play as a genre, while it sometimes goes its own way, frequently intersects with the established, traditional genres of tragedy and comedy'.<sup>101</sup> Leggat observed in the plays a conflict of pace in the individual interest of personal tragedy and the grander scheme of history; noting in the *Henry VI* plays that 'an intersection of two forms' occurs when 'The heroes of individual tragedies are brought down by historical forces':

At the same time an interest in tragedy makes the play pause over the fates of individuals in a way that the simple chronicling of events would not require. In 2 *Henry VI*, the deaths of Gloucester and Suffolk slow the action down, as each death is held in a freeze-frame to let us contemplate it before the pace picks up again and history moves on (p. 12).

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<sup>101</sup> Alexander Leggat, 'The Death of John Talbot', in *Shakespeare's English Histories: A Quest for Form and Genre*, ed. by John W. Velz (Binghamton: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1996), pp. 11-30 (p. 11).

The theory reverts back to Kott's grand mechanism and the concept that the histories are a prelude to Shakespeare's great tragedies; Leggat saw the death of Talbot as an indication of 'how much Shakespeare as a writer of tragedy owed to his first experiments in historical drama' (p. 13). As a union of two genres, Leggat argued that the histories are little more than experiments and testing-grounds for Shakespeare's ideas that he would perfect in other plays.

### New approaches and questioning the tradition

Towards the end of the Twentieth century the form and structure which previous visions of the cycle offered to Shakespeare's history plays was put to question by the New Historicists. Such was the backlash against Tillyard's ideology, that by 1985 Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield correctly summarised that 'The objections are familiar enough', the main criticism being that 'the "Elizabethan World Picture" simplifies the Elizabethans and, still more, Shakespeare.'<sup>102</sup> Critics now argued that it was not possible to explain an entire culture through one philosophical viewpoint, and attention increasingly focused on the subversive elements within the histories. Instead of order and divine providence, Stephen Greenblatt's influential essay 'Invisible Bullets' explored how 'What appeared as "balance" may on closer inspection seem like radical instability tricked out as moral or aesthetic order; what appeared as clarity may seem now like a conjurer's trick concealing confusion in order to buy time and stave off the collapse of an illusion.'<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, 'History and ideology: the instance of *Henry V*', in *Alternative Shakespeares*, ed. by John Drakakis (London: Methuen, 1985), pp. 206-227 (p. 207).

<sup>103</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, 'Invisible Bullets', in Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), pp. 21-65 (p. 40).

Though the plays presented order, Greenblatt felt that within the histories a contemporary audience would have found ‘subversion, no end of subversion’ (p.65) and that this consequently questioned the authority of the state; though *Henry V* championed the King’s heroics at Agincourt, Greenblatt identified ‘Hal’s sober cold-bloodedness’ (p. 57) in the treatment of his friends as a necessary part of that order, arguing that ‘The betrayal of friends does not subvert but rather sustains the moral authority and the compelling glamour of power’ (p. 58). Leonard Tennenhouse also found significance in the contradictions present within Shakespeare’s later histories, suggesting that ‘It cannot be accidental that the *Henriad*, which produces Shakespeare’s most accomplished Elizabethan monarch, should also produce his most memorable figure of misrule.’<sup>104</sup> Dollimore and Sinfield’s account of *Henry V* reached a similar conclusion, noting that the play ‘can be read to reveal not only the strategies of power but also the anxieties informing both them and their ideological representation.’<sup>105</sup> For all of the order perceived in Tillyard’s criticism, there was an equal amount of disorder which was seized upon and discussed, so that consequently the formal structure and foundations of Shakespeare’s epic cycle were weakened.

Furthermore, by examining literature in its historical context, new emphasis was placed upon the sequence in which the plays were written, rather than their narrative chronology, so that cultural materialists such as Graham Holderness believed that ‘each play was independently and individually shaped by contemporary cultural pressures’.<sup>106</sup> Holderness observed how Heminge and Condell initiated the perception of the plays as a cycle and the

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<sup>104</sup> Leonard Tennenhouse, ‘Strategies of State and political plays: *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *Henry IV*, *Henry V*, *Henry VIII*’, in *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism*, ed. by Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), pp. 109-128 (p. 121).

<sup>105</sup> Dollimore and Sinfield, ‘History and ideology: the instance of *Henry V*’, p. 226.

<sup>106</sup> Graham Holderness, *Shakespeare: The Histories* (London: MacMillan Press, 2000), p. 2.

limiting nature of this, for ‘once the Histories had been collected into compilation and metanarrative, the disaggregated units reorganised into a linear temporal sequence, the overall framework began to prescribe certain interpretative horizons’ (p. 9). As discussed previously in this chapter, Stephen Orgel questioned the views of earlier critics who had drawn so heavily upon the historical elements of the plays, asking ‘How did history come to play so profound a role in determining our sense of Shakespeare?’<sup>107</sup> While Holderness and Orgel questioned, as I have, the authority of the folio and subsequent critical approaches, Kiernan Ryan observed that the stage history of the cycle was also affecting our approach to the histories. Looking specifically at the *Henry IV* plays, he suggested that the overbearing structure and pageantry of a history cycle at the Royal Shakespeare Company effectively dampened the radical and political material which the critics were now discovering within the drama:

These productions seem to have swallowed the hierarchial assumptions and the fusion of personal and national destiny which the plays are not fooled by for a moment.<sup>108</sup>

The epic qualities of the cycle were seen to work against the potential of each play’s individual theme. Holderness felt that ‘The four plays of the “second tetralogy” could for example easily be identified as belonging to different genres – lyrical tragedy, popular comedy, patriotic chronicle (or satire) – as well as to an interrelated series.’<sup>109</sup> Having recognised that the structure of the history cycle was indeed, a structure, rather than an inherent part of their conception, Holderness observed the two poles of how we may approach the plays and queried their consequent effects upon the histories.

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<sup>107</sup> Orgel, p. 38.

<sup>108</sup> Kiernan Ryan, *Shakespeare*, 3rd edn (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), p. 60.

<sup>109</sup> Holderness, p. 6.

What does it mean to think of Shakespeare's history plays as, on the one hand, an integrated compilation of elements designed to compose a grand historical narrative; and on the other, as a discrete collection of dramatic exercises, differing radically one from another in form and style, and linked to one another only by the contingency of common contents? (p. 8)

Little by little, the assumptions made previously were now being questioned, and the potential effects on the plays were recognised. Holderness' question asks us to consider how our view of the histories, and to what extent they are connected to one another, alters the way in which we understand each play. It is a fundamental question which every critic needs to ask of themselves before approaching the histories as, depending on their own personal view of the structure of the plays, their response to themes, characters and plots can become widely diverse.

## Conclusion

While some critics question the logic that has brought us to the idea of a history cycle, others perceive the critical and theatrical acceptance of the cycle as a positive step. Janis Lull recognised the increased critical focus on the histories as a triumph if only because 'a more scholarly approach to Elizabethan drama led to more productions of the *Henry VI* series and to an early revival of *Edward III*'.<sup>110</sup> Certainly the history series has resulted in an increase in the production of some histories, and consequently a greater awareness of them, albeit through the idea of a unified whole. Thus, while they are being performed more regularly, they are being done in such a way that further strengthens the serial perception, as Michael Hattaway suggests: 'In theatrical production the outcome of the

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<sup>110</sup> Janis Lull, 'Plantagenets, Lancastrians, Yorkists, and Tudors: 1-3 Henry VI, Richard III, Edward III', in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare's History Plays* (See Hattaway, above), pp. 89-105 (p. 104).

action has been signalled from the beginning, perhaps so that the audience might attend to constitutional degradation or the particular chains of causation that generate the play's ending.'<sup>111</sup>

From Heminge and Condell's early editing, through the specific structures and ideas explored by Schlegel, Tillyard, Kott and others, the history series, or cycle, has become a recognisable, and still dominant, critical idea in the present age, and one which, rather than requiring further support and development, is actually now so established that current critics must argue their case against it. Edward Burns suggests that the idea of a history cycle, written by the genius Shakespeare, has become practically unquestionable in academic circles:

While even conservative literary critics would feel they have to employ, at the very least, some fancy rhetorical footwork if this kind of idea homed into view in their arguments, it is part of our taken-for-granted as far as Shakespeare goes that he may well have operated in this way.<sup>112</sup>

Whether critics are exploring the politics, the characters or the structure of the histories, many fail to justify their reasons for discussing the plays as a connected series. Even Tennenhouse, when questioning an exclusive approach to the histories, still draws reference to 'the *Henriad*' without acknowledging that this too is just one theoretical idea and equally open to subversion.<sup>113</sup> Despite the questions which some critics are asking, the

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<sup>111</sup> Michael Hattaway, 'The Shakespeare History Play', in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare's History Plays* (see Hattaway, above), pp. 3-24 (p. 4).

<sup>112</sup> Edward Burns, 'Shakespeare's History Cycles', in *Shakespeare's History Plays: Performance, Translation and Adaptation in Britain and Abroad* (see Hoenselaars, above), pp. 151-168 (p. 155).

<sup>113</sup> Leonard Tennenhouse, 'Strategies of State and political plays', p. 121.

fundamental assumptions of the past are still influencing our approaches to the plays. Orgel recognises the continuing effect of character continuity in modern criticism:

We are not at all, in our critical and editorial practice, free of [the] assumption that the essence of drama is character, that characters have consistent psychologies determining their motivations, and that what we see of them is only part of a larger whole that exists outside the play.<sup>114</sup>

Whether consciously or otherwise, a number of critics continue to be influenced by the serial perspective, and the notion that each play is a separate entity has been mostly relegated to individual editions of the plays. The Oxford Shakespeare and Arden's third series have both made the unusual step of assigning each part of *Henry IV* or *Henry VI* to a different editor, but given that many texts of the *Henry VI* and *Henry IV* plays have been edited by a continuous scholar, such as Wilson's Cambridge series, Andrew Cairncross' editions of *Henry VI* for the Arden second series, or more recently Michael Hattaway's editions of the same trilogy for the New Cambridge Shakespeare, the majority of texts available of each play continues to present the image of *Henry IV* and *Henry VI* as complete units.

As I will show in my next chapter, these theories have informed stage productions, encouraging directors to find a unified vision for the histories and to present them as a series. The cycle was discussed as a theory in critical writing for many years, but what has made the idea so dominant at the present time of writing is the subsequent dramatisation of the cycle in the twentieth century. In this chapter I have shown the development of critical thought as academics have tried to understand Shakespeare's histories; in the next chapter I

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<sup>114</sup> Orgel, p. 40.



will show how the cycle was communicated to the public at large through an ever increasing number of serial productions on the English stage.

## **Chapter Two: Theatre Histories**

### **(or: One Hundred Years of Multitude)**

The story of the history cycle on the English stage coincides with the twentieth century: the first production did not occur until 1901, and as the twenty-first century approached the cycle was once again present to mark the occasion. It is astonishing that in such a short time our perception of these plays could be so radically altered. In this chapter I will show how the cycle developed on the English stage, from festival productions, through tentative explorations of a continuing theme, to the triumph and acceptance of the cycle. Throughout this I will highlight how the decisions made in these productions affected the interpretation of the plays, shaping our concept of staging, characters and conclusions in the histories.

Though my production history focuses on the English stage, it should not be inferred that this is the only location for the history cycle; during the twentieth century other media embraced the cycle, the full extent of which is too large to provide a coherent commentary on here. In literature, Arthur Quiller-Couch wrote a selection of stories for children based on the histories in 1899, effectively filling in the gaps from the Lamb Shakespeare.<sup>1</sup> On radio, J. C. Stobart presented *Shakespeare's Monarchs* in 1925, which involved a discussion, aimed at children, of Shakespeare's kings in order of succession over twelve weeks.<sup>2</sup> Alternatively the BBC often dramatised the sequence for radio, for example in 1952 when they presented 'A sequence of Shakespeare's histories edited by Professor J. Dover Wilson' with the intriguing addition of 'Raphael Holinshed, the historian' who

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<sup>1</sup> A. T. Quiller-Couch, *Historical Tales from Shakespeare* (London: Edward Arnold, 1899).

<sup>2</sup> The series was transcribed and published as J. C. Stobart, *Shakespeare's Monarchs* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, [1925(?)]).

received top billing in the cast list.<sup>3</sup> The BBC also adapted the histories for television twice, in 1960 and in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Once the cycle had become recognised on the English stage, the necessary funding and time to dedicate an entire season to Shakespeare's plays was a luxury many theatre companies could not afford, save for the Royal Shakespeare Company. In the second part of the chapter I will focus on subsequent productions in the last half of the century and the effect of the RSC upon the plays as it fostered a sense of tradition around the cycle, charting how the experimentation and novelty of the early twentieth century productions gave way to familiar and conventional directions.

### Section One: The First Turn of the Cycle

The very first history series was actually performed abroad. In Germany Franz Dingelstedt directed the history plays on successive nights at the Weimar Theatre for the tercentenary. The information held on this production is tantalisingly sparse; Robert K. Sarlos produced an article on Dingelstedt and his cycle in which he identified Dingelstedt as a pioneer and champion of Shakespeare, for whom the attraction to the history cycle 'had probably been the realisation that of all Shakespeare's plays this category was the most neglected'.<sup>4</sup> Dingelstedt imagined the histories from *Richard II* to *Richard III* to form a five act play:

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<sup>3</sup> *The Radio Times*, 31 October 1952.

<sup>4</sup> Robert K. Sarlos, 'Dingelstedt's Celebration of the Tercentenary: Shakespeare's Histories as a Cycle', *Theatre Survey*, 5 (1964), 117-131, (p. 120).

*Richard II*, in which the House of Lancaster succeeds to the throne by the way of usurpation, is the exposition (Act I). The complication [...] of the plot occurs in *Henry IV*, which, presenting the usurper trembling from his own son, forms the antithesis to the thesis of the previous act. In *Henry V*, the action reaches its climax, Lancaster is at the peak of power and fame (Act III). In *Henry VI*, the turning point [...] follows: Lancaster loses the crown in consequence of weakness and betrayal. Tyranny, the sole remedy against this impending civil war, results in catastrophe (Act IV). In *Richard III*, finally, the dissolution and self-destruction of the House of York is followed by the union of the two houses in Henry Tudor, and the action is resolved (Act V) (p. 121).

The protagonists of Dingelstedt's cycle were the houses of Lancaster and York, and it was the fall of the former, in contrast to the rise of the latter, that thus occupied Dingelstedt's vision of the histories. This cycle contained many factors which will be seen to be present in all succeeding productions. First, the construction of a grand series charting a coherent plot of time and heritage meant that the remaining histories were excluded: '*King John* and *Henry VIII* were not considered parts of the cycle because they do not pertain to the War of Roses' (p. 121). Secondly, in presenting the plays as one coherent story, Dingelstedt thought nothing of trimming certain parts for the benefit of the overall narrative: Sarlos writes that '*Henry VI* was rewritten so thoroughly that stone was not left upon stone of the original drama' (p. 122). Dingelstedt also recognised the significance of Margaret, whose position as a character stretching across four plays made her of critical importance to the cycle. Accordingly, to ensure that she maintained audience sympathy, Dingelstedt wrote and inserted 'a highly passionate scene' between her and Suffolk, and a 'long and passionate scene, praying for death at the hands of her son's murderers' (p. 124-5).

In these alterations and attitudes there is a template for the cycles which follow; even the decision to present the cycles in commemoration of an anniversary will be seen as a familiar point in their history on the English stage. But most of all it should be concluded that Dingelstedt's cycle was a success and prompted the desired response in the audience, one critic remarking that 'in the end we want to know what is going to happen to Falstaff later on and how the prince gets on with it, in the following night we want to see Henry V, and part of the action at the beginning does not really become clear if we do not keep in mind the staging of Richard II.'<sup>5</sup> Praise was lavished on the worthiness of the project and the way in which 'the combination of performances enhanced many details of the plays' (p. 129). Dingelstedt showed that it could be done, and just as the critical views of Schlegel, Ulrici and Gervinus provided the basis for later views in England, so the 1864 production was the beginning of what would become an English cultural phenomenon.

#### Starting the Cycle: Benson's Festival Productions

The first English cycle occurred as part of the annual Stratford festival. From 1886 to 1919, all but five of the festivals would be produced by Frank Benson and his company, and the demands and potential of the festival provided Benson with the necessary opportunity for the history cycle. Each play was performed only once during the festival, save for one Saturday matinee repeat, allowing for a greater number of plays to be performed in that duration than might be seen currently in Stratford. Moreover, thanks to the Festival Committee's wish to present all of Shakespeare's works, Benson had an

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<sup>5</sup> Review cited in Sarlos, p. 126, translated for the author by Kerstin Woerster, 2004.

unusually large repertoire, as each year the council would pay for costumes and sets for the revival of a neglected play.

Thus by the time Benson presented the first English production of the history cycle in 1901, he already had a number of the histories at his disposal. Returning to Stratford after a disastrous London season, Benson greeted the more enthusiastic and supportive audience with a patriotic and commemorative week befitting the ambience of the Stratford festival. The success of this venture would encourage him to produce two more cycles in 1905 and 1906, and it appears in turn that Benson had been inspired by, or at least aware of, the precedent in Germany. One review noted that ‘Those responsible for the arrangement recalled that in 1864 [...] there was given at the Court Theatre of Weimar a week’s performance of the “Histories”’ and had ‘accordingly decided to have a similar week in Stratford.’<sup>6</sup> But most reviewers acclaimed Benson’s cycle as the first of its kind, ‘an undertaking no actor-manager has hitherto attempted’, whilst another quietly mentioned of the series ‘I believe that (to our shame be it said) it has been done in Germany.’<sup>7</sup>

Benson presented the event as suitably grand; in 1901 he purposefully devoted the first week of the festival to comedies as ‘without such lighter interlude it would be almost impossible to carry out the heavy task of the cycle of historical plays’.<sup>8</sup> This cycle monopolised the second half of the festival in what would be dubbed ‘The week of Kings’. Over six successive nights each unfolding chapter would be presented, Benson taking from his own repertoire *Richard II*, *Henry IV Part Two*, *Henry V*, *Henry VI Part Two* and

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<sup>6</sup> *Northampton Reporter*, 13 April 1901.

<sup>7</sup> *Stratford-upon-Avon Herald*, 19 April 1901; *Laws Pictorial*, 4 May 1901.

<sup>8</sup> Frank Benson cited in *The Stratford-upon-Avon Herald*, 26 April 1901.

*Richard III*. While never presenting all of the history plays in one season, subsequent productions by Benson offered the second tetralogy in 1905 and the first in 1906. In both cases the pioneering aspect of the production was applauded just as it had been in 1901:

To Mr F. R. Benson falls the distinction of being the first exponent of Shakespearean drama to present in its entirety the impressive Trilogy of The Wars of the Roses.<sup>9</sup>

Yet despite presenting three cycles, Benson never presented a fully-formed cycle with narrative links between each part. Stuart Hampton-Reeves suggests that ‘Benson had put together an *ad hoc* programme based on what he knew and what he could learn’.<sup>10</sup> The choice of *King John* as the revival play in 1901 shows an intentional choice on Benson’s part not to link his existing repertoire together, though the reasons behind his intentions are not immediately clear. It is likely that a predominant motive for the choice of *King John* is likely to be commercial; Benson was potentially seizing on the success of Beerbohm-Tree’s revival two years earlier as an opportunity for a lucrative play to take on tour.

Whatever Benson’s reasons, critics still connected the performed plays together, one deciding that ‘*King John* was added as a kind of prologue to the later plays, for which it served acceptably, though many would have preferred to see the first parts of *Henry IV* in its stead.’<sup>11</sup> *Henry V* was the only play in the 1901 cycle where the night before had shown the preceding play without any gaps or omissions, of which it was said that ‘the play is always popular, the more so on this occasion because it immediately followed or continued

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<sup>9</sup> *Birmingham Express*, 2 May 1906.

<sup>10</sup> Hampton Reeves, p. 236.

<sup>11</sup> *Literature*, 4 May 1901.

the story of *Henry IV Part Two*.<sup>12</sup> The bridge from *Henry V* to *Henry VI Part Two* in 1901 was less clear. Though the text of *Henry V* ends with the chorus considerably outlining the plot of *Henry VI Part One*, in Benson's production the part of the chorus had been cut. The gap between *Henry VI Part Two* and *Richard III*, however, was aided by Benson's inclusion in the latter of Richard's murder of the pious King from *Part Three*, a happy coincidence owing its origin to Cibber, which nonetheless provided a closing scene for Henry and a link to Richard.

Some links between plays were demonstrated by a basic continuity of casting; 1901 saw Frank Rodney as Bolingbroke and Henry IV, Oscar Asche as Pistol, while Benson himself played Hal and Henry V, and later York's son Richard and Richard III. However, continuity only occurred where it was convenient or in line with the previous direction of each play, for while Constance Benson played the French Queen in *Henry VI* in 1906, by the time they reached *Richard III* she 'handed the character of Margaret to Miss Mildred Forster', taking the larger part of Elizabeth instead.<sup>13</sup> This may be explained by a leading lady's desire for a leading role, but also by the practical choice of a touring repertory company to cast actors and actresses in the roles with which they were familiar.

Nonetheless, the links within the cycle were further confirmed by the recognition of an outsider in the festival; in the 1906 cycle Marlowe's *Edward II* was also revived in Stratford, which, though acknowledged by the *Herald* as 'one of the best works of Shakespeare's great predecessor', was received as a separate entity.<sup>14</sup> While *King John* was

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<sup>12</sup> *The Chronicle*, 26 April 1901.

<sup>13</sup> *Stratford-upon-Avon Herald*, 11 May 1906.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*



accepted in the 1901 cycle, Marlowe's account of a king, whose reign was far closer to Shakespeare's *Henriad* in historical dating, remained distinct from the cycle. The critic for the *Herald* felt that Marlowe's play 'is not history as history is nowadays understood' and the verdict was that the season portrayed *Edward II* and 'a cycle of kings, commencing with Richard the Second': Marlowe was not welcome in Shakespeare's glorious epic.

What conclusion then can be made of Benson's unusual cycles? That the plays were intended to be seen as a cycle is evident from the flyers and announcements printed in the papers. However, the directorial slant taken in each production remained identical to the approach with which each play had always been presented. Benson's intention was obviously not to present a coherent story such as we might expect from modern cycles.

An explanation may be gleaned from the production standards of the cycle. Following the influence of Charles Kean and Beerbohm-Tree's epic productions, Benson's histories were equally commended for their visual qualities. Throughout the reviews can be found constant references to appearance, such as 'How well Mr Benson looked' or how, in *Richard II*, 'The opening scene was artistically grouped', or of *Henry VI Part One* that 'The effect of the opening scene was most picturesque'.<sup>15</sup> This was not merely a whim on Benson's part, but an expectation from the audience and critics; for example when Lady Gray greeted Edward in an exterior setting with their baby son, it was felt that the presentation of the scene on a field should affect the costume, as one critic notes:

Perhaps the unexpectedness of its appearance served as much as its strictly correct chrysalis robing to awaken the mirth of the house. The

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<sup>15</sup> *Stratford-upon-Avon Herald*, 4 May 1906.

infant might, with decorum, under the circumstances have been wrapped in some royal velvet cloak when he was taken thus boldly into the open air.<sup>16</sup>

Adherence to historical truth was as important to the audience as visual beauty, and this constitutes the second prominent feature of Benson's cycles. One critic noted that 'Benson has done his best to clothe the people with historical accuracy and his own artistic fancy.'<sup>17</sup> Equally another noted 'the care which has been bestowed upon what may be termed the historical and archaeological side of the production.'<sup>18</sup>

What this suggests is that the aim was not to present a coherent plot, but a visual display, a glorious pageant of kings, each successive night offering a brand new monarch for the audience to behold. If there was any continuity, it was not in the plot or the dealings of individual characters, but in the crown itself, and the many famous figures who occupied the English throne, brought to life for one week in Benson's royal pageant. One critic noted the reaction to John of Gaunt's famous speech in 2.1 of *Richard II*, which captured the audience's response to the cycle as a whole:

Of course the beautiful though flattering picture of his country, which has never failed to seize the attention, excite the wonder, and flutter the spirits of everyone rejoicing in the name of Englishmen, brought forth the customary applause.<sup>19</sup>

This is what Benson's audience wanted from the histories: visual spectacle and patriotic anthems, rather than moral deprivation, such as 'that vile and wretched being, Doll Tearsheet' of which the critic was disappointed to see that 'certainly no attempt was made

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<sup>16</sup> *Stratford-upon-Avon Herald*, 11 May 1906.

<sup>17</sup> *Stratford-upon-Avon Herald*, 5 May 1905.

<sup>18</sup> *Birmingham Express*, 4 May 1906.

<sup>19</sup> *Stratford-upon-Avon Herald*, 4 May 1906.

to tone down its unblushing vulgarity.<sup>20</sup> Under these conditions the ‘dark and dreary story’ of Henry VI stood little chance.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless Benson’s three productions of a history series raised an awareness of the histories in performance and helped establish the view of them as Shakespeare’s dramatic cycle. Alongside its 1905 history series, Benson’s company also performed Aeschylus’ *Oresteia*, and by the time of the next history series the subsequent year, one critic had absorbed the examples from the past, saying that ‘We should call such a series of plays now a cycle [...] as much to be seen and studied as a whole as the Aeschylean trilogy or the Wagnerian *Ring*.’<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, Benson’s productions set a precedent for future cycles:

This (there can be no question about it!) is the way to see the chronicles performed – to watch the whole story of the combat between red rose and white; from the sowing of the seed of mischief when Bolingbroke, the strong and ambitious, ousted Richard, the weak and fantastic.<sup>23</sup>

Like Dingelstedt’s cycle, the most important factor of Benson’s input to the histories was the great success of each production; the theatre was full each night and the popularity appeared to ‘increase, rather than diminish’, whilst ‘eager playgoers assembled round the doors as early as four o’clock in the afternoon.’<sup>24</sup> Extra seats were necessary, and each night ended with standing ovations and several curtain calls; the cycle ‘proved an artistic achievement of great merit, as well as a financial success - equally pleasing to the company and to the memorial theatre.’<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> First quotation from *Stratford-upon-Avon Herald*, 5 May 1905; others from *Stratford-upon-Avon Herald*, 4 May 1906.

<sup>21</sup> *Birmingham Express*, 5 May 1906.

<sup>22</sup> *Stratford-upon-Avon Herald*, 4 May 1906.

<sup>23</sup> *The Times*, 5 May 1906.

<sup>24</sup> *Birmingham Gazette*, 27 April 1901.

<sup>25</sup> *Topical Times*, 27 April 1901.

It would be grand to look forward to further endowment that would make possible still higher efforts. For instance, how much more instructive would it have been to the audience to have had the whole series of historical plays rendered [...] I am well aware that this is but a dream, but it may be a prophetic one [...] And to this possibility the success of Mr Benson's performance and the increasing number of visitors to Stratford may prove stepping stones. The best wish of all who have seen the performances is "go on, and prosper."<sup>26</sup>

### Testing the Cycle: Two-part Productions from 1920 to 1945

Lois Potter suggests that Benson's series was the 'one precursor' to the influx of cycles in the second half of the twentieth century, but this is not entirely true. Benson never justified his cycle; no theme was drawn out between the plays, and the distance between what he achieved and what subsequent directors presented is therefore immense. Though other directors in the first half of the century were unable to present a cycle of the same span and scale as Benson, there were a number of significant cycles of only two plays which took the important steps of heading towards a unified direction.

Prior to the twentieth century, there had been two-play productions of Shakespeare's histories, though not many; like Benson's, any pre-twentieth century productions were opportunistic, building on an existing repertoire rather than specifically directing both parts for one coherent production. Though Betterton played Falstaff in both parts of *Henry IV* throughout his career, playing them in close succession occasionally was a wise business move rather than an example of directorial vision. Samuel Phelps did perform both parts for the tercentenary, but once more they were already in his repertoire, designed for

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<sup>26</sup> Charlotte Carmichael Stopes, *Stratford-Upon-Avon Herald*, 3 May 1901.

different purposes. Consequently in his 1864 production Phelps played 'Falstaff in *1 Henry IV* and both the King and Shallow in *Part 2*'; this suggests that continuity of casting was less important than playing the parts which each member of the company was used to.<sup>27</sup>

Reviewing the productions in the early twentieth century, we can see how they evolved. Both parts of *Henry IV* featured together five times, directed in 1920 by Russell Thorndike and Charles Warburton at the Old Vic, in 1921 by Barry Jackson at the Birmingham Rep, in 1922 by Robert Atkins at the Old Vic, in 1932 by William Bridges-Adams in Stratford, and in 1945 by John Burrell at the Old Vic. In the same period Robert Atkins also offered a conflation of the *Henry VI* plays, adapted into two parts, at the Old Vic in 1923. That these productions did not stretch beyond two plays suggests that these directors could not rely on guaranteed audience attendance of each production as Benson had, yet this resulted in the promotion of a coherent theme, to encourage theatre-goers to see both, that would develop into large cycles in the second half of the twentieth century.

Sadly there is very little information surviving on the first of these productions, the 1920 performance of *Henry IV*, and what remains is contradictory. The programme notes tell us that both parts were presented by the same group of actors under the same direction.<sup>28</sup> It also shows that *Part One* was shown from Monday 3 May to Monday 10 May, and that *Part Two* was shown during the following week from Wednesday 12 May to Friday 21 May. We might assume the day's gap allowed for final rehearsals and perhaps a change of set. Thus far the programme suggests that the two plays were offering one unified vision.

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<sup>27</sup> Weis, p. 66.

<sup>28</sup> Programmes for *Henry IV, Parts One and Two*, directed by Russell Thorndike and Charles Warburton at the Old Vic, 1920.

However, as with the pre-twentieth century productions, there is not a complete continuity of casting between these two plays. While C. Montague Shaw portrayed Henry IV in both plays, the part of Hal was divided. In *Part One* Campbell Fletcher played the young prince, but in *Part Two* Fletcher played the Lord Chief Justice, while Charles Warburton, who had played Hotspur, now played Hal in *Part Two*.

Given that Warburton is credited as joint-producer alongside Russell Thorndike, who played Falstaff in both parts, it might be assumed that Warburton was abusing his power to play the most dominant roles, were it not that Hal has a much smaller presence in *Part Two*. Furthermore, there are other actors who shuffled parts: Alan Watts played Westmorland in *Part One* and Lancaster in *Part Two*, whilst Maxwell Wray took over the role of Westmorland in the second play; also Reginald Jarman, who played Bardolph in *Part One*, was completely absent from the cast of *Part Two*. It is possible that Jarman fell ill, and a reshuffle was necessary as understudies stepped forward to play the role, but it is unclear how the understudying of Bardolph could result in the recasting of Hal.

Ultimately, what can be deduced from the programme is that some attempt was made towards a unified direction; however, this intention was not fully realised. This may be due to actor's vanity, understudying or may simply be an indication that the attempt to produce one story was half-hearted. The next production would achieve that which Warburton and Thorndike had not. In the same year as the Old Vic production, Barry Jackson's Birmingham Rep had also produced *Henry IV Part One* and, given its success, revived it in 1921 for a week, with the second part being performed the next week, as Thorndike and Warburton had done the year before. However, Jackson further united the two plays on the day in between when both parts would be performed; the date chosen for this extended

experience was Shakespeare's birthday, cleverly manipulating the commemorative spirit in a manner that many other historical cycles would build on. Local press excitedly declared that 'People who have searched the records of histrionic achievements declare such a feat to be unique.'<sup>29</sup>

Much of the success of the production rested on the staging; Jackson divided his stage in half, with one side representing the court and the other the tavern, the boundary marked by a central post, with two curtains which could be drawn across either half as required. Thus while the court scenes were being presented, a curtain covered the tavern, and vice versa. The merit of this lay in the swift change of scenes, as both actors and props could enter and exit the stage behind the curtain, and thus each scene was ready immediately as the preceding one ended; the necessary pace was thus achieved to make an entire day's performance a feasible prospect.

After the staging, the critical praise rested on Osmund Wilson's performance as Falstaff. One critic remarked that 'Next to the boldness of the producer, the outstanding impression left on Saturday was the greatness of Mr Osmund Wilson's Falstaff', while another gave equal praise to both.<sup>30</sup>

The revival [...] is noteworthy for two reasons: first the excellent Falstaff of Mr. Osmund Wilson, and secondly, the novelty of the stage setting and the care which has been bestowed on the accuracy of the dresses and the various insignia of heraldry.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> *Birmingham Post*, 25 April 1921.

<sup>30</sup> *Birmingham Gazette*, 29 November 1920.

<sup>31</sup> *The Era*, 1 December 1920.

The focus on proper setting and authentic costumes in the histories still remained a major consideration. However, the reviewer's equal focus upon Falstaff reveals a consequence of presenting the two parts of *Henry IV* together; seen this way, with neither the history of the King portrayed in *Richard II*, nor the decisions of the Prince justified in the events of *Henry V*, the hero of this two-part story became the fat knight. There is little mention of Hal or his father in the reviews. By drawing on Falstaff's progress as the story arc of the drama, critics had no problems in accepting the two plays as one. One felt that 'Students will probably welcome the opportunity of seeing the whole of this play', while another felt of Part Two that it 'presented no difficulty from the producer's point of view, for it naturally followed on the lines of the first part.'<sup>32</sup> Equally, one reviewer readily accepted the continuation of character between the two parts and beyond, saying of *Henry IV Part One* that it 'really may be regarded as the first of a trilogy dealing with the career of Harry of Monmouth'.<sup>33</sup> The two parts had been accepted as one, but the other histories offered a tantalising saga to audiences; however, note how the critic's thoughts linger on a trilogy, and nothing larger. At this point in time the concept of a unified series of more than three plays was more than the reviewer gave credit for; the cycle was still in its infancy, and the idea of an extensive cycle had yet to be realised.

Robert Atkins' production of *Henry IV* two years later showed a greater acceptance of the plays' unity than his predecessors; as in Jackson's, there was complete continuity of casting, but furthermore the 1923 season went a step closer towards presenting the history cycle on stage. The programme notes tell us of the director's intentions:

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<sup>32</sup> *Birmingham Weekly Post*, 23 April 1921; *The Stage*, 28 April 1921.

<sup>33</sup> *Birmingham Mail*, 29 November 1920.



It is hoped to play Henry V, and the three parts of Henry VI early in the second half of the season, and this, with Richard III, should form a dramatic sequence of great interest to all.<sup>34</sup>

Robert Atkins presented a number of marginalised plays during his time at the Old Vic; George Rowell notes in his biography of Atkins that ‘for connoisseurs and collectors he offered a chance to see Shakespearian works which had not been given in London time out of mind’.<sup>35</sup> It is therefore in keeping with Atkins’ pioneering spirit that he should plan to present the histories as a unified dramatic sequence. However, the reality was a disjointed series which maintained distinctions between the plays. The two parts of *Henry IV*, though offering continuous casting, had a significant gap between productions: the last production of *Part One* was 13 October, while *Part Two* was first presented on 30 October.

A further failure to realise the promised dramatic sequence was evident in the presentation of *Henry VI*. While the programmes were keen to announce the production as *Henry VI Parts One, Two and Three*, the plays were compressed into two parts: from 29 January to 10 February 1923 audiences could see ‘Shakespeare’s Henry VI (Part 1, and First Half of Part 2)’, then from 12 February to 24 February the Old Vic offered ‘Shakespeare’s Henry VI (Second Half of Part 2 and Part 3)’.<sup>36</sup> In the same season Atkins presented other marginalised plays such as *Titus Andronicus* and *Troilus and Cressida*, which suggests that the focus of Atkins’ direction was predominantly to present all of Shakespeare’s plays, rather than specifically turning to the histories. When the time came for the *Henry VI* plays, he made the decision to produce them together, truncated from

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<sup>34</sup> Programme for *Henry IV*. ( *Part 1* ), directed by Robert Atkins at The Old Vic, 2-13 October 1923.

<sup>35</sup> George Rowell, ed., *Robert Atkins, An Unfinished Autobiography* (London: The Society for Theatre Research, 1994), p. 134.

<sup>36</sup> Programmes for *Henry VI Parts One and Two*, directed by Robert Atkins at the Old Vic, 1923.

three to two, a concession that nonetheless should be credited given the relative absence of the plays from the contemporary stage.

Still, the three plays of *Henry VI* were being offered at the cost of squeezing them into two plays, and while these two plays were shown in quick succession, both were still being presented four months after the productions of *Henry IV*. Though Atkins also presented *Richard III* in the same season, he did not put forward a uniform continuity of casting between the play and *Henry VI*. Reyner Barton and Douglas Burbidge continued their roles as Edward and George, respectively, but Lady Gray/Queen Elizabeth, Margaret and, most tellingly of all, Richard of Gloucester were not played by the same actors in both productions: this was not a trilogy. Furthermore, the length of time between productions reduced the audience's potential for following continuity of character, plot and theme across the entire sequence of histories. It appears that the intentions of Atkins had their limitations; the opportunity, or risk, of encouraging an audience to return to the theatre not once, but twice or more, to see the story continue was not fully realised by the Old Vic at this time.

A smaller history cycle was resumed at Stratford in 1932. As with Jackson's 1921 production, the two parts of *Henry IV* would be performed on the same day, and the day chosen was once again Shakespeare's birthday. Furthermore, the production by William Bridges-Adams marked the grand unveiling of the new Memorial Theatre in Stratford, under the royal patronage of the Prince of Wales. The event offered an ideal setting for the epic feel of a Shakespearean drama that stretched beyond one play; accordingly, the show had a large element of spectacle surrounding it. One imaginative headline declared:

## ROBOT SHAKESPEARE IN FLOOD-LIT WONDER THEATRE - MECHANICAL MAGIC OUTSHINES ACTORS<sup>37</sup>

As the headline suggests, pageantry and visual opulence were once more prevalent in the presentation of history. The production's staging was remarkably elaborate; as well as two levels of backdrops on some scenery, a moving portcullis and a full array of different stage layouts for each scene, a rolling stage was employed to create the mirage of a procession through London's streets at the end of *Henry IV Part Two*. This offered the chance for Bridges-Adams to exhibit his custom-built stage, but the ostentatious nature of the scenery would extend to the costumes as well. Publicity photographs show the characters in dress contemporary to the period of the play, though the style and appearance of them bear greater resemblance to those one might expect of film actors of the time. In view of the emphasis on the visual side of the production, it is of little surprise that one critic felt the result 'was a ceremony as much as a performance.'<sup>38</sup> Like the productions of Benson and Jackson before, Bridges-Adams' cycle was presented and viewed consciously in terms of visual presentation: the manner of staging attracted the attention of the critics. This in turn was symptomatic of the pageantry which surrounded the histories, for the pictorial quality which continued to be highlighted reverts back to the patriotic view of them as an actual segment of English history, rather than a dramatic work.

Critics accepted the unity of both parts without resistance; performed together on one day the two plays were generally referred to as simply *Henry the Fourth. The Stage* congratulated 'a rare opportunity of viewing that great chronicle play as a complete entity',

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<sup>37</sup> *Daily Herald*, 25 April 1932.

<sup>38</sup> *Birmingham Post*, 25 April 1932.

having noted that ‘the time-space between the end of Part One and the beginning of Part Two seemed not much longer than an ordinary interval.’<sup>39</sup> Bridges-Adams used this conception to draw the themes of the two parts together and, as with Jackson’s 1921 production, the consequence was a greater focus upon the tragedy of Falstaff. It was said at the time of Roy Byford in the role that ‘he subdues Sir John as a butt and emphasises him as a conscious humorist’, the result being a progression from the farcical caricature his appearance suggested to a three-dimensional character.<sup>40</sup> The structure of the two plays together naturally led to the emphasis of Falstaff’s rejection as conclusion to the whole, rather than just the second part, and in this scene the supposed tragedy of the fat knight was particularly highlighted by one critic:

I, for one, shall not forget the gesture with which the old man, so cruelly spurned by the newly-crowned king, stooped to pick up his fallen hat and rubbed it with his sleeve, turning his head lest Shallow and Pistol should see the crest-fallen disappointment in his face.<sup>41</sup>

In the description, Henry V barely gets a mention, other than to scorn his final decision, and the actual moment of the King’s proclamation is not touched upon, having failed to haunt the memory so much as Falstaff’s subsequent sorrow. In a production that offered elaborate staging and opulent setting, the quiet prince and his royal intrigue fell foul of the audience in favour of the larger-than-life knight and his gaudy world; *Henry IV* had become *Falstaff*.

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<sup>39</sup> *The Stage*, 28 April 1932.

<sup>40</sup> *Sheffield Telegraph*, 25 April 1932.

<sup>41</sup> *Evening News*, 25 April 1932.

The confirmation of Falstaff in the plays was further emphasised in John Burrell's 1945 production. The production is famous for two reasons: Laurence Olivier's dual role of Hotspur and Shallow, and Ralph Richardson's Falstaff. Michael Warre's Hal is barely mentioned in reviews and appears to have stood poorly in comparison. In both plays, his fate failed to render the same sympathies as the tragedy of Hotspur and Falstaff, one critic noting that while 'there is a tremendous Falstaff performance' and 'Laurence Olivier's Hotspur immediately possesses the audience [...] Michael Warre, prompted to play the Prince in such society as this, inevitably remains in the junior school. How otherwise?'<sup>42</sup>

The emphasis upon both Richardson and Olivier created a contradiction of union and distinction in the two plays, one reviewer's comment that 'Mr. Olivier's curious power of being at the centre of every picture' suggesting that *Part One* remained, as it had been in previous centuries, a production in which Hotspur is more popular than Hal. Consequently, the plot of each play was threatened; when it came to Hal and Hotspur's climactic struggle one reviewer felt 'this stripling would have got the better of Hotspur only on the theory that ash can tilt successfully at oak.'<sup>43</sup>

At the same time, however, Richardson's Falstaff countered this with a strong performance in a continuous role, thus ensuring some interest in those scenes involving Hal. The production enjoyed a higher profile than the two from previous decades, with the combination of Richardson, Olivier and the London venue ensuring a larger reception, which may explain why Richardson was hailed as 'The Greatest Falstaff in Living

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<sup>42</sup> *Observer*, 30 September 1945.

<sup>43</sup> *Sunday Times*, 30 September 1945.

Memory’ in one headline, a hyperbole that marked the pinnacle of the fat knight’s dominance over the two plays and set a high benchmark for subsequent directors.<sup>44</sup>

All of these productions from the 1920s onwards, while limiting themselves to two plays, progressed from Benson’s cycles in their promotion of unity. Casting was continuous, as was the direction. Each production used the same staging and design for both parts: it is a key aspect of how we view these plays that each director relied so heavily on their set, and the visual image. The use of contemporary clothing and continuous sets further confirmed the notion of these plays as a representation of history, rather than a dramatic presentation: the key was in reproducing the past. Rather than patching together individual plays, these histories were being conceived on stage as a unified production: what needed to occur next was the thematic links of the small productions with the size and scope of Benson’s original cycles. By 1945, Burrell’s production, thanks to its two main stars, widely promoted the appeal of a unified cycle. The great success of the two plays may well be seen as an inspiration for the subsequent, larger cycles that were offered in the second half of the century.

### Proving the Cycle: Quayle and Seale

Six years after Burrell’s production, the Festival of Britain in 1951 provided the opportunity for two cycles to emerge on the English stage. The Medieval Mystery plays returned to the public consciousness: J. S. Purvis notes that ‘The City of York decided to revive, as part of its share in that Festival, the performance of the Cycle, which had last

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<sup>44</sup> Richard Jennings, *Picture Post*, 20 October 1945.

been presented there in 1572.<sup>45</sup> Meanwhile in Stratford, as part of the same national festival, Anthony Quayle presented *Richard II*, *Henry IV Part One*, *Henry IV Part Two* and *Henry V*, for which the programme notes make clear his intentions:

It is generally agreed that the four plays of this season's historical cycle form a tetralogy and were planned by Shakespeare as one great play.<sup>46</sup>

Quayle's general agreement undoubtedly rested on the critical works of Tillyard and Campbell, published just a few years earlier and already having effect, though Quayle kept the grand series that Tillyard had discussed down to a manageable four plays. Quayle acknowledged the critical and theatrical heritage, remarking that the 'plays have come to be thought of as separate entities' only because 'the economic and organisational difficulties in the way of presenting the cycle as a whole are so formidable.'<sup>47</sup> In an approach similar to Dingelstedt's, Quayle conceived one play with separate acts, rather than individual plays, but unlike Dingelstedt, Quayle identified a specific hero: Hal. Tillyard had said that 'First and most important, Richard and Prince Hal are deliberately contrasted characters'.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, as Quayle had identified the 'true hero of the whole play' as Henry, then to include *Richard II* in his scheme it was necessary to have the protagonist 'offset the hero':<sup>49</sup>

The tragic *Richard the Second*, who would seem to have all the defects of Prince Hal's virtues, is not only historically, but dramatically, the perfect counterpoise and prologue (p. vii).

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<sup>45</sup> J. S. Purvis, *The York Cycle of Mystery Plays* (London: S.P.C.K., 1957), p. 7.

<sup>46</sup> Promptbook for *Richard II*, directed by Anthony Quayle at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, 1951.

<sup>47</sup> Anthony Quayle, 'Foreword', in *Shakespeare's Histories at Stratford 1951* (see Wilson and Worsley, above), p. vii.

<sup>48</sup> Tillyard, p. 240.

<sup>49</sup> Quayle, p. vii.

*Richard II* became a chapter in which the main hero did not appear. A radical reinvention was needed, so Quayle presented Richard as an antithesis to Hal, to show the audience what a bad king might be so that they could appreciate the virtue of Henry V. Accordingly Michael Redgrave played Richard as ‘a nervous, emotional incompetent who undervalues his crown’.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, a reviewer noted how in the production ‘the King is more obviously guilty of Gloucester’s death than most actors care to suggest’.<sup>51</sup>

The flaw in Quayle’s focus was that he considered only the grand scheme of the tetralogy: as a series the story worked and when viewed together audiences would see the growth of Bolingbroke and the rise of his son to therefore appreciate the growth and continuity of character that such an alteration of *Richard II* allowed; however, the audiences did not have the luxury of Quayle’s foresight when they watched *Richard II*. Despite Quayle’s wishes that it might be otherwise, the plays were not released in close succession but a month apart, and so rather than being presented with a coherent story, audiences were given a first chapter, which they took to be a disappointing *Richard II*, and more specifically, a disappointing Richard. One reviewer felt that ‘Michael Redgrave has overdone his Richard so much in the beginning that he kills the character long before the prison scene.’<sup>52</sup> Another reviewer realised the intention of the director but was not convinced by its effect, seeing that ‘Mr Redgrave, in fact, is set to play his character, in a sense, *against* the production’:

The lyricism of his part, which distils the very essence of a sweet adolescent self-pity, is overshadowed. Mr. Redgrave gives an

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<sup>50</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 29 March 1951.

<sup>51</sup> *Stratford-on-Avon Herald*, 30 March 1951.

<sup>52</sup> Gerard Fay, *Public Opinion*, 30 March 1951.



extremely sensitive and lyric performance and if it doesn't, as it should, absolutely engulf us, isn't this because the production is deliberately designed to see that it does not? And though I think I follow the reason for this – namely to unify the play with those that follow – I cannot feel it to be right. And it is certainly not satisfying.<sup>53</sup>

The reviewer, T. C. Worsley, reversed his views upon seeing the whole production, but the initial response displays how the quality of one play was compromised for the good of the whole – it cannot be a triumphant production that makes the critic feel it 'is certainly not satisfying.' Kenneth Tynan concluded of Redgrave's performance that 'It was not his fault that in the later acts and the slow hysterical slide toward death one tired of him'.<sup>54</sup> The 'fault', or rather the intention, was precisely that the audience's attention turned to Bolingbroke/Henry IV, so that they looked forward, not back.

But the main impact of this cycle would be upon Hal. In his account of the stage history of *Henry IV Part One*, Scott McMillin identifies Quayle's production as the cause of how 'What had been a "Falstaff" play or, on occasion, a "Hotspur" play [...] came in the twentieth century to be seen as a study of political power with Prince Hal as the central character.'<sup>55</sup> Quayle felt that Hal was 'usually so shorn and mangled in both parts of *Henry IV* that he is unrecognisable when he emerges into *Henry V*, and so misrepresented as the frank, boon companion of Falstaff that we can only feel nauseated by his priggish renunciation of his friend.'<sup>56</sup> Thus the familiar jolly knave of single productions needed to be replaced by a more grave character whom the audience could imagine being the future Henry V. This was a character who knew what was going to happen, who had everything

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<sup>53</sup> T. C. Worsley, *New Statesman*, 31 March 1951.

<sup>54</sup> Kenneth Tynan, *Curtains: A Critic's View of Plays, Players and Theatrical Events 1950-1960* (London: Lowe and Brydone, 1961), p. 11.

<sup>55</sup> Scott McMillin, *Henry IV Part One*, *Shakespeare in Performance* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), p. 1.

<sup>56</sup> Quayle, Foreword, *Shakespeare's Histories at Stratford 1951* (see Wilson and Worsley, above) p. viii.

planned out. The 1951 production was the first to introduce the now familiar device of adding extra portent to the play-acting of 2.4 in *Henry IV Part One*, of which McMillin notes the significance:

Hal's response to 'banish plump Jack, and banish all the world' has now become a moment of high significance in modern productions, as though the line 'I do, I will' is his discovery of what he will eventually do to Falstaff, or his prediction of what he will do, or both. The days of innocence when the line could be tossed away with the fling of a cushion, as was done in the Old Vic production, are over.<sup>57</sup>

Michael Redgrave was again unfortunate in the role of Hotspur, which was also minimised from its usual place as star role in single productions, in order to allow Hal to shine as the hero. Equally, Falstaff was played by Quayle in such a way as to show his villainies and vice, with the aim of justifying his rejection. To support the cycle Quayle gave a detailed synopsis and discussion of each play and its successor in the programmes, including a justification of Hal's rejection of Falstaff.

The fact that he repudiates him publicly is forced upon him by Falstaff, and the conditions he imposes [...] can scarcely be called severe [...] But in terms of kingship the rebuke is necessary and, in the light of the play which is still to come, the alternative is unthinkable.<sup>58</sup>

The directors aimed to change little of *Henry V*, their theory being that having presented the three previous acts, the last play was fully explained and could be enjoyed in its existing form as it was meant to be. However, to seal the tetralogy of plays, the conclusion

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<sup>57</sup> McMillin, p. 47.

<sup>58</sup> Promptbook for *Henry IV Part Two*, directed by Michael Redgrave at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, 1951.

was adapted in order that the chorus reflected on what had passed rather than hint at what was to come:

Small time, but in that time most greatly lived  
This star of England: Fortune made his sword  
By which the world's best garden he achieved  
And nourished there the red rose of his blood  
Awakened from the self despising dream  
Of tavern-victories hallowed by Sir John  
He moves in his true measure: so our theme  
From Richard's winter builds this summer throne;  
Which oft our stage have told, and for our sake  
In your fair minds let this acceptance take.<sup>59</sup>

Having set the parameters of the story, the links between each chapter were once more strengthened not only by continuity of casting, but also a permanent stage. Tanya Moiseiwitsch's set would be used for all four plays and therefore the connection of scenes through their location was of utmost importance: the governor of Harfleur was entreated to surrender from the same balcony by Henry V that his father had entreated Richard II to step down from at Flint Castle. Equally, props became as much stars as the actors, with the throne, for example, being a permanent feature on the side of the stage, in which three kings all sat and reigned, the unchanged position inviting the audience to compare and contrast the many monarchs. Quayle's great risk, to rely upon an audience returning to see not one, but three sequels, appears to have paid off, and the series was subsequently applauded for its scope and magnitude. Many of his innovations, such as the duality of Richard and Bolingbroke, or the deeper ramifications of the play extempore, became conventions, which indicate the production's far-reaching impact on theatre.

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<sup>59</sup> Prompt book for *Henry V*, directed by Anthony Quayle at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, 1951. Additional lines written by Patrick Dickinson.

The risk, and success of Quayle's cycle was complemented by a more cautious approach at the Birmingham Rep. Working from adaptations of the *Henry VI* plays prepared by Barry Jackson, the director Douglas Seale made the unusual decision of presenting *Henry VI Part Two* on its own in 1951, the same year of Quayle's cycle. Great care was taken to ensure that the marginalised play was suitable for successful performance: cuts and alterations were applied and Jackson was said to have 'spent two months working upon "Henry VI, Part 2" before he invited Professor Allardyce Nicoll to advise on the cuts he had been compelled to make', after which the carefully prepared text was 'handed over to Producer Douglas Seale.'<sup>60</sup> The production's opening night coincided with that of *Henry IV Part One* in Stratford, but rather than suffer from the comparison, Seale's production drew in the audiences and prompted a new cycle two years later.<sup>61</sup>

One of the reasons for the success of *Part Two* in 1951 was the sheer novelty of seeing it performed, which prompted the rational fear, as one critic noted, that it 'may not be acted again in our time.'<sup>62</sup> As such, the play was 'attracting people from as far afield as London, Liverpool and Wales.'<sup>63</sup> Such was the merit of the production that the Old Vic was eager to have the play presented on its stage, though Jackson had to decline in light of insufficient funds.<sup>64</sup> Its success left the audiences wanting more; one elderly lady who had travelled from Dover to see the play justified her reasons for coming so far by claiming: 'I have now seen all but two of Shakespeare's plays.'<sup>65</sup> Needless to say, the other two were *Henry VI*

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<sup>60</sup> *Birmingham Weekly Post*, 25 May 1951.

<sup>61</sup> *Birmingham Mail*, 29 March 1951.

<sup>62</sup> J. C. Trewin, *John O'Connor Weekly*, 27 April 1951.

<sup>63</sup> *Birmingham Post*, 19 April 1951.

<sup>64</sup> *Evening Dispatch*, 7 June 1951.

<sup>65</sup> *Birmingham Post*, 19 April 1951.

*Parts One* and *Three*, and, having awakened the audience's interest, Seale duly tried to recreate the success of 1951 by presenting *Henry VI Part Three* the following year:

A note in the programme for *King Henry VI Part 3* [...] states that the decision to produce Part Three follows the interest created throughout the country by the presentation of Part Two last year. That decision is entirely justified.<sup>66</sup>

Once again the Old Vic invited the company to perform on its stage, and this time the offer was accepted, resulting in a sell-out success in London.<sup>67</sup> Ironically, the success of the plays as individual works in their own rights did not result in the theatre's acceptance of them as such, but rather the presence of other parts that had not yet been performed prompted Seale to revive both *Part Two* and *Three* and perform them with *Part One* in 1953. Consequently, in hindsight the productions are now remembered as a successful trilogy and their initial reception as individual plays have been overlooked. One headline in 1953 crowed that the 'Henry VI Trilogy is Now Complete'.<sup>68</sup>

Besides exclaiming the rarity of the plays, the reviews all congratulated the production as a great success, though one reviewer felt that 'The many characters and the complexities of lineage still present some difficulty to the spectator'.<sup>69</sup> Continuity of casting was once more present, along with a permanent set and figurative props through which the passing characters might be compared; one reviewer notes how 'Mr Douglas Seale's production swings effectively round a central Gothic arch under which the key speeches are likely to be

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<sup>66</sup> *Birmingham Post* 2 April 1952.

<sup>67</sup> *Evening Dispatch*, 21 July 1951.

<sup>68</sup> *Birmingham Mail*, 3 July 1953.

<sup>69</sup> *The Times*, 2 April 1952.

delivered', the architecture providing more of a spiritual commentary upon the action than the formal allusions of Quayle's throne.<sup>70</sup>

The relative obscurity of the plays presented the reviewers with no alternative reading outside of that which Seale presented. The lack of any strong opposing view is not surprising, given that critics such as Campbell were focusing on the other histories and omitting the *Henry VI* plays. Most critics hailed the production simply as Shakespeare's *Henry VI*, their emphasis stressed on merely seeing the play performed at all rather than considering interpretative decisions of the cast and directors. One critic applauded the entire trilogy whilst unashamedly stating:

I did not see Part Three, but one has only to read it to recognise that the genius of Shakespeare was past finding itself.<sup>71</sup>

Shakespeare's text and Seale's production were one and the same. Critics were seeing these plays for the first time and, as such, their eagerness mirroring that of the audience, little heed was paid to criticism or analysis. Whilst Quayle's cycle had to redefine the audience's perception of known plays, ironically Seale's timid approach had less reason to be cautious, as the marginal awareness of the *Henry VI* plays allowed for a unified presentation to be accepted much more readily. The audience had no concept of them as individual productions with which to challenge Seale's direction.

In both Quayle's and Seale's productions the idea of a unified story became accepted. The reviews of *Henry VI* show a drastic reduction in time spent on explaining the cycle and

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<sup>70</sup> Unmarked review (possibly *The Times*), from the Old Vic production of *Henry VI Part Three*, 1952.

<sup>71</sup> Beverly Baxter, *Sunday Express*, 19 July 1953.

the purpose of the directors than had been spent in reviews of earlier productions: the concept of a cycle was becoming established in the critical and public consciousness. Indeed this extends beyond Shakespeare; Purvis notes the revival of interest in morality plays that coincides with Quayle's cycle: 'It was not, in fact, until the Festival of Britain in 1951 that there was any general renaissance of appreciation of the qualities latent in the Cycle.'<sup>72</sup> The British public was becoming increasingly receptive to the idea of a dramatic epic, which offered subsequent directors the opportunity to present bigger and bolder cycles.

When the Old Vic presented its five-year plan to produce all of Shakespeare's plays in the mid-1950's, continuity of casting was proposed in the history plays when they were produced; *Richard II*, *Henry IV Parts One and Two* and *Henry V* were presented in the same season, just as Quayle had done, rather than individually as they had been during Atkins attempts to present all the plays three decades earlier. While the placement of these plays amongst a five-year season of the entire canon suggests that, as with Atkins, the emphasis was on showing every play rather than drawing on these plays specifically to tell a particular story, it nonetheless shows how the work of Quayle and Seale was establishing the story arc of the history cycle and impressing this upon other directors. Following upon this, in 1960, the BBC presented their 15 part series *An Age of Kings*, and in so doing communicated the cycle to a much larger audience. In a review, the Radio Times noted how 'Broadcasting both in radio and television has renewed the serial form in drama', and so Shakespeare's plays were incorporated into the twentieth century notion of a television

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<sup>72</sup> Purvis, p. 7.

series.<sup>73</sup> The cycle was no longer a critical model, but an accepted stage practice with contemporary equivalents. This would allow future directors to adapt the stories to their own agendas with an audience who would now be willing to wait for the next part of the story before drawing conclusions on each individual chapter.

### Accepting the Cycle: Barton and Hall

Now that the theory had been proved, the history cycle reached widespread acceptance on the English stage in 1963-4 with John Barton and Peter Hall's celebrated *The Wars of the Roses*. Already the attitude towards the plays had changed, and the BBC series appears to have had an impact in how critics viewed the cycle; one felt that *Richard III* was 'like a TV epilogue', while another felt the series was 'as epic in its conception as anything Hollywood, with all its millions, has offered the cinema.'<sup>74</sup> The permeation of modern media into the cultural consciousness provided a short-hand reference for the history cycle as either soap opera or big-budget epic. The directors themselves were eager to draw out contemporary parallels in the plays; initially they had sought a piece of drama relevant to their times when Hall, who Loehlin notes 'had read Kott's essay on the histories in proof before rehearsals', saw in the lesser-known *Henry VI* plays a Brechtian vision that spoke to his generation.<sup>75</sup> Kott had considered the cycle to be 'a constant procession of kings' in which history itself is the protagonist.<sup>76</sup> Inspired by this, Barton and Hall's cycle would not be, as Quayle's (and Tillyard's) had been, a cycle with one hero, but a chronicle of a nation.

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<sup>73</sup> Michael Barry, *Radio Times*, 22 April 1960.

<sup>74</sup> Milton Shulman, *Evening Standard*, 16 April 1964; Peter Rodford, *Western Daily Press*, 21 April 1964.

<sup>75</sup> Loehlin, 'Brecht and the rediscovery of *Henry VI*', p. 135.

<sup>76</sup> Kott, p. 9.



McMillin surmises that ‘The project appealed to Hall, among other reasons, because there is no star role in these plays except that of Richard III [...]. This would be excellent training ground for a young company.’<sup>77</sup> Margaret Shewring agrees that ‘the cycle of English history plays offered Peter Hall and his colleagues an opportunity to illustrate all the skills that could be demonstrated by a company trained meticulously to work together – a company which, on the whole, ignored the “star” system in favour of a sense of shared purpose.’<sup>78</sup> Indeed, through Kott we can trace the treatment of *Richard III* in 1963 back to Jessner’s production of 1920. Michael Patterson describes how Jessner’s direction differed from the standard approach to the play:

It was not the psychological character of the hero or the specific historical situation that was the focus, but the image of a dangerous tyrant rising to power and being defeated – not Richard the individual, but his career.<sup>79</sup>

Similarly, in Barton and Hall’s production, individual characters were minimised against the backdrop of history. As a result, through the cycle Ian Holm’s Gloucester was a quiet, watchful man, of no great size but deadly with dagger and wit, who did not exude the flamboyance that audiences were used to seeing in Richard. Even when the final play was shown, Gloucester’s speeches delivered to the audience seemed more reluctant than crowing. Gillian Day notes that in the production ‘Richard lost many asides and rhetorical flourishes, diminishing both his delight in language and his familiarity with the audience, so

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<sup>77</sup> McMillin, p. 54.

<sup>78</sup> Margaret Shewring, *Richard II*, Shakespeare in Performance (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), p. 100.

<sup>79</sup> Patterson, p. 91.

that he became a self-contained, circumspect figure who treated his audience as enigmatically as he treated those on stage.’<sup>80</sup>

Shaughnessy remarked of the cast that ‘However individualised, the actors in the drama were still the little people, who either suffered themselves to be crushed in the machinery of history [...] or become armoured and indistinguishable from their environment’.<sup>81</sup> This environment, a physical embodiment of Kott’s grand mechanism, was recognised in designer John Bury’s permanent set. Bury decided that the predominant material employed would be metal, to represent ‘the steel of the plate armour – the steel of the shield and the steel of the broadsword’ of the age depicted.<sup>82</sup> Two mechanical triangular walls at the back of the stage appeared to move between scenes of their own accord, irrespective of the actors and suggestive of the machine which operated without their control. The set was not a simple backdrop but a conscious, moving presence that cried out for the audience’s attention. Shaughnessy rightly notes that ‘It was the scenic dimension of *the Wars of the Roses* that created its initial impact and accounted for its subsequent memorability.’<sup>83</sup>

Bury himself had also designed the set for the first English production of Brecht’s *Mother Courage and her Children*, and Brecht’s influence could be found in what Loehlin calls the RSC’s ‘cool, rational and political’ approach to the histories: ‘The set was spare and harsh [...] the effect was minimalist’.<sup>84</sup> Props were once again employed as a commentary upon the plays; in their adaptation, Barton and Hall developed ‘one

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<sup>80</sup> Gillian Day, *King Richard III*, Shakespeare at Stratford (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2002), p. 43.

<sup>81</sup> Shaughnessy, p. 45.

<sup>82</sup> John Bury, in John Barton and Peter Hall, *The Wars of the Roses*, (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1970), p. 237.

<sup>83</sup> Shaughnessy, p. 45.

<sup>84</sup> Loehlin, ‘Brecht and the rediscovery of *Henry VI*’, p. 138.

particularly bold invention', wherein Gloucester gives up his power as protector to a democratic council, so that 'power is henceforth to rest in the majority decision of the council' which was based around an imposing table bearing the initials of the reigning King.<sup>85</sup> Each king placed their own name upon the table, until in Edward V's reign Richard's men smashed the table to pieces after the arrest of Hastings. Democracy had no place in Richard's reign; such a Richard was not of the medieval age but a product of the twentieth century. Like Kott's vision of the histories, this cycle was removed from the original source and became directly related to the era of the production.

The cycle was a great success, and Barton and Hall revived the plays the following year, along with the second tetralogy, in Shakespeare's quartercentenary. An unintentional benefit was that the production of the plays mirrored the order in which Shakespeare is presumed to have written them, so that the second tetralogy was presented to an audience who knew the conclusion. However, by presenting all the histories together in the same season Barton and Hall faced the added pressure of making these four new plays comply with the directorial vision they had imposed on the others. Burton's Exeter, who had been a connection through the 1963 production, was now stretched across seven plays, developing as a young man supporting his brother Bolingbroke in *Richard II*, and *Henry IV*, as a warlord in *Henry V*, as an observer in *Henry VI* before becoming involved in Richmond's rebellion in *Richard III*. The character lived for the incredible duration of over a century of politics; in this flouting of the known-boundaries of human life, the director's use of Exeter emphasises that the presentation of time passing was predominant over realisation of character.

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<sup>85</sup> Bamber Gascoine, *Observer*, 2 August 1964.

In his focus on *Henry IV* McMillin notes that where the strength of previous productions lay in the characterisation, this time ‘the *Henry IV* plays would have to create a momentum that would carry through *Henry V* to the harsh portrayal of power politics in the *Wars of the Roses*. Character flattens a little under this pressure’.<sup>86</sup> Iconic figures and major parts like Falstaff, Hotspur, Richard, and Henry V would have to become part of the machine rather than stars in their own right. Richard II was played by David Warner, immediately linking the weak King with Warner’s other role of Henry VI, though where the latter part was celebrated as ‘never likely to be improved upon’ his Richard was felt to be ‘really rather pedestrian’.<sup>87</sup>

As well as doubling these two parts, Barton and Hall also linked Henry V with Richard III. This gave Hal a more sinister association than previous productions had suggested; he killed Hotspur not with a sword, but a dagger, and dumped his body in a pig trough, which proved to be both a death unfitting for Hotspur, and a means of killing him that was unsettling for the audience’s perception of Hal:

Anti-heroism can do no more with the Battle of Shrewsbury than dump Hotspur in a pig trough. It was a tremendously menacing and disturbing fight, a demonstration of the battlefield brutality that ran through the entire cycle, and one took no pleasure in knowing that a hero-King of England was emerging out of such violence.<sup>88</sup>

Nor was the minimisation of Falstaff welcomed by the critics. It was felt by one that ‘Hugh Griffith’s Falstaff is perhaps something of a disappointment [...] he does not give

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<sup>86</sup> McMillin, p. 55.

<sup>87</sup> Geoffrey Tarran, *Morning Advertiser*, 3 August 1964; Philip Hope-Wallace, *Guardian*, 16 April 1964.

<sup>88</sup> McMillin, p. 65.

Falstaff's marvellous lines their full measure of pointed wit' whilst another felt they would 'hesitate to call him the complete Falstaff.'<sup>89</sup> A Falstaff who fitted in to the bleak world of Barton and Hall's cycle could not be the Falstaff the audience wanted.

But the concerns for individual treatments were drowned out by the overwhelming support and congratulations for the production in its entirety; the *Guardian* congratulated the RSC on the reprisal of 'their splendid trilogy "The Wars of the Roses" which much honours the Shakespeare Year.'<sup>90</sup> *The Times* agreed that 'This enterprise, neither a pious gesture nor a theatrical stunt, ranks as the current Stratford regime's greatest service to Shakespeare so far', whilst the *Daily Mail* saw it also as 'one of the mightiest stage-projects of our time'.<sup>91</sup> In 1965 Barton and Hall's adaptations of *Henry VI* and *Richard III* were screened on the BBC, just five years after the corporation's own history series, so that the contemporary production was captured in a contemporary medium, and became permanently available for subsequent directors to watch and learn from.

*The Wars of the Roses* showed the dramatic potential of hitherto neglected characters from the canon: David Warner's Henry was judged as 'one of the memorable performances of our time', whilst it was agreed that 'Dame Peggy Ashcroft as Margaret, Henry's Queen, touches greatness.'<sup>92</sup> These characters now became roles to covet in subsequent years as the production lodged itself in the theatre's memory. Furthermore, Barton and Hall's work marks the turning point at which the cycle became embedded in the public consciousness. Reviews of prior productions showed little awareness of precedents claiming even in 1964

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<sup>89</sup> *Liverpool Post*, 17 April 1964; *Birmingham Mail*, 17 April 1964.

<sup>90</sup> Philip Hope-Wallace, *Guardian*, 30 July 1964.

<sup>91</sup> *The Times*, 24 August 1963; Bernard Levin, *Daily Mail*, 21 August 1963.

<sup>92</sup> W. H. W., *Birmingham Mail*, 30 July 1964; Harold Hobson, *The Sunday Times*, 25 August 1963.

that ‘The presentation of these plays in sequence has never before been attempted on any stage’.<sup>93</sup> After 1964 reviews of all subsequent productions are littered with remembrances of ‘the triumph of 15 years ago’, and later ‘the tradition of the company’s Histories cycles of 11 and 25 years ago’: from Barton and Hall’s production onwards a heritage of cycles was established in Stratford upon which each subsequent director would build.<sup>94</sup> From this point forth critics, and productions, would look back rather than forward; whereas the reviewer of Benson’s cycle had wished them to ‘go on, and prosper’, the cycle now changed from a progressive innovation to an established tradition.<sup>95</sup> *The Wars of the Roses* achieved the largest unified history cycle yet produced on the English stage, and became the jewel in the crown of the RSC; it was the highest point the cycle had reached, and now, ultimately, the only direction left was down.

## Section Two: Repetition in the Cycle

### Commemoration and Commodity: The Cycles of Hands and Nunn

The cycle had arrived and earned its place on the English stage. As a key component in achieving this the RSC drew upon its past success and embraced the histories as epic and traditional, and in so doing, the possibilities of the cycle were reduced as subsequent directors turned to the model as accepted practice rather than an innovative exploration. When the next cycle after Barton and Hall’s was produced at Stratford in 1975, reviewers

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<sup>93</sup> J. A. P, *Warwick Advertiser*, 14 August 1964.

<sup>94</sup> Milton Shulman, *Evening Standard*, 13 July 1977; Michael Ratcliffe, *Observer*, 30 October 1988.

<sup>95</sup> Charlotte Carmichael Stopes, *Stratford-upon-Avon Herald*, 3 May 1901.

not only anticipated a narrative or thematic link, they demanded it, regardless of the director's own ideas:

Whatever may have been Mr Hands's aims and intentions in directing the three histories for this year's centenary season, the fact that the leading characters are played by the same actors in each play, and that the same basic setting is used throughout, makes it inevitable that audiences will look for linkages and consistencies, will expect to see a continuous narrative unfold.<sup>96</sup>

In contrast to Quayle's era, this time the audience were expecting continuity between the plays. Building upon this, in the interim since the 1964 series, the RSC had extended its epic approach to Shakespeare with *The Romans* in 1972 and 1973. The artistic director Trevor Nunn envisioned a season of *Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Coriolanus* and *Titus Andronicus* with continuous casting and a coherent theme. The season was a success, but highlighted some of the advantages which Shakespeare's histories offered over his Roman plays. Only *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra* afforded the opportunity to span characters across more than one play; accordingly John Ripley later remarked that 'While the Roman cycle let some daylight into odd corners of the plays, it offered little of the cumulative enlightenment which distinguished the *Wars of the Roses*.'<sup>97</sup> Richard Madelaine notes how others 'felt the production was too pictorial'; the epic approach favoured with the histories was not considered necessarily beneficial to the Roman plays.<sup>98</sup> Nonetheless, the season was a success and offered further evidence to the RSC not only of the dramatic and lucrative potential of the cycle format, but how this was best exploited through the history plays, and two years later, the company staged a history cycle once

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<sup>96</sup> Sheila Bancock, *Stratford-upon-Avon Herald*, 26 August 1975.

<sup>97</sup> John Ripley, *Julius Caesar on Stage in England and America, 1599-1973* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 272.

<sup>98</sup> Richard Madelaine, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Shakespeare in Production* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 104.

more, one critic noting that ‘The treatment is, of course, the now familiar but ever marvellous Royal Shakespeare Company manner of producing historical sequences’.<sup>99</sup>

Even so, Terry Hands’ 1975 cycle was an unusual presentation of the second tetralogy; not only was *Henry V* the opening production, but Hands also replaced *Richard II* with *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, creating a Falstaff quartet. Hands shied away from the grand style of 1951 and the political overtones of 1964, instead choosing to place the emphasis in his cycle on theatre itself. *Henry V* began on a bare stage with the cast in rehearsal costumes. As the play continued, so the characters began to dress appropriately. The set was little more than a canopy, which was raised and lowered to represent a battleground, tents, and the French court.

Given the selection of plays, Brewster Mason’s Falstaff became a sympathetic protagonist: ‘His cunning is pragmatic, not malicious, and we sense that, when his ship comes home and Hal is king, he plans genuinely to repay his friends.’<sup>100</sup> In direct contrast, Emrys James as Henry IV was less popular, creating ‘a father any son would be glad to escape [...] a snarling, sardonic, guilt-laden autocrat’.<sup>101</sup> Consequently Hal’s rejection of Falstaff made little sense in this cycle.

The production’s unity was tenuous; the style adapted in *Henry V* of rehearsal clothes developing into costume was not followed or expanded upon in the other plays. Whilst the presence of *Merry Wives* offered more Falstaff, ultimately the play deviated from the plot of

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<sup>99</sup> Bernard Crick, *Times Higher Education Supplement*, 12 September 1975.

<sup>100</sup> *The Listener*, July 1975.

<sup>101</sup> *The Times* cited in McMillin, p. 77.



the other three. Even A. C. Bradley, who so keenly connected the character through the other plays, had argued long before that the Falstaff of *Merry Wives* is not the same creature we see in *Henry IV*.<sup>102</sup> The 1975 cycle was a series which sat awkwardly as one unit, and the patchiness can be explained by examining why the company produced the cycle at this time.

In 1975 the RSC was under considerable financial strain: the company was operating at a loss and box office success was crucial. The use of histories was a desperate attempt to relive the success of the RSC's previous cycle. A clever PR campaign was put forward to promote Hands' production as a commemorative event. Past productions had coincided with anniversaries; Barton and Hall's had marked the tercentenary and quarter centenary of Shakespeare's birth respectively, Benson's cycle marked the start of the twentieth century, Jackson's and Bridges-Adams' *Henry IV* productions had taken place on Shakespeare's birthday, with the latter also marking the opening of the Stratford Memorial Theatre, and Quayle's had been produced during the Festival of Britain. Hands' cycle needed a similar occasion; the Stratford festivals had begun in 1879, which meant any centenary plans could not be implemented for another four, long years. So instead the RSC created an anniversary in 1975, which celebrated one hundred years since the formation of the festival's planning committee: a questionable object of commemoration.

McMillin claims that the cycle showed 'signs of strain [...] particularly in the abundance of commentary by which the RSC surrounded the production.'<sup>103</sup> The artistic director,

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<sup>102</sup> A. C. Bradley, 'The Rejection of Falstaff', in *Oxford Lectures on Poetry* (London: Macmillan, 1909), pp. 247-275.

<sup>103</sup> McMillin, p. 82.

Trevor Nunn, keen to emphasise how presenting the histories at Stratford was now a proud tradition, claimed that 'The "Henry" plays have always had a special place at Stratford.'<sup>104</sup> Pointing out the previous productions at Stratford and their commemorative associations, Nunn concluded that 'the three plays together form a single masterpiece which needs to be seen together, in a festival repertoire, to be appreciated' (p. 6).

The RSC's manipulation of events does not encourage positive views of artistic integrity. Hands had been quoted as having said that 'he didn't go along with the idea that Shakespeare's Histories could be satisfactorily grouped or unified into trilogies, tetralogies or cycles'.<sup>105</sup> Equally, Ronald Bryden, who had dismissed the cycle in 1964 as a fallacy, now reversed his position by acting as play advisor to the RSC, believing the two *Henry IV* plays and *Henry V* would form 'a trilogy about the education of a king.'<sup>106</sup> Two cynics were converted thanks to a personal investment in the cycle. McMillin states the result:

The various kinds of cycle [...] have become part of the duller institutional thinking at the RSC. In part this is financial thinking. Cycles can be counted on to make money. They use the same set and many of the same costumes for more than one play. They have popular appeal and [...] a certain power to draw school parties.<sup>107</sup>

The historical cycle was no longer a pioneering art form, but a reliable resource to pull in crowds and box office success. Directors would choose the format first and work out the directorial justification afterwards. Hands' 1975 *Henry V* especially was a great success and brought in the required funds, and only two years later, the production was revived as a

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<sup>104</sup> Trevor Nunn in *Henry V for the Centenary Season at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre*, ed. by Sally Beaumann (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1976), p. 5.

<sup>105</sup> Terry Hands cited by Sheila Bannock, *Stratford-upon-Avon Herald*, 26 August 1975.

<sup>106</sup> Ronald Bryden, cited in McMillin, p. 83.

<sup>107</sup> McMillin, p. 85.

springboard for the *Henry VI* plays, which Hands also directed that season, with Alan Howard reprising his role as Henry V and continuing as his son Henry VI. Many critics questioned the presence of *Henry V* as the plays did not ‘emerge as a consistent whole’ so much as a ‘consistent three-quarters, since the RSC is playing them in tandem with its already celebrated *Henry V*, instead of the more logical *Richard III*’.<sup>108</sup> Ultimately, the prior success of the former play exposes the decision to include it to be commercial, not artistic.

The 1977 productions of *Henry VI* were applauded for their novelty: even Barton and Hall had shied away from presenting all three plays in their original form. Since their cycle, the plays had received greater critical attention: Moody E. Prior had published his argument for presenting these plays separately from the rest of the histories, claiming that ‘There is a well-defined line of progression discernible through the trilogy.’<sup>109</sup> However, Hands does not appear to have succeeded in achieving this progression; even an enthusiastic reviewer conceded of the cycle that ‘There is no single theme running through it.’<sup>110</sup> Having seen Hands’ cycle, G. K. Hunter concluded that ‘The Henry VI plays offer one of the greatest challenges to the Shakespeare producer, for there is no obvious method of making these plays powerfully effective on the stage’; which suggests that Hands’ production had not impressed Hunter as a dramatic unit.<sup>111</sup> Ric Knowles spoke of it as ‘a conceptual vacuum’, while Shaughnessy notes that Hands’ cycle exposed many of the flaws behind the concept of the cycle:<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Benedict Nightingale, *New Statesman*, 22 July 1977.

<sup>109</sup> Prior, p. 36.

<sup>110</sup> Frank Marcus, *Sunday Telegraph*, 17 July 1977.

<sup>111</sup> Hunter, ‘The Royal Shakespeare Company Plays *Henry VI*’, p. 91.

<sup>112</sup> Ric Knowles, ‘The First Tetralogy in Performance’, in *A Companion to Shakespeare’s Works* (see Dutton and Howard, above), II (*The Histories*), pp. 263-286, (p. 266).

The ramshackle, improvised quality [...] revealed the implicitly tendentious basis of cycle manufacture: throwing together four plays and allowing audiences to make what unifying sense of them they could.<sup>113</sup>

Hands seems to have almost been putting the plays on simply for the achievement of producing them, rather than considering what might be done with them, and it was only a few years before both he and his lead actor Alan Howard turned to the plays and title roles of *Richard II* and *Richard III* to complete their collection.

The focus of the RSC on tradition and sense of commemoration resulted in the unfortunate situation where staging a history cycle was now a simple question of going through the motions, rather than promoting new interpretations as past directors had done. The RSC's attitude towards the histories of tradition over innovation was complemented by the BBC Shakespeare series which began in 1979. The producer Cedric Messina's guiding principle 'to make the plays, in permanent form, accessible to audiences throughout the world' resulted in a series of plays such as its *Henry V* which James Loehlin comments upon as 'neither original nor surprising'.<sup>114</sup> Though the first series contained only two histories, *Henry VIII* and *Richard II*, it was understood from the start that 'the English histories, from *Richard II* through all the *Henry IVs*, *V* and *VI*s to *Richard III* would be presented in chronological order, [...] a unique record of the chronicled history of that time.'<sup>115</sup> Sure enough, following the production of *Richard II*, the director David Giles was asked to direct the rest of the second tetralogy, and continuity of casting was attempted

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<sup>113</sup> Shaughnessy, p. 61.

<sup>114</sup> Cedric Messina, 'Preface', in *Richard II* ed. by John Wilders and others, BBC Shakespeare (London: BBC, 1978), p. 8; James N. Loehlin, *Henry V*, Shakespeare in Performance (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), p. 83.

<sup>115</sup> Messina, in *Richard II*, ed. by John Wilders and others, pp. 7-8.

with Jon Finch returning as Henry IV, but thwarted by the change in actors playing Hotspur and Northumberland.<sup>116</sup>

Nonetheless, McMillin notes how the BBC's histories were made 'in accordance with the tradition that had by now become entrenched at the RSC'; Falstaff was played by Anthony Quayle, who reprised the role from his 'now fabled production' of 1951.<sup>117</sup> When Messina was replaced by Jonathan Miller, the series became more innovative, and accordingly Jane Howell's production of the first tetralogy was more experimental, as shall be discussed further in chapter four. Yet the BBC's decision to film the histories as a coherent unit, rather than exploring each play as individual drama set in the larger context of the Shakespeare canon, reflects the theatrical traditions of the time; like *An Age of Kings* before it, the series reached a wider audience than theatre could, and in so doing lent further support to the RSC's continuing presentation of the histories as a cycle.

Even without the support which the BBC series lent to the history cycle, the RSC was still maintaining the custom of producing histories on special occasions. After the financial success of Hands' cycle, Nunn was already looking ahead to the planned opening of the company's new theatre in the Barbican, at which future point he felt that 'it will be time to celebrate another milestone in our development with another cycle of histories.'<sup>118</sup> Tradition called for a history cycle, and when the theatre did open in 1982, Nunn provided one. He offered a production of *Henry IV Parts One and Two*, which would be performed together in one day, like Jackson's in 1921 and Bridges-Adams' in 1932. While academics were increasingly examining the politics of the histories, the RSC was still looking back, and as

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<sup>116</sup> See John Wilders and others, eds, William Shakespeare, *Henry IV Part 1*, BBC Shakespeare (London: BBC, 1979), pp. 20-23.

<sup>117</sup> Henry Fenwick in *Henry IV Part 1*, ed. by John Wilders and others, p. 25.

<sup>118</sup> Trevor Nunn, Beauman, p. 8.

might be expected, the tone of this production was nostalgic: the style of the production was commented upon as ‘almost Dickensian’, while it was felt that it was Nunn’s intention ‘to treat these twin masterpieces as an almost novelistic work [...] a long novel called *Fathers and Sons*.’<sup>119</sup> Accordingly, one critic felt that the production was ‘sorely disappointing’:

We get little sense of the march of history and almost none of being in the presence of big men – kings, dukes, archbishops, moulding the destiny of England.<sup>120</sup>

This was the first two-part cycle at Stratford since the establishment of larger, grander cycles, and now in comparison it seemed an anti-climax: Nunn’s focus on family relationships and a Dickensian vision created a cosy production and not the epic depiction of history which critics now expected from these plays. As with the two-play cycles of the early twentieth century, the absence of *Henry V* to complete Hal’s journey meant that the plays became Falstaff’s tragedy, highlighted more so in this production by Nunn’s exploration of father/son relationships. Gerard Murphy’s Hal looked to Joss Ackland’s Falstaff for hugs and affection that Patrick Stewart’s austere King would not provide; as with Hands’ production, the rejection of the gentle knight made no sense in this context, forming a harsh, bitter ending to what had been otherwise a gentle, mainstream commemorative production.

Murphy fared ill in comparison both to his co-stars and previous interpretations of Hal, his character being neither the noble prince of Burton, nor the political schemer others felt he ought to be: ‘We are a long way from the wary, almost furtive admiration suggested by

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<sup>119</sup> Desmond Pratt, *Yorkshire Post*, 10 June 1982; Michael Billington, *The Guardian*, 11 June 1982.

<sup>120</sup> Tom Vaughan, *Morning Star*, June 1982.

Ian Holm'.<sup>121</sup> The production wallowed in a nostalgic vision of merry England that created a politically safe yet ultimately unsatisfactory finish; the two-play sequence appears to have been chosen for its length rather than content, Nunn seeking to present a warm-spirited play to exhibit the new theatre, and not considering the implications of the chosen text or the subsequent structure and themes brought out by presenting the two plays together.

### Challenging Tradition: The ESC

The RSC was encouraging its audience to expect nostalgia and repetition in the cycle; this in turn made it difficult for other companies to break the mould. Peter Holland remarks that 'The only major challenge' to the RSC at this time 'came from the English Shakespeare Company, founded by Michael Bogdanov and Michael Pennington.'<sup>122</sup> Disillusioned with existing theatre companies, Bogdanov and Pennington had decided the only way forward was to create their own. When looking for funding for a touring group, they soon realised that to gain support they had to offer Shakespeare, and they had to make it big. As Pennington himself writes, 'Nothing is larger in Shakespeare than the epic sequence of Histories that runs over eight plays'.<sup>123</sup> But as Holland notes, 'at this point, Shakespeare in England still substantially meant the RSC', so it was in the interest of the ESC to define its production in contrast to the continuing tradition the RSC had created.<sup>124</sup> Accordingly, the programme's promotional literature emphasised a sense of novelty and innovation in the project:

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<sup>121</sup> Stephen Wall, *Times Literary Supplement*, 25 June 1982.

<sup>122</sup> Peter Holland, *English Shakespeare: Shakespeare on the English Stage in the 1990s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 21.

<sup>123</sup> Bogdanov and Pennington, p. 5.

<sup>124</sup> Holland, *English Shakespeare*, p. 21.

This cycle of plays was last staged over twenty years ago in Stratford-upon-Avon, has not been seen as a complete sequence anywhere since, and has never been toured.<sup>125</sup>

Unable to afford to stage eight plays on tour the ESC instead commenced with ‘a brilliant self-contained unit’ that it saw in the two parts of *Henry IV* and *Henry V*.<sup>126</sup> The decision allowed a more economic tour that nonetheless offered potential sponsors a notable event to be associated with, and also sidestepped Quayle’s difficulty in linking *Richard II* to the progress of Hal. Instead an opening song ‘The ballad of Henry le Roy’ was sung at the beginning of *Henry IV Part One* to inform the audience of the old King and Bolingbroke’s seizing of power. Bogdanov justified this insertion thus:

I have to assume that an audience has no background, has not read or seen the plays, has no knowledge of the history of England. Unless I assume this, I am being elitist (p. 43).

Whilst Quayle had struggled to incorporate *Richard II*, Bogdanov struggled without it: the fundamental difference was that by this point in time it was assumed that knowledge of *Richard II* was necessary to understand the following play.

The trilogy received great critical attention as the press debated whether the Henrys were a triumph or not. Costuming was a point of contention: partly because of budgeting, Bogdanov convinced Pennington that *Henry V* should be in modern dress, but to reach this point the other plays would have an eclectic approach. Against the court of the Regency and Victorian era, Hal stood out in ‘torn jeans and an old denim jacket’ (p. 30), an immediate

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<sup>125</sup> Programme for *The Wars of the Roses*, directed by Michael Bogdanov at the Palace Theatre, Manchester, 15-19 March 1988

<sup>126</sup> Bogdanov and Pennington, p. 5.



visual indication of the contrast between Hal and the world of his father. The problem, as Bogdanov points out, is that ‘an eclectic style in form-obsessed English theatre is (or was then) a novelty’ (p. 30), so while some critics applauded the decision as ‘a liberation of the events of the plays from phoney historicism into their rightful role of universal role play, myth’, others felt that the production was ‘wilful, vain and historically dubious’: not only was costume under attack but there were also doubts as to whether the plays were being presented as history or not, and whether this decision was good or bad.<sup>127</sup>

Consequently one audience member complained that impressionable school parties would walk away believing that ‘it is all right for British soldiers to shoot prisoners in the back, rob the dead, use foul language and behave like hooligans – and that this is what the British army does’, which reveals a bizarre assumption felt by most that to reassess Shakespeare’s characters is to slight the historical figures they are based on.<sup>128</sup> The ESC tried to release the plays from their context with contemporary clothing, but the general public, fed on the RSC’s historically based, traditional cycles, were divided on how to receive this innovation; indeed, in examples such as the one above, many audience members were openly hostile to innovation in the history cycle.

Despite the controversy (or perhaps because of it) the company endured and, building on its success, expanded the series to present the complete cycle, or at least an approximation of it. As in the cycles of Dingelstedt, Atkins and Barton and Hall before, the three parts of *Henry VI* became the two parts of *Henry VI*. Bogdanov argues that ‘the plays sprawl and

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<sup>127</sup> Robin Thorber, *The Guardian*, cited in *The English Shakespeare Company* (see Bogdanov and Pennington above), p. 160; Michael Billington, *The Guardian*, cited in *The English Shakespeare Company* (see Bogdanov and Pennington, above), p. 50.

<sup>128</sup> Mrs A. N. Butler, cited in *The English Shakespeare Company* (see Bogdanov and Pennington, above), pp. 302-3.

brawl and they are clearly early works [...] probably the result of improvisation and have been tampered with, edited, and the best writing is in *Part 2*' (p. 100). It was therefore alright, given Bogdanov's view that they were not very good, to condense the plays so they would be over all the quicker. The *Henry VI* plays were viewed not as an opportunity but rather part of the package that came with presenting all of the histories. Pennington writes:

The actors in these plays get used to serving a rather confining brief, that of simply moving the story along – especially when subtleties of character have been further ironed out by ruthless cutting; the audience became hypnotised by a rhythm dynamic enough to hold the interest but not trouble the imagination over much (p. 171).

The plan was simple: get through the weaker plays quickly before anyone gets bored. This of course relied upon audiences deciding to view the entire saga, which was not always the case. The programme impressed upon the audience that while 'each play can, of course, be enjoyed separately [...] together they give you a unique opportunity to see Shakespeare's histories as a natural progression'.<sup>129</sup> As a touring show, audiences did not have the luxury of returning weeks later to see further shows; each play was performed once in each venue, so audience members might only see one, or else had to rearrange their plans swiftly to continue watching the tale unfold: Bogdanov writes that 'stories of baby-sitting rows, spouses refusing to leave cars behind, emergency arrangements to get home – or stay the night – filtered back each week' (p. 55). But it was not only essential to the director's vision, but also the company's finances, that audiences saw many, if not all, of the plays.

The encouragement on the company's part for audiences to see the cycle as one continuous story led to the misconception that the direction of one play indicated the

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<sup>129</sup> Programme for Palace Theatre, Manchester, 15-19 March 1988.

direction of all the plays, an approach which caused the directors great consternation on press night at the Old Vic. Bogdanov writes:

It was ghastly. We had inadvertently dug an elephant trap for ourselves and fallen leadenly in. Imagine our anger and frustration on reading a one-off analysis from someone unknown on the style of *Richard II* in which the writer was assuming that the rest of the cycle was the same. Or another, dipping into *Henry IV Part 2*, saying that she couldn't imagine what *Richard II* had been like. No wonder. The problem with seeing only one performance in a considered cycle of seven meant there was no context (p. 212).

Pennington and Bogdanov had presented a cycle and now suffered the consequences; the plays had to be seen as a group or else be misunderstood. Reviewing *Henry IV Part One*, which in this production deliberately ended with Hal no more in his father's favour, one critic felt that 'director Michael Bogdanov has turned a brilliantly constructed and unified work of art into something that is incomplete and unsatisfying. He could not have said "to be continued" more clearly if he had had a couple of pom-pom girls parade a banner across the stage'.<sup>130</sup> While Bogdanov 'took this intended criticism as a compliment' (p. 55), it highlights the fundamental problem with serialised Shakespeare: the destruction of each play's individuality relied heavily upon the audience to see the complete cycle, or else feel dissatisfied with the one chapter they had watched. The ESC had offered a new and radically different interpretation of the cycle, which has since been acknowledged as 'The only other major English language presentation of the "sequence"' outside of Stratford, but ultimately the ESC cycle was performed in the context of the RSC's heritage,

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<sup>130</sup> *The Toronto Star*, cited in *The English Shakespeare Company* (see Bogdanov and Pennington, above), p. 55.

against which it was viewed unfavourably by many who preferred their history to be a little more traditional.<sup>131</sup>

### Back to Stratford: Noble's Histories

Whilst the ESC found itself trapped by the general audience's expectations of a series, Stratford was once more laying its claim upon the histories. Adrian Noble's 1988 adaptation of the first tetralogy, *The Plantagenets*, was played on a relatively plain set, in costumes appropriate to the time period in which the plot was set, and consequently received praise from many quarters precisely because it was not the ESC. Michael Ratcliffe of the *Observer* remarked that 'After the raffish, twentieth-century limbo of the English Shakespeare Company's cycle, rich heraldry returns to the Histories on the main Stratford stage of the RSC.'<sup>132</sup> Michael Billington concluded that 'you don't need to update these plays', drawing a deliberate contrast between the Stratford and non-Stratford cycle:

Contrast it with the bustling, energetic, modern-dress version of these same plays Michael Bogdanov's English Shakespeare Company gave us at the Old Vic. Where Mr Noble's production scores is that it anchors the plays in the fifteenth century.<sup>133</sup>

The lack of energy or directorial vision in Noble's production was excused, even applauded, because the histories were being pushed firmly back in their place, both historically and geographically: the tradition resumed. Lisa Hopkins notes the 'demand for

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<sup>131</sup> Burns, 'Shakespeare's Histories in Cycles', p. 154.

<sup>132</sup> Michael Ratcliffe, *The Observer*, 30 October 1988.

<sup>133</sup> Michael Billington, *The Guardian*, 3 April 1989.

period accuracy, so rarely encountered in professional criticism of Shakespearean productions' that continues to appear in reviews of the histories.<sup>134</sup>

The view of them as representations of history, rather than dramatic works, prevailed at the cost of any innovation in the plays. Billington applauded the tradition, noting that Noble's production was 'the third time in a quarter century that Stratford has resurrected these once derided plays', and that 'Each time they have come up trumps'.<sup>135</sup> But others were beginning to see the signs of wear on the cycle; despite Ratcliffe's condemnation of the ESC production, in the same review he noted that the latest Stratford cycle 'holds the Hall Barton Hands line with honour, but adds little individual of its own.' Rhoda Koenig felt that, while the production was notable for its heraldry and authentic costumes, 'What Noble has not done, however, is to provide us with very much passion [...] to support the pageantry':

A routine, lightweight air pervades this production, as though more thought has gone into shifting the characters about than to figuring out who they are.<sup>136</sup>

Acting was questioned, especially the doubling that a cycle demanded of the company; one critic felt that 'Oliver Cotton's Buckingham is accomplished, so his RSC, rent-a-cockney Cade cannot be entirely his fault.'<sup>137</sup> However, Noble's continuation of tradition included the clever recasting of Anton Lesser as Richard of Gloucester, reprising the role he had played in Hands' 1977 cycle, but continuing it through to *Richard III*, which

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<sup>134</sup> Lisa Hopkins, 'The King's Melting Body: *Richard II*', in *A Companion to Shakespeare's Works* (see Dutton and Howard, above), II (*The Histories*), pp. 395-411, p. 395.

<sup>135</sup> Michael Billington, *The Guardian*, 24 October 1988.

<sup>136</sup> Rhoda Koenig, *Punch*, 14 April 1989.

<sup>137</sup> Carl Miller, *City Limits*, 13 April 1989.

satisfied those ‘who have waited over ten years for Anton Lesser to return to Stratford and fulfil the promise of his embryo Richard of Gloucester.’<sup>138</sup> The cycle was regarded as ‘emotionally more satisfying than Hands’ trilogy, which came to an end just as the fun was about to start.’<sup>139</sup> Acceptance of the cycle here rose to anticipation that threatened the conclusion of each play: *Henry VI Part Three* was perceived as disappointing unless followed by *Richard III*, and whilst watching the earlier two plays it was Gloucester’s starring role that the critics had ‘all been waiting for’.<sup>140</sup>

In line with tradition, the Stratford production once more employed a permanent set, with a prominent feature of a throne that raised upon a platform to reveal a cage beneath, where kings and lords might be seen to rise and fall. One reviewer felt that through this prop ‘Noble gives us a clear narrative path through the confusions of the Wars of the Roses and the struggles with France. He gives us two structures of power, the throne and the prison-cell, which are both physical and symbolic; whose occupants change but whose presence is constant.’<sup>141</sup> Along with this was a metallic sun, serrated around the edges to resemble a circular saw, that moved towards stage left during the course of the three productions to take centre stage in *Richard III*: this ‘son of York’. But ultimately the clever sets and period costumes did not fully succeed in smoothing over the cracks that were beginning to show in Stratford’s great tradition. Rhoda Koenig of *Punch* concluded her review by remarking ‘If quantity and action are your yardsticks then *The Plantagenets* delivers excellent value for money. But if what you care about are words and their music, it

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<sup>138</sup> Jack Tinker, *Daily Mail*, 24 October 1988.

<sup>139</sup> Irving Wardle, *The Times*, 24 October 1988.

<sup>140</sup> Barbara Lewis, *Bromsgrove Advertiser*, 3 November 1988.

<sup>141</sup> Tony Dunn, *Tribune*, 14 April 1989.

may, to put it crudely, be left to the better class of tourist.’<sup>142</sup> The cycle was an event rather than a dramatic work, to be looked at, but not actually watched.

When Noble took over as artistic director at the RSC three years later, the occasion was marked, as were most occasions in Stratford, by a history cycle. The *Henry IV* plays were deemed a suitable choice of production; Noble appears to have balked at the idea but, given his recent promotion, he claimed that ‘I thought I should lead from the front. So I asked myself what I should do, and I partly resisted doing the *Henrys* but then I thought, it’s what I want to do.’<sup>143</sup> The tradition behind the choice of play was reinforced by the accompanying programme’s double-spread feature dedicated to past productions, which notably omitted not only the ESC’s production but also the Olivier/Richardson production of 1945, limiting the remembrance of the past to Stratford’s stage only. The appropriateness of a cycle production was picked up by the reviews and applauded as a triumphant and bold move:

Adrian Noble, the Royal Shakespeare Company’s new artistic director, has arrived in Stratford with drums beating, banners waving and a fight scene to match anything seen on stage. This was no tentative first step on the company’s hallowed ground.<sup>144</sup>

Elements of Noble’s previous cycle were brought across to this production, one reviewer noting how ‘Designs are by Bob Crowley whose magnificent heraldic scheme was one of the memorable features of *The Plantagenets*.’<sup>145</sup> Likewise the costuming would once more be in period, the costume designer Deirdre Clancy explaining that ‘being a

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<sup>142</sup> Rhoda Koenig, *Punch*, 14 April 1989.

<sup>143</sup> Adrian Noble, in interview with Terry Grimley, *Birmingham Post*, 31 March 1991.

<sup>144</sup> David Griffin, *Evening News*, 18 April 1991.

<sup>145</sup> Ann Fitzgerald, *Warwickshire and Worcestershire Life*, April 1991.

history it would be perverse not to'.<sup>146</sup> Once again, the visual element of the production betrayed the desire to anchor each text in its historical context, placing it firmly within a larger framework rather than releasing them as individuals. Charles Spencer found fault with the set in his review, specifically because he felt it was not historically accurate, complaining that the Eastcheap set 'doesn't symbolise your average Elizabethan pub'.<sup>147</sup>

As with previous productions, presenting both parts together resulted in the perception of Falstaff, played this time by Robert Stephens, as the main character of the piece. One reviewer felt that 'Stephens makes a charming intellectual out of Falstaff [...] but rather at the expense of the rest of the play'.<sup>148</sup> Another reviewer expanded on this by suggesting that Stephens' ability for 'projecting the self-disgust of men who have let themselves go morally [...] upsets the balance of the *Henry* plays. Instead of experiencing flickers of anxiety about his future, this introspective Falstaff already seems to be preparing for his rejection by Hal at the end of Part Two'.<sup>149</sup> Indeed, Peter Holland notes of Falstaff's farewell to Doll that Stephens portrayed a 'sharp awareness that they will not meet again'.<sup>150</sup> Falstaff's rejection at the end of *Part Two* dominated the text, informing how the characters were portrayed in scenes prior to their knowledge of Falstaff's fate.

Stephens himself claimed of Falstaff that 'Underneath that great padding he was a good soldier in his youth' and unwittingly allied himself with Morgann in his view that Falstaff is 'not cowardly, just a total survivor. And you have to avoid any sense of mawkishness,

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<sup>146</sup> Deirdre Clancy in interview with Terry Grimley, *Birmingham Post*, 31 March 1991.

<sup>147</sup> Charles, Spencer, *Daily Telegraph*, 18 April 1991.

<sup>148</sup> Malcolm Rutherford, *Financial Times*, 18 April 1991.

<sup>149</sup> Paul Taylor, *Independent*, 18 April 1991.

<sup>150</sup> Holland, p. 110.



self-pity or sentimentality.’<sup>151</sup> The focus upon Falstaff as central tragic figure rather than comedic commentator led reviewers to question its detrimental effect upon the buoyancy of the first play: one reviewer remarked that Falstaff ‘does not take enough pleasure in himself; he lacks the authentic rumble.’<sup>152</sup> Significantly, when the second part was reviewed later in the year, critics’ opinion altered having seen the whole of Noble’s production. Charles Spencer recanted his condemnation of *Part One* saying that ‘The production has now acquired a fluent confidence [...] and Robert Stephens’ Falstaff has both mellowed and gained in panache.’<sup>153</sup> The change in opinion may be attributed to Spencer’s experience of the two parts as a whole:

Watching the two plays on the same day is an overwhelming experience. In this great national epic, Shakespeare was writing at the very peak of his powers [...]. The depth of vision in *Henry IV* is as remarkable as its breadth.

Spencer’s comments focused on the production as ‘epic’, with ‘depth’ that made it ‘overwhelming’; ultimately the positive aspect he perceived was the sheer size and scope of the plays as one unit, rather than the quality of acting or directing. Noble’s production was intended as a whole; thus when they seen as such they were applauded, whilst individually the plays were questioned. To make a history cycle was to do so at the expense of any individual merit the plays might have.

### The End of the Century: ‘This England’

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<sup>151</sup> Robert Stephens, in interview with Terry Grimley, *Birmingham Post* 13 October 1991; Robert Stephens, in interview with Ann Fitzgerald, *Warwickshire and Worcestershire Life*, April 1991.

<sup>152</sup> John Gross, *Sunday Telegraph*, 21 April 1991.

<sup>153</sup> Charles Spencer, *Telegraph*, 3 June 1991.

Given the pattern of cycles as a celebration of occasion in Shakespeare, it is almost redundant to add that come the new millennium, Stratford put on a production of the histories. For the first time since Barton and Hall, the entire cycle would be produced under the collective title of 'This England', and, more pioneering yet, *all* eight plays would be performed, with no conflation of *Henry VI*. However, the history season of 2000 shows the cycle at Stratford in its most deformed state, a strange combination of contradictions and compromise. The plays maintained a continuity of casting, but not a continuity of direction, with different directors tackling different plays. Despite this, the two parts of *Henry IV* were assigned to the same director, as were the three parts of *Henry VI* and *Richard III*, signifying an individuality of some, but not all, the histories.

The multiplicity of directions clashed with the uniformity of casting to ensure that audiences might follow the same plot, but not witness any significant commentary upon the plays as presented in a cyclical format. When David Troughton's Bolingbroke went on to reign in *Henry IV*, moving from the white, minimalist set of Stephen Pimlott's *Richard II* to Michael Attenborough's traditional, heraldic production, the alteration in direction and presentation provoked a change in the audience's perception of the character. Benedict Nightingale noted of Troughton's King that 'gone is the fierce ambition the king-to-be displayed in *Richard II*, and in its place is a mix of defiance, desperation for reassurance, bitterness at his son, yearning for tranquillity, remorse, exhaustion and near-despair.'<sup>154</sup> Michael Coveney felt in contrast that 'Troughton continues his vigorous course as a deeply troubled Henry, so there is at least some semblance of artistic continuity' in a production where he felt 'The lack of overall impetus and vision is beginning to tell, as the cycle

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<sup>154</sup> Benedict Nightingale, *The Times*, 21 April 2000.

moves from the brutal white antechamber of Richard II, in Stratford's *The Other Place*, to a broiling battlefield in the Swan.'<sup>155</sup>

It was not possible for critics to define where continuity existed and where individual direction took over. Nightingale felt that Adam Levy's *Hotspur* failed to maintain continuity between the two plays; 'The performances don't tally - but who cares? Like so much of this production, it succeeds at the time.' Carole Woddis of the *Herald* felt that the overall narrative still shined through:

If there is to be justification for the RSC's current History cycle it must be in the showing of the making of a nation over a century's time-span, and, despite the lack of an overall directorial vision, a sense of continuity.<sup>156</sup>

The weight of RSC tradition was felt heavily in the presentation of *Henry V*, as it was directed by Peter Hall's son. While one critic remarked that 'Compared with his dad, Edward Hall is something of a laggard', another felt of the production that 'His father, Sir Peter, co-founder of the RSC, must be very proud'.<sup>157</sup> Despite the title of 'This England' ascribed to the 2000 production, the reflection on history that the cycles offered was becoming ever more specific to Stratford's, rather than England's history.

The RSC's diverse cycle suddenly became uniform in the second half, for whilst *Richard II* and *Henry V* had been ascribed individual directors, all three plays of *Henry VI* and *Richard III* were presented under the single direction of Boyd. In contrast to the

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<sup>155</sup> Michael Coveney, *Daily Mail*, 21 April 2000.

<sup>156</sup> Carole Woddis, *Stratford-upon-Avon Herald*, 25 April 2000.

<sup>157</sup> Charles Spencer, *Daily Telegraph*, 4 September 2000; Georgina Brown, *The Mail on Sunday*, 3 September 2000.

multiple directions of the second tetralogy, this was far more in keeping with RSC tradition, as Russell Jackson notes:

The staging of these plays has proved, even more than the first part of ‘This England’, that the Royal Shakespeare Company can make a return to the principles of ensemble nowhere better than in its dealings with the English history plays.<sup>158</sup>

Ultimately this was a self-contained series with little connection to the earlier run of histories in the season. Whilst Troughton and Levy had continued their roles from Pimlott’s production to Attenborough’s, and William Houston’s Hal had become Henry V under Hall, Christian Mahrle did not continue his role of Gloucester into *Henry VI*: the first tetralogy involved a completely separate cast who doubled amongst the four plays. This allowed for a stronger sense of unity to be achieved within them, as David Oyelowo explains:

Michael’s idea to have any actor whose character had died re-emerge as a new character but retain the philosophy of their former incarnation (i.e. remain a Lancastrian or a Yorkist) meant that, even though nearly every actor played more than one character, the audience were never lost as to where their allegiance lay.<sup>159</sup>

The resulting unity between these four plays specifically reduced the first tetralogy into one chapter among a cycle of otherwise individual direction. It remained an odd mix of individual productions and serial mentality, with continuity between some plays and not in others; the impression appears to be that the idea of a cycle was picked before any concept of theme was decided on. Edward Burns writes that ‘the millennium RSC production has reaffirmed a sense of it as central to their repertoire, and of their repertoire as somehow of

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<sup>158</sup> Russell Jackson, “‘This England’: Shakespeare at Stratford-upon-Avon, Winter 2000-2001’, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 52 (2001), 383-392 (p. 383).

<sup>159</sup> Oyelowo, p. 45.

central importance.’<sup>160</sup> But in becoming such a staple ingredient in the RSC’s catalogue, the history cycle has become staid and restricting. Jackson recognises ‘the ideals that once made the RSC (in company speak) a reliable brand name’, most notably how ‘a degree of predictability in the product and its scheduling is vital to the encouragement of a base of recurrent playgoers’.<sup>161</sup> This predictability has stifled originality. Instead of pioneering a vision across the histories, directors at Stratford seem to have lost the ability to consider them as anything but a cycle, and therefore must fit their productions within the constraints of this frame regardless of whether it benefits their production or not.

### Conclusion: Challenging the Cycles

So far this chapter has focused purely upon those productions of history plays which presented them as a series of two or more plays; but there continued to be individual productions during this time also. As will be explored in the ensuing chapters, *Richard II*, *Henry V* and *Richard III* continued to be presented as autonomous dramas in numerous successful productions, both at the RSC and beyond. For *Henry IV* and *Henry VI*, however, the growing awareness of cycle productions resulted in a situation at Stratford where they were only presented in tandem with other parts. One exception stands out: Katie Mitchell’s 1994 production of *Henry VI: Battle for the Throne*, an individual presentation of *Henry VI Part Three*. The production was put on with little fuss at The Other Place, with a minimalist set and costume in stark contrast to the RSC’s epic cycles. The decision to do the play was Mitchell’s, when she told the artistic director, Adrian Noble, that she wanted to do the play on its own, his response was one of disbelief. In an interview Mitchell

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<sup>160</sup> Edward Burns, ‘Shakespeare’s Histories in Cycles’, pp. 154-5.

<sup>161</sup> Jackson, “‘This England’”: Shakespeare at Stratford-upon-Avon, Winter 2000-2001’, p. 391.

recalled how Noble ‘laughed and asked her if she was serious’; Noble’s own experience with the play having been in abridged form, it is telling that when Mitchell discussed it with him, he was unable to ‘remember at what precise point in the internecine wranglings this play begins.’<sup>162</sup> Mitchell’s production, which I shall discuss further in chapter four, was just one exception against the backdrop of the RSC’s numerous productions of *Henry VI* as part of a cycle.

At the close of the twentieth century the attitude towards the history cycle was such that not only were serial productions made without first querying why they were being done as a series, or what they hoped to achieve as such, but moreover when plays such as *Henry VI Part Three* were presented individually, this was questioned at a time when cycles were not. Without the requirement to convince an audience of the story’s unity, directors no longer need to formulate the over-riding structures of Tillyard’s providentialism in the 1951 cycle, or Kott’s political outlook in the 1964 production; the history cycles offered in the latter half of the century have had little defining vision beyond a nostalgic recollection of earlier cycles.

Peter O’Toole once said of Hamlet’s infamous soliloquy that audience members would actually speak the lines along with him while he performed it, a phenomenon which Kevin Kline later dubbed as ‘singalongaHamlet’; a bizarre moment of drama when the audience knows the sequence word for word and enjoys it precisely for that comfortable uniformity.<sup>163</sup> The recent trend of cycles on the English stage, most prominently at the RSC, identifies this same phenomenon, encouraging a sense of tradition in the cycle at

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<sup>162</sup> Katie Mitchell in interview with Paul Taylor, *Independent*, 10 August 1994.

<sup>163</sup> Peter O’Toole in *There is Nothing Like a Dane* ed. by Clive Francis (London: Nick Hern Books, 1998), p. 26; Kevin Kline cited in Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, *Writers and their work: Hamlet* (London: Northcote House, 1996), p. 33.

Stratford, in the hope that audiences will find enjoyment in repetition and familiarity.

Holland remarks that 'the RSC is the inheritor of a long tradition of English Shakespeare production, a tradition that it has rarely sought fundamentally to radicalise.'<sup>164</sup> Rather than exploring and refining the 'diverse, multi-directional history-cycle'<sup>165</sup> which it played with in 2000, the RSC has announced its plans for its next cycle in 2007 to be under the sole direction of Boyd.

Whilst individual plays can easily be presented by any company, professional or amateur, a cycle of two or more plays is beyond the resources of many, and those that might afford to, such as the National Theatre, are perhaps less willing to devote an entire year of theatre to one playwright, let alone one story. It is little surprise then that it is the RSC, with its funding and focus on Shakespeare, which dominates the performance history of the cycle. But it is equally true to say that the cycle dominates the performance history of the RSC. Robert Shaughnessy notes 'the centrality of the histories to the RSC's cultural project', and Lois Potter remarks upon the reinvention of the history cycle as a rite of passage for the RSC:<sup>166</sup>

Aware of the history plays as part of its own history, the Royal Shakespeare Company has given one production of a cycle each decade, each time with a sense that it was embodying something about its sense of itself as a theatre.<sup>167</sup>

In Stratford the cycle has become an event rather than a dramatic work, and it is precisely in their lack of innovation, their capacity to evoke a connection with prior cycles in Stratford's history, that the RSC continues to present the plays in this way. The early

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<sup>164</sup> Holland, p. 23.

<sup>165</sup> Michael Billington, *The Guardian*, 21 April 2000.

<sup>166</sup> Shaughnessy, p. 3.

<sup>167</sup> Potter, p. 293.

cycles of the mid-twentieth century looked forward, promoting a new view of the histories on the stage, but since then each production has looked back, recreating history, rather than redefining it. Shaughnessy concurs that the RSC's continual production of the cycle says more about the company than the plays themselves:

Rolling around at roughly twelve-year intervals ever since, history cycles have continued to perform for the RSC an economically and artistically regenerative role, forging a sense of unity, clarity and purpose, acting as a reminder that the company exists for something far more profound and far-reaching than the repertory production of single plays: to carry the national burden of Shakespeare, his, and our, supposed mythical history.<sup>168</sup>

The history cycle has become traditional, staid and predictable. Since their publication in the *First Folio*, many of the histories have become almost exclusively considered as a sequence. What was initially a minority view has, thanks to stage productions in the twentieth century, become an evermore potent and dominant way in which to consider these plays. The effects of the cycle has permeated almost every discussion of these eight history plays, and in turn led to a reduction of critical interest in others. In his appraisal of the twentieth century's critical approaches to the histories, Edward Berry concludes the century's search for unity in the plays by recognising that a new approach is necessary to open the plays up any further:

It is hard to escape the conclusion that we have reached the end of a tradition of critical thought regarding the histories, and that the genre as a whole, if indeed genre itself remains a viable framework, requires new questions and new critical models. Given the enduring vitality of the plays, one suspects they will come.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Shaughnessy, p. 39.

<sup>169</sup> Berry, 'Twentieth Century Criticism: The Histories', p. 256.



It is my belief that exploring these plays in their own right, rather than imposing the concepts of genre or theme upon them, is the appropriate new critical model by which to maintain and invigorate the vitality of the histories. The chronological ordering of Shakespeare's plays in the Oxford Complete Works offers a perception of the history which directly challenges the unity once offered by the First Folio, and our growing awareness of the true sequence of the histories prompts a reconsideration of the view that the plays were intended as a dramatic whole. This does not mean that they cannot be considered in relation to one another; Holderness points out that 'The separate plays can, for example, be regarded as inter-connected in non-linear ways.'<sup>170</sup> It is now time to challenge the cycle once more, to ask why these plays must be presented in narrative order and explore how else they can be presented. In the second part of this thesis I will now investigate the opportunities these plays offer as individual pieces, to question the monopoly which the cycle has upon our perception of the history plays and to prompt a reconsideration of these plays as works of drama in their own right.

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<sup>170</sup> Holderness, p. 12.

Part Two:

Breaking the Cycle

## Chapter Three

### I Am Myself Alone: *Richard III*, *Henry V* and *Richard II*

#### Individual Success

While the concept of a unified series is monopolising the modern perception of many of the history plays, that domination is not yet complete; without the cumbersome addition of ‘Part One/Two/Three’ after their title, the plays of *Richard II*, *Henry V* and *Richard III* have maintained an individual status despite having the same historical background and inspiration as the *Henry IV* and *Henry VI* plays. In this chapter I shall consider how these three plays achieved independence, in what way they were interpreted as such and how this was affected by the introduction of the history cycle to the English stage, before finally considering ways in which each interpretation, serial and individual, can be supported and argued in the original text. By so doing I aim to show that much of what we take for granted about the nature of these plays can be questioned, and that they bear just as much, or as little, claim to independence as the other histories.

In the titles bestowed on them in the First Folio, these three plays were exempt from discussion of whether they were plays or merely parts, and in the three centuries prior to the cycle on stage, these plays were performed more regularly than the others and celebrated as separate dramas in a way that the intervening plays were not permitted. However, their pre-cycle success is due to more than just the titular decisions of Heminge and Condell.

To begin with the earliest of the plays, *Richard III*, we must acknowledge the practical appeal of the sheer size and attraction of the title role. Ironically the crookback owes much of his success on the stage to Colley Cibber rather than Shakespeare. Cibber's adaptation of 1699 trimmed much of the original text, cutting major scenes and characters such as Margaret, Hastings, Edward IV, the two murderers and Clarence, arguably offering a more coherent plot, but more importantly creating a greater emphasis upon Richard. Lull concurs that 'Cibber shrewdly exaggerated the play's potential as a star vehicle'.<sup>1</sup> By glorifying the part that he himself would play in the early productions, Cibber created a role that the leading actors of the next two centuries would consider a benchmark: his character was taken on by others, including David Garrick who confirmed its success: Cibber's adaptation was presented eighty-four times in the four decades after it was written, and two hundred and thirteen times in the twenty-nine years that Garrick managed the Drury Lane Theatre.<sup>2</sup> The success of Garrick in the role combined with his promotion of the Bard of Avon only further promoted the link between Cibber's creation and Shakespeare's original.

However, this interpretation of Cibber's adaptation is incomplete. As noted in chapter one, the development of Richard was achieved not only by editing other characters out of the play, but by incorporating scenes from the *Henry VI* plays that might provide a background to the crookback's rise to power, most notably in the inclusion of Henry's murder. Furthermore, Cibber included scenes which have no bearing on Richard's character; for example, the opening speech from *Part One* was used as Anne's lament for Henry VI. Presumably the use of Shakespeare's lines supported Cibber's aim not only to

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<sup>1</sup> Lull, ed., *Richard III*, p. 25.

<sup>2</sup> See Lull, ed., *Richard III*, p. 25

‘imitate his Style and manner of thinking’, but to quote the plays directly or else write what he described as ‘generally [Shakespeare’s] thoughts, in the best dress I could afford ’em.’<sup>3</sup> The result is a play that represents the events and style of four distinct plays by Shakespeare. The contradiction of celebrating *Richard III* as an individual play is that the version which prevailed upon the English stage for so many years was actually a conflation, a one-play history cycle that actually argued for the dependence of Shakespeare’s *Richard III* upon the other plays.

In direct contrast, the success of *Henry V* on the stage can be directly attributed to its individuality. The play endured as a commemoration of a great English hero, a great English victory and consequently as a celebration of the English spirit: Jonathan Bate points out that during the Napoleonic wars, ‘*Henry V* was the most useful at this time.’<sup>4</sup> However, for the play to be a victory play, it is necessary to ignore all that follows: the loss of France by Henry’s infant son and the descent into civil war. David Scott Kastan argues that ‘Unlike their modern counterparts, historians in the sixteenth century were willing to isolate the victorious acts of Henry V from the temporal context in which they occur. From such a vantage point they saw only the peerless warrior-king’.<sup>5</sup>

The historic interpretation of Henry as ‘peerless warrior-king’ seeped into Shakespeare’s dramatisation of events and ultimately into the stage productions of the play for the following three centuries, which thrived precisely because it was independent of the surrounding plays and the negative implications of territorial loss and national insecurity

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<sup>3</sup> Cibber, Preface.

<sup>4</sup> Bate, p. 14.

<sup>5</sup> Kastan, *Shakespeare and the Shapes of Time*, p. 58.

that they present. The play's dependency on individuality can be seen by the contrasting, negative views of Henry that arose in critical writing where the play was considered within the cycle. As discussed in chapter one, it was a serial viewpoint, and the consequent awareness of Hal's inappropriate behaviour, which prompted Hazlitt to argue that while Henry 'is a very favourite monarch with the English nation [he] scarcely deserves this honour.'<sup>6</sup>

In contrast to such views the theatre embraced the play as an individual drama of triumph. Sprague argued that it was unlikely that 'a play so busily occupied as this one is with a single military event should prove at last to be an exposition of Renaissance thought on the nature of kingship. *Henry V* is no more a scholar's play than it is a giddy one.'<sup>7</sup> So long as the theatre had yet to adopt the history cycle, the interpretation of the play remained divided; the actors and audience celebrated it while the scholars, wary of its historical and dramatic background, continued to question the morality of the King. Andrew Gurr remarked that 'almost the whole history of the play as performed amounts to a series of patriotic and emotional readings rather than the analysis of its ambivalence that reading the play in private study had evoked.'<sup>8</sup> Until the twentieth century the two readings were distinct; as Sprague points out, despite the critics' objections, 'The treatment of Shakespeare's history on the stage remained much as it had been.'<sup>9</sup>

The conflict between theatre and criticism equally applied to *Richard II*, though with the opposite results: the play failed to maintain a place on the English stage through the

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<sup>6</sup> Hazlitt, p. 156.

<sup>7</sup> Sprague, p. 92.

<sup>8</sup> Andrew Gurr, ed., William Shakespeare, *Henry V*, New Cambridge Shakespeare (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 37-8.

<sup>9</sup> Sprague, p. 96.

seventeenth and eighteenth century, but critics applauded it. In the nineteenth century Hazlitt remarked that '*Richard II.* is a play little known compared with *Richard III.*, which last is a play that every unfledged candidate for theatrical fame chuses to strut and fret his hour upon the stage in; yet we confess that we prefer the nature and feeling of the one to the noise and bustle of the other'.<sup>10</sup> However, the theatre of the time leaned precisely towards that noise and bustle which Hazlitt deplored: *Richard III* and *Henry V* offered strong lead roles, melodrama and spectacle, but *Richard II* relied on poetic writing and a weak king. The sensitive subject matter of deposing the rightful ruler prevented the play from reaching the stage on a number of occasions: Nahum Tate's adaptation of the play was forbidden three days after its opening on 11 December 1680, and when he tried to present it under another title with renamed characters, the playhouse was shut down.<sup>11</sup>

The poet King, be it Tate's or Shakespeare's, failed to grasp the public's imagination, despite several efforts at revivals. David Garrick was warned away from the play by George Steevens who felt that 'A few splendid passages will not maintain a play on the stage.'<sup>12</sup> It was not until Charles Kean's revival of 1857 that the play enjoyed any permanent success, and the case proves interesting as proof that an obscure Shakespearean history play can achieve popularity. Kean's master-stroke was to produce the play with the spectacle that his audience expected from contemporary productions, and furthermore to embed the play within its historical context. Drawing on a prevalent mood of reverence for both history and display inspired by the spate of Great Exhibitions around the country in the 1850's, Kean offered a production of *Richard II* with accurate costumes, set designs

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<sup>10</sup> Hazlitt, p. 137.

<sup>11</sup> Nahum Tate, *The History of King Richard the Second* (1680), repr. in *Shakespeare: The Critical Heritage* (see Vickers, above), I, pp. 321-340.

<sup>12</sup> George Steevens cited in Sprague, p. 29.

and scenes from the time in which the drama was set.<sup>13</sup> The epitome of this occurred in the non-existent scene of Bolingbroke's entry into London. Kean seized upon the description offered by York in 5.3 and transformed it into 'the most graphic Shakespearean illustration that ever entered into the mind of actor or manager: an illustration that gave a reality to the play it was never supposed to possess.'<sup>14</sup> Kean recreated old London town and staged the scene amongst a multitude of extras, 'a stage crowd of hundreds, each member of which [...] was drilled to make an individual contribution'.<sup>15</sup>

Ultimately, Kean's interest lay in the context, rather than the specific content of the play, and Richard Foulkes notes that 'Kean was bound to find a degree of contradiction and conflict between Shakespeare's treatment of his historical subject in a play such as *Richard II* and the opportunity which it irresistibly presented for a painstaking reconstruction of medieval life.'<sup>16</sup> This led to a distorted production of the text that nonetheless brought it to the attention of subsequent directors: *Richard II* had achieved individual success upon the stage, but the comparative delay in achieving this meant that the play had barely settled on the stage before productions of the history cycle would begin to disrupt our understanding of *Richard II*.

### The Cycle's Effect

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<sup>13</sup> See Richard Foulkes, 'Charles Kean's *King Richard II*: A Pre-Raphaelite Drama', in *Shakespeare and the Victorian Stage*, ed. by Richard Foulkes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 39-55.

<sup>14</sup> John William Cole, *The Life and Theatrical Times of Charles Kean, F.S.A*, 2 vols (London: Richard Bentley, 1859), II, p. 209.

<sup>15</sup> Foulkes, p. 51.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 40-1.



In the twentieth century the theatre caught up with critical views and the cycle became dramatised. Consequently the conflicting views of the stage and page became more resolved, and interpretations of character that had hitherto only been discussed in criticism now began to appear in theatrical productions. For lesser known histories the introduction of the historical cycle greatly increased the number of productions: there were more showings of *Henry VI* than in any other century. However, for the three histories that were already enjoying success on the stage, the sudden awareness of the surrounding context for each individual drama inevitably resulted in a number of new approaches and evaluations of the plays, many of which have proved more enduring than the individual views.

### *Richard III*

After a few short-lived revivals, Shakespeare's *Richard III* had finally regained prominence over Cibber's in 1877 with Henry Irving's production, of whom Lull proclaims 'his victory at last overturned a two-hundred year tradition of using Cibber's words in place of Shakespeare's.'<sup>17</sup> However, the text used was still heavily cut, only amounting to two thirds of the original, so that 'this triumph did not end the practice of focusing narrowly on the title role' (p. 26), but the context that Cibber had added was lost and many characters and scenes remained cut. Consequently, when the history cycle came to the stage, productions of *Richard III* required reconsideration to strengthen the links between the play and its predecessors. This can be seen most clearly in the rise of Margaret in the play, which can be linked directly to both the introduction of the cycle and, as a side-effect, the growing awareness of *Henry VI*. This effect was not immediate; as discussed in chapter

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<sup>17</sup> Lull, ed., *Richard III*, p. 26.

two, Benson's cycle did little to alter the plays from their individual direction; continuity of casting was not actively sought and in the first cycle of 1901 it appears that Margaret remained cut, despite her appearance in *Henry VI Part Two* as played by Constance Benson. When the three plays of *Henry VI* were performed with *Richard III* in 1906, Margaret was included but made little impression: one critic remarked of *Henry VI Part Two* that 'Mrs Benson as Queen Margaret has not very much to do' and when the night of *Richard III* arrived she was seen in the role of Elizabeth instead.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, when Robert Atkins presented the play at the Old Vic in 1923, appearing after his conflation of *Henry VI*, no effort was made to connect the plays together: none of the parts were played by the same actor so that *Richard III* remained distinct from the cycle.

Arguably the production of the *Henry VI* plays at the Birmingham Rep in the early 1950s raised the profile of these plays, which, in turn, encouraged their association with *Richard III*: reviews of the plays captured the anticipation felt towards what was now seen as the final chapter. One critic felt that 'A minor advantage of seeing this rarely performed play is that it has the effect of clearing up all sorts of narrative obscurities in the more famous histories and whets the desire to see them all again at the earliest opportunity.'<sup>19</sup>

The revival of *Henry VI* prompted the recognition of Margaret as a major character. In a review of the Birmingham Rep's trilogy, one critic summarised that 'It is difficult to over-assess Rosalind Boxall's contribution to this fiery chronicle as Queen Margaret.'<sup>20</sup> Equally significant is the remark of another critic, following praise of the prototype

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<sup>18</sup> *Birmingham Express*, 4 May 1906.

<sup>19</sup> *The Times*, April 1952.

<sup>20</sup> *Birmingham Post*, 3 July 1953.

Richard, that ‘The other characters we have called comparative nonentities, and so, with the striking exception of Queen Margaret, who makes her effect against stronger competition even in the later play, perhaps they are.’<sup>21</sup> Margaret was seen as the only equal to Richard, the only character who could stand up to the infamous crookback, both in terms of plot and dramatic presence. When Barton and Hall presented the plays with *Richard III*, Margaret’s impact was immense: Peggy Ashcroft’s portrayal became the toast of the production, one critic remarking that her performance ‘touches greatness.’<sup>22</sup> The part that had previously been cut from productions was now felt by some to be the best feature of the play: the first half of *Richard III* ‘was ponderous – a series of set pieces, relieved in the first act only by Miss Ashcroft’s unnerving tremor when, as the deposed queen, she curses the victors.’<sup>23</sup>

The re-emergence of Margaret continued in individual productions of the play, but having no longer cut the part, directors now had to interpret the character without the explanatory history which *Henry VI* provided. This required a new approach to how we perceive Margaret. To take one example of a major production following the 1963 cycle, Bill Alexander’s production for the RSC in 1984 involved Margaret as a reminder of the past, even when, for the audience, there is no past to remember. In the programme, half of the play synopsis is devoted to her actions:

Queen Margaret, widow of one of Richard’s earlier victims, Henry VI, returns from exile to curse Richard and prophesy his downfall. Her prophecies are fulfilled finally at the battle of Bosworth where

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<sup>21</sup> *The Times*, 2 April 1952.

<sup>22</sup> Harold Hobson, *The Sunday Times*, 25 August 1963.

<sup>23</sup> Ray Seaton, *Wolverhampton Express and Star*, 13 August 1964.

Richard, his relationship with the powerful Buckingham severed, is defeated by Henry Earl of Richmond.<sup>24</sup>

Richard's downfall was reinterpreted as the fulfilment of Margaret's prophecies. Her asides in 1.3 were marked by a change in lighting whilst the other characters on stage paused, apparently frozen, so the audience alone heard Margaret's thoughts; she was awarded a supernatural status with power over the stage itself, and her curses carried genuine significance as portents of what was to come. Margaret's significance was thus justified in the absence of her back-story from the *Henry VI* plays. Modern directors face the dilemma of having to include a reference to the past without the necessary explanation of it; through their subsequent attempts, neither critics nor audiences have felt she needed explanation and both now accept the character as a central part of the text rather than an unfortunate link back to other plays.

But even when presented amongst the other histories, productions of *Richard III* have failed to enjoy the complete success of the pre-cycle age. The *Henry VI* plays, in building anticipation for the last chapter, seem to do rather too good a job of it: many reviews have felt that *Richard III*, as celebrated a play as it may be, makes a disappointing conclusion to the history cycle. When Terry Hands offered the three parts of *Henry VI* in 1977 without *Richard III* there was disappointment and disbelief that Anton Lesser would not continue the role; one critic could not 'imagine that he will be denied the opportunity of developing his evil crookback.'<sup>25</sup> But when that moment came in 1988 the sensation was decidedly anti-climatic: 'With *Richard III*, which ought on every count to be the climax, tension

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<sup>24</sup> Programme for *Richard III*, directed by Bill Alexander at the Swan Theatre, 1984.

<sup>25</sup> Frank Marcus, *Sunday Telegraph*, 17 June 1977.

slackens and impetus is lost.’<sup>26</sup> The same qualities which discouraged so many directors from tackling the *Henry VI* plays, the multitude of characters, the many battle scenes, the swift pace, served in a cyclical production to create an epic feel to the plays; *Richard III* takes place in the court, with subtle plans instead of epic wars and a focus on one character rather than an ensemble cast, so that it makes a quiet ending to an otherwise loud and rousing cycle. Directors cannot win: to make the play fit the cycle involves minimising Richard’s character and focusing on all the characters equally, but to present the play in such a fashion would be to completely contradict our understanding and expectations of the play. Like the eponymous hero, *Richard III* cannot rest peacefully amongst the other kings: it needs to stand alone.

### Henry V

The major effect of the cycle upon *Henry V* is that it has become a final chapter in the story of Hal. As a finale to the second tetralogy, the play was in danger of becoming simply an epilogue where much of the catharsis has already taken place; James Loehlin remarked of the 1979 BBC production that ‘in the context of the Giles/Messina cycle, *Henry V* is a destination rather than a journey.’<sup>27</sup> In the BBC production this resulted in a Henry who was ‘blandly noble’ (p. 75) with little character development. Likewise Tillyard interpreted the play as the history in which Shakespeare had had enough ‘and had no more to say on the matter’, and suggested that consequently Henry’s character suffered in comparison with the more interesting Hal:<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> John Gross, *Sunday Telegraph*, 9 April 1989.

<sup>27</sup> Loehlin, *Henry V*, p. 75.

<sup>28</sup> Tillyard, p. 318.

[Shakespeare] had developed characters of uncommon subtlety and in Prince Hal he had pictured a man, having indeed settled a conflict, but one in whom a genuine conflict had taken place. No wonder if Henry V, traditionally the man who knew exactly what he wanted and went for it with utter singleness of heart, was the very reverse of what Shakespeare was growing truly interested in. (p. 318)

To connect the heroic king with the troubled prince and create continuity within the cycle, directors changed their approach to Henry's character, and the unblemished image of the hero King has given way on stage to the tarnished politician which the critics had long been discussing. When Burton played the King in Quayle's *Henriad*, theatre reviewers noted how this Henry was more reflective, downbeat and doubting than they were previously accustomed to, lacking 'the personal vigour and personality usually associated with this popular hero.'<sup>29</sup> Bearing in mind it was only six years since Olivier's Henry had ridden to glory through a Technicolor Agincourt, Burton's Henry showed a stark contrast between individual and serial readings, so that in the latter production 'what should have been the final flourish of the History Cycle [...] moved all too soberly to an end.'<sup>30</sup> While critics felt his Hal had shown 'princely dash and kingly promise', when Burton moved on to play the King, the doubts he had shown as the prince remained.<sup>31</sup> One critic felt that Burton was 'at his best in quieter moments – moving among his soldiers or wooing Katherine – rather than in the "Once more unto the breach" or "Crispin's day" speeches'.<sup>32</sup>

When the next cycle approached, the treatment of Hal/Henry V was more extreme, and there was a disturbing message to be read in the doubling of Ian Holm as Richard III, and now Henry V. Amongst the political, metallic, cold world of Barton and Hall's production,

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<sup>29</sup> *Nottingham Guardian*, 2 August 1951.

<sup>30</sup> *John O'London's Weekly*, 2 August 1951.

<sup>31</sup> Cecil Wilson, *Daily Mail*, 9 May 1951.

<sup>32</sup> Brian Harvey, *Birmingham Gazette*, 4 August 1951.

sentimentality would not rest well, and accordingly the Henry that Holm offered was more devious than valiant. In this cycle the audience had already seen Henry murder Hotspur with the dagger rather than the sword, and now in this play he offered what one critic dubbed 'Grim Henry V minus the patriotism.'<sup>33</sup> The critic explained himself thus:

Until tonight I had regarded "Henry V" as a play of gorgeous if facile patriotism. It contained all the illusions of an uncritical love of country. This illusion was shattered by the Royal Shakespeare Theatre's production which in visual detail as well as mood reminded me more of scenes from "All Quiet on the Western Front" than the glitter of sunlight on armour.

This was not necessarily the choice which a director approaching the play by itself might choose; Barton and Hall's hands were tied by the overall theme they had selected for their earlier cycle which they now needed to maintain in order to justify calling their productions a coherent whole. James N. Loehlin reflects that the production 'had taken a strongly anti-war line in keeping with the generally nihilistic political views of Jan Kott, which informed the whole cycle.'<sup>34</sup>

In critical writing, more was said on the darker side to what had traditionally been a straight-forward patriotic play. It is interesting to note that in Norman Rabkin's famous essay on the subject, 'Rabbits, Ducks and *Henry V*', his readings into the two sides of the play relies upon the assumption that '*Henry V* is, of course, not only a free-standing play but the last part of a tetralogy' (p. 280). He argues that in patriotic productions of the play it was appropriate to 'Think of *Henry V* as an extension of *I Henry IV*', whilst more sombre

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<sup>33</sup> *Liverpool Post*, 4 June 1964.

<sup>34</sup> Loehlin, *Henry V*, p. 49.

readings marked the play 'as the sequel of the second part of *Henry IV*.'<sup>35</sup> For Rabkin's reading to be true requires a continual referral outside of the boundaries of the text, as can be seen in his interpretation of the Saint Crispin's day speech of 4.3:

Like the dying John of Gaunt, Harry is inspired by a vision of England [...]. Unlike Richard II, Harry disprizes trappings, 'outward things.' Like Hotspur, he cares only about honour and wants to fight with as few troops as possible in order to acquire more of it: 'the fewer men, the greater share of honour.' Like Falstaff [...] he thinks of the 'flowing cups' to come when the work is done and sees the day's events in festival terms. Gaily doing battle on the Feast of Crispian, he is literally playing at war like Hotspur, paradoxically uniting the opposed principles of the two most enchanting characters of the cycle (p. 286).

In the post-cycle age *Henry V*, both the play and the character, had become weighed down with the baggage of the past. The rejection of Falstaff which gave the bitter taste to *Henry IV Part Two* now informed audiences watching *Henry V* as well: one reviewer remarked of Alan Howard's Henry in 1975 that 'Mr Howard does not regard the putting aside of Falstaff as Hal's last step to maturity. Indeed, mention of Falstaff and of Bardolph's theft still have power to bring tears to the vulnerable eyes of this Henry'.<sup>36</sup> It is interesting to note that in the two major film productions by Olivier and Branagh both directors, whilst presenting an individual Henry in quite contrasting ways, nonetheless felt it necessary to include flashbacks of Falstaff and specifically his rejection. In Olivier's film we merely hear Henry's speech as a voice-over which the frail Falstaff seems to be remembering; in Branagh's there is a visual flashback which Pistol and Nim remember together. When the rejection scene dissolves back to the present action of 2.1, the

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<sup>35</sup> Norman Rabkin, 'Rabbits, Ducks and *Henry V*', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 28, 1977, 279-296 (p. 285, p. 288).

<sup>36</sup> Charles Lewson, *The Times*, 10 April 1975.



screenplay describes the two characters as being ‘still deep in this depressing recollection.’<sup>37</sup>

Henry’s past has invaded theatre productions as well. The contemporary design of Nicholas Hytner’s 2003 production allowed for the Boar’s Head to have a large television screen showing camcorder footage of Hal amongst the Eastcheap crew. Alternatively directors have represented the King’s betrayal of the knight and his company by implicating Henry in Bardolph’s death. What appears in the text as a decision already made has been radically altered in modern performances to allow the King the opportunity to save the thief if he so chooses. Adrian Noble’s 1984 production with Branagh in the title role actually presented Bardolph’s execution on stage. Loehlin described the scene:

Bardolph knelt, fixing Henry with an imploring gaze for ten or fifteen seconds of silence. With effort, Henry raised his eyes to Exeter’s, who stood behind Bardolph, and gave an almost imperceptible nod.<sup>38</sup>

Bardolph was suddenly garrotted by Exeter, the action itself lasting a few moments and horrifying the audience. Hytner’s production emphasised the King’s betrayal even further by showing Adrian Lester’s king shoot Bardolph himself. Lester felt that the invented scene ‘shows us another side of the multi-faceted character that Henry is. One by one he has to kill his friends because they betray the qualities of leadership and the elements of kingship that he must uphold in order to carry out his task.’<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Kenneth Branagh, *Henry V by William Shakespeare: A Screen Adaptation* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1989), p. 35.

<sup>38</sup> Loehlin, p. 93.

<sup>39</sup> Adrian Lester, ‘King Henry V’, in *Players of Shakespeare 6*, ed. by Robert Smallwood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 145-162 (p. 157).

The post-cycle Henry must relive the past, rejecting Falstaff and his followers again and again. What had otherwise been a Christian king's denouncement of stealing amongst his own men became a man's betrayal of his friends, because in the cycle production both Henry, and the audience, had a memory of Eastcheap. John Barber disliked Branagh's performance, but claimed it was 'more Shakespeare's fault than his own. The Prince Hal we recall from "Henry IV" was a wicked wit and as full of spirit as the month of May. Now king, he is a mere bluff good fellow, incapable of serious thought.'<sup>40</sup> Barber looked at the same text which in earlier centuries had revealed a rousing hero, but could not see that hero beyond Hal. Now that the plays had been delivered together on the stage Henry would be forever a King-in-waiting trying to prove himself and not the hero of Agincourt that he had been in previous centuries.

### Richard II

As the least popular of the three discussed in this chapter, the development of *Richard II* as an individual play has been heavily affected by its place in the cycle, if only for no other reason that, unlike *Henry V* and *Richard III*, it did not have sufficient enough history on the English stage prior to the cycle to balance out the new interpretations that the twentieth century brought. After Kean's initial success in the role, the part had been taken on most notably by Frank Benson, of whom C. E. Montague said that of his 'achievements as an actor his Richard strikes us as decidedly the most memorable', another critic concurring that 'as the unhappy King, Mr Benson is at his very best.'<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> John Barber, *Daily Telegraph*, 29 March 1984.

<sup>41</sup> C.E. Montague, *The Manchester Stage* (1899), repr. in *Shakespeare in the Theatre*, ed. by Stanley Wells, Oxford Shakespeare Topics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 170; *Daily Chronicle*, 24 April 1901.

As a result of Benson's continued success in the title role, *Richard II* featured in every one of the three cycles that he presented at Stratford. Other histories could be edited or accounted for: Margaret remained cut from *Richard III*, the Chorus was absent from *Henry V*, whilst *Henry IV* and *Henry VI* were predominantly offered with entire plays missing, but *Richard II* endured as a main feature of all of Benson's cycles.

Meanwhile, critical discussion emphasised the play's vital place in the historical cycle: the murder of Richard was considered to be the cause of all the events which occurred in the following seven plays. Tillyard's vision of divine retribution centred itself around the murder of the King: '*Richard II* does its work in proclaiming the great theme of the whole cycle of Shakespeare's History Plays: the beginning in prosperity by a crime, civil war, and ultimate renewal of prosperity.'<sup>42</sup> However, Tillyard was not trying to promote the play for its own merits; for him, the justification of the play was precisely its place in the series, and he felt that 'As a separate play *Richard II* lacks the sustained vitality of *Richard III*, being less interesting and less exacting in structure and containing a good deal of verse which by the best Shakespearean standards can only be called indifferent' (pp. 250-1).

Having been redefined as an opening chapter, *Richard II* was affected by anticipation and expectation of the next episode. One result of this can be seen in the treatment of Harry Percy. The fundamental problem a director of a cycle must tackle is that the character represents a small part in *Richard II* and, under the guise of Hotspur, a star part in *Henry IV Part One*: therefore either a leading actor must be persuaded to play a small role, or an

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<sup>42</sup> Tillyard, p. 267.

unknown actor be trusted with the larger part in the later play. Quayle cheated by casting Robert Hardy as Harry Percy in *Richard II*, then replacing him with Michael Redgrave in the next play, affecting the continuity between the plays that he was so keen to stress.

Where continuation of casting has occurred the result is that greater interest is invested in the character than the text of *Richard II* provides for. Despite having only forty-five lines in the entire duration of the play, the character is never cut and is often mentioned in reviews; during the 2000 cycle, Benedict Nightingale's summary of the play deviated to the character and its implications for the next play:

Why must Adam Levy play Harry Percy, alias Hotspur, as a black-clad nerd who enters doing a military crawl and is doomed ever afterwards to strut, salute and polish off the odd foe with his pistol? Where is the charmer Shakespeare created? What will Levy do when *Henry IV Part One* requires him to play the humorous adventurer and stammering romantic?<sup>43</sup>

The small character of Harry Percy was identified as Hotspur, and the actor condemned precisely because the part did not comply with the descriptions provided in another text. The focus on Hotspur had taken attention away from many larger parts in the play.

However, the major impact of the cycle upon *Richard II* has been the resulting treatment of Bolingbroke. In pre-cycle productions Bolingbroke was not looked upon favourably; J. A. R. Marriott described him as 'the shrewd politician, the crafty diplomat'.<sup>44</sup> Nahum Tate's adaptation depicted Bolingbroke returning amongst the London crowd 'himself externally fawning and internally treacherous and violent', and the conclusion undeniably tragic, with 'Bolingbroke's wish that he himself were dead and

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<sup>43</sup> Benedict Nightingale, *The Times*, 31 March 2000.

<sup>44</sup> Marriott, p. 110.

Richard alive and mourning for him.’<sup>45</sup> But in a cycle, directors had to ensure the audience sympathised with Bolingbroke in preparation for his continuation in *Henry IV Part One*.

When the English Shakespeare Company produced *Richard II*, they were adding it to their pre-existing trilogy of *Henry IV Part I*, *Henry IV Part II* and *Henry V*. Consequently, when they came to consider how to present *Richard II*, Bolingbroke’s character had already been determined by the requirements of the other plays. Margaret Shewring noted that ‘Bolingbroke was soon to be seen as Henry IV and it would not be appropriate to present him as the villainous usurper with Richard as the tragic victim.’<sup>46</sup> Consequently, in this production, and indeed all serial productions, it was necessary ‘for the casting of Bolingbroke to be at least as significant as that of King Richard. It is, after all, Bolingbroke whose ability to rule is a dominant issue in both parts of *Henry IV*’ (p. 93). A play that once had one starring role now had two. In turn this meant a re-imagining of Richard as a more complicated figure, both tragic and fit to be usurped.

This re-evaluation of the play has also affected interpretations of the text in individual productions. The most famous exponent of the duality of Richard and Bolingbroke occurred in John Barton’s production in the 1970s where Ian Richardson and Richard Pasco shared the two roles, alternating between the King and the usurper on different nights, clearly highlighting what Shaughnessy recognised as the two ‘central characters’:

There was a textual rationale underpinning the doubling, in that Barton saw Richard and Bolingbroke as mirror images, a pairing which fitted

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<sup>45</sup> Harold Child, ‘Stage History’, included in *Richard II*, ed. by J. Dover Wilson, New Shakespeare (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1939, reprinted 1971), pp. lxxvii-xcii (p. lxxxi).

<sup>46</sup> Shewring, p. 112.

into the overall conception of doubling, twin-natured beings, and kings and actors.<sup>47</sup>

Critics reread the play as one in which we find ‘Shakespeare contrasting two types of personality. The King is a dreamer and an egotist. His usurping cousin, Bolingbroke, is an astute man of action.’<sup>48</sup> The interchanging of roles between the two actors invited audiences to consider what each would do in the position of the other, and the opening ceremony in which a Shakespeare figure would ‘choose’ who would be King that night prompted the sensation that both roles were indeed, roles, and that no blame were to be laid on either character for the events which followed as they were only acting out the parts they had been assigned. This sensation was clearly defined in Anne Barton’s programme notes:

Shakespeare [...] seems to have seized upon and explored the latent parallel between the King and that other twin-natured human being, the Actor. Like Kings, actors are accustomed to perform before an audience. Like kings, they are required to submerge their own individuality within a role and, for both, the incarnation is temporary and perilous. Like the two kings in *Richard II*, their feelings towards their roles are often ambiguous, a mixture of exhilaration and disgust.<sup>49</sup>

The production absolved the characters from their actions; Bolingbroke was no longer a usurper of the rightful crown, and the sympathetic reading of him continued to resonate with the eponymous hero of *Henry IV*; one reviewer noted that Richardson’s Bolingbroke ‘was effective in the closing scenes, when already he found the crown an uneasy burden – a clever anticipation by the director of “Henry IV” from which the “Sleep” soliloquy is

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<sup>47</sup> Shaughnessy, p. 98.

<sup>48</sup> John Barber, *Daily Telegraph*, 11 April 1973.

<sup>49</sup> Anne Barton, Programme for *Richard II*, directed by John Barton at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, 1973, p. 14.

borrowed.’<sup>50</sup> The development of Bolingbroke’s character now skipped ahead beyond the close of the text and into the midst of *Henry IV Part Two*.

### Maintaining Individuality

While the interpretation of these plays has been affected by the cycle, their individuality endures on the English stage in the same century that has seen *Henry IV* and *Henry VI* almost exclusively presented in tandem with the other parts. In order to expose the inequality of such actions and the failed logic that suggests the other plays cannot be presented individually, I shall now play the part of Devil’s advocate and examine how *Richard II*, *Henry V* and *Richard III* are reliant on the other histories, as well as attempting to identify how directors have enabled the plays to remain individual.

To consider them in the order in which they would be presented in the cycle, one might assume that *Richard II* needs no introductory material to explain the opening situation; but this is not so. The play opens after the King’s controversial murder of his uncle, Thomas Woodstock, though this is never clarified save for a cryptic dialogue between John of Gaunt and the Duchess of Gloucester in the second scene of the play:

God’s is the quarrel; for God’s substitute,  
His deputy anointed in his sight,  
Hath caused his death; the which if wrongfully,  
Let heaven revenge, for I may never lift  
An angry arm against his minister. (1.2.37-41)

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<sup>50</sup> John Barber, *Daily Telegraph*, 11 April 1973.

After this reference by Gaunt, the Duchess focuses her wrath upon Mowbray, who is distinctly named, as ‘fell Mowbray’ (1.2.46) and ‘butcher Mowbray’ (1.2.48), while the crime is identified as ‘Mowbray’s sins’ (1.2.50). It is therefore not clear for a first audience what the King’s involvement in the dispute truly is, as it is Mowbray who is distinctly called out as the villain. Many critics have suggested that *Richard II* was dependent on *Thomas of Woodstock* to clarify the King’s guilt to Shakespeare’s audience. Assuming the play to predate *Richard II*, Charles Forker has argued that the way in which *Woodstock* ‘unhistorically idealises the character of Gloucester [...] probably influenced Shakespeare’s portrayal of Gaunt’; additionally he believes that the depiction of Gloucester’s widow ‘thirsting for revenge’ and the offering of ‘details about Richard’s followers and “blank charters” to which Shakespeare only makes cryptic references’ not only suggests that the play precedes *Richard II*, but that Shakespeare was directly influenced by it.<sup>51</sup> This idea is not uncommon, and following E. K. Chambers’ suggestion that *Woodstock* was titled *I Richard II*, Wilhelmina Frijlinck’s edition for the Malone Society was called *The First Part of the Reign of King Richard the Second*.<sup>52</sup> Drawing on this, E. B. Everitt went further, suggesting a trilogy of plays concerning Richard II:

It is possible that even before *Woodstock* there was another Richard play, containing the peasant’s revolt and the desertion of the Duchess of Ireland by her husband [...]. If this conjecture is near the facts, there would have been a 1, 2 and 3 *Richard II*, of which *Woodstock* was part 2, and the well-known poetic drama was part 3.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Charles R. Forker, ed., William Shakespeare, *Richard II*, Arden 3<sup>rd</sup> Series (London: Thomson Learning, 2002), p. 116.

<sup>52</sup> Wilhelmina P. Frijlinck, ed., *The First Part of the Reign of King Richard the Second or Thomas of Woodstock* (Oxford: Malone Society, 1929), p. v.

<sup>53</sup> E. B. Everitt and R. L. Armstrong, eds, *Six Early Plays Related to the Shakespeare Canon* (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1965), p. 252.



This argument reveals the eagerness with which some critics looked to a cycle to justify issues of structure: *Richard II* has a confusing opening, and therefore critics have tried to identify a preceding play to explain it. But this idea is complicated by MacD. P. Jackson's recent argument that *Woodstock* actually postdates *Richard II*.<sup>54</sup> By analysing the language and grammar of *Woodstock*, Jackson presents a persuasive case that the play was written no earlier than 1600. He recognises the limitations of the parallels between the texts, as each parallel 'reinforces the connection between *Richard II* and *Woodstock* without telling us which playwright is the debtor' (p. 28). Jackson's linguistic studies go on to suggest that '*Woodstock* exerted no influence whatever upon *Richard II*, because *Woodstock* was written after *Richard II*, probably at least ten years after Shakespeare's play had first been performed' (p. 56).

If Jackson is right, then the dramatisation of events in *Richard II* has no precedent and the opening is intended to be understood without the requirement of another play. Peter Ure suggested that rather than relying on an earlier play, 'it is more probable that Shakespeare was assuming knowledge of events as recorded by Holinshed, *The Mirror for Magistrates* or by tradition.'<sup>55</sup> Whether relying on *Woodstock* or general historical knowledge, what both arguments suggest is that *Richard II* is reliant on an awareness of preceding events, but a final option is that Shakespeare deliberately opened his play in the thick of the action for dramatic effect. The play opens in a court full of political intrigue where it is not immediately clear who is the hero; it is an exciting and dynamic introduction to the characters and environment of the play.

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<sup>54</sup> MacD. P. Jackson, 'Shakespeare's *Richard II* and the Anonymous *Thomas of Woodstock*', *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England*, 14 (2001), 17-65.

<sup>55</sup> Peter Ure, ed., William Shakespeare, *Richard II*, Arden 2<sup>nd</sup> Series (London: Methuen, 1956), p. xxxviii.

Stage productions of *Richard II* show how, when dramatising a history, prior events can be clarified without relying on a previous play. The standard response is to offer a critical introduction in the programme notes, or find a way to clearly mark the King's involvement in the murder in the opening scene. In Tim Carrol's 2003 production at the Globe, Mark Rylance's Richard appeared jolly and distracted throughout the accusations that Bolingbroke threw at Mowbray, seeming to be involved in jokes and conversation with his flatterers, and then at the precise moment when Bolingbroke proclaimed that Mowbray 'did plot the Duke of Gloucester's death' (1.1.100), Richard stopped, startled, with the smile wiped off his face. His guilt was implicit. Alternatively, new openings have been created to suggest other priorities that the audience should be focusing upon in the play. As previously discussed, Barton's 1973 production began with Shakespeare handing the role of King to one of the two lead actors; from the outset it was clear that it was upon these two that the strength of the drama relied and it was consequently the interaction between them that dominated audience interest in the first scene.

The end of the play has other difficulties: if it is indeed the first part of a tetralogy, or even an octology, then by the nature of a first chapter there must be unresolved issues to spill into the next episode. Charles Forker argues that 'The introduction of Harry Percy as a character of fictive youthfulness and Bolingbroke's worried speeches about his son's licentiousness and possible reformation [...] are hardly intrinsic to *Richard II* as a self-contained tragedy'.<sup>56</sup> Equally, whether we interpret the play's actions as the replacement of either God's deputy with a heartless usurper, or a weak King with a guilt-wracked King,

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<sup>56</sup> Forker, p. 118.

neither interpretation makes a satisfying conclusion. As a chronicle of the nation's history it demands the opportunity to see the nation flourish again in the manner to which Gaunt refers in his famous speech of 2.1. A play which appeals to its audience's patriotism with descriptions of 'This royal throne of kings, this sceptred isle' (2.1.40) cannot be considered complete when the doom-laden end shows the country, as Gaunt feared, having 'made a shameful conquest of itself' (2.1.66). Of course, what can be interpreted as an unsatisfactory end to a chapter of a nation's progress can also be considered a fitting end to a tragedy, and in modern productions it may be argued that the progress of the man is of more interest to the audience than the qualities of kingship.

Accordingly, when Jonathan Kent directed Ralph Fiennes in the role at Shoreditch in 2000, he reverted to the pre-cycle practice of villainising Bolingbroke in order to glorify Richard; Simon Schama's introduction to the production text identifies the protagonist as a sympathetic character 'acutely conscious of the need to act' in contrast to the 'chilling' return of Bolingbroke to London where the usurper has 'become an overnight impresario of political bullshit, marketing his fake humility before the adoring throng.'<sup>57</sup> Individual productions reflect back upon the events of the play by focusing on the death of Richard rather than the guilt of Henry: a contemporary audience is unlikely to worry over the future of the realm at the play's close. The play survives individually by escaping its definition as history and by being explored instead as a tragedy: after all, even an unhappy ending is still a conclusion.

### Henry V

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<sup>57</sup> Simon Schama, 'Introduction', in *Shakespeare in Shoreditch: Richard II*, Simon Schama and others, (London: Almeida Theatre, 2000), pp. iv-v.

Depending upon the scale of the series being explored, *Henry V* either constitutes the conclusion of a trilogy or tetralogy, or else the middle chapter of a chronicle, a peak that stands above the civil dissension in the surrounding plays. Either interpretation relies upon knowledge of events before the opening of the play, but this is provided in the first act. The transformation of the riotous prince Hal into the righteous King Henry is neatly summarised during conversation between Canterbury and Ely: ‘The course of his breath no sooner left his father’s body/But that his wilderness, mortified in him,/Seemed to die too.’ (1.1.26-8).

Thus King Henry’s past need not affect an unknowing audience’s understanding of the play, were it not for the intrusion of Falstaff into this history. Though Oldcastle provided an initial inspiration, ultimately Falstaff and the events depicting him in the histories are a fictional creation, and therefore references to him within this play cannot be justified by suggesting that Shakespeare’s audience knew their history. To understand the role of the fat knight and his followers in this play relies wholly on a knowledge of the two plays of *Henry IV* and, arguably, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, for it is from this play and no other that *Henry V* has inherited Corporal Nim.

The quasi-presence of Falstaff in the play, as a character forever offstage, just out of the audience’s view, ironically allows the character an omnipresence in the action; because the play asks us to remember Falstaff when he is not on stage, there is no limit to when we can and cannot remember him. In Branagh’s film Henry remembered Falstaff three times, including the final scene during Burgundy’s speech, so that throughout Henry’s campaign

Falstaff and past events are continuously brought back to mind. But little information is provided in the play on Falstaff's relationship with the prince; Nim and Pistol discuss the fortunes of Falstaff in 2.1 in a conversation that does not stretch beyond six lines.

Nim: The King hath run bad humours on the knight, that's the even of it.

Pistol: Nim, thou hast spoke the right.

His heart is fractured and corroborate.

Nim: The King is a good king, but it must be as it may.

He passes some humours and careers.

(2.1.116-121)

The only other reference that connects Falstaff to the King comes from Fluellen at Agincourt when he recounts how 'Harry Monmouth, being in his right wits and his good judgements, turned away the fat knight with the great belly-doublet' whom Gower identifies as 'Sir John Falstaff' (4.6.44-49). The sparse information barely explains the significance of Falstaff, nor justifies his role in this play: the full details on Falstaff and Hal may only be found in Shakespeare's *Henry IV*, making *Henry V* utterly reliant on an earlier play.

Therefore the key to *Henry V*'s autonomy lies in those aspects which do not refer to Falstaff: independence lies in the campaign of the King, not the rejection of the knight. Pistol, Bardolph and Nim serve a dramatic function as comic relief amongst the weightier subject of England's great victory, a victory that may only be perceived when we view the episode as a separate play distinct from the woes of civil war.

To this end, we may look to the chorus to frame the play as individual. The opening speech of the chorus has too often been singled out for Shakespeare's excuse of his stage,

but when we look at the speech in the context of the play we can see that its predominant function of is to promote the events which are about to be depicted. Without the sets and costumes that modern director's might employ, the Chorus' function is to whip up excitement in the crowd. The speech looks forward, not back; the chorus does not, as Rumour does in *Henry IV Part Two*, try to summarise the events of previous plays, but instead focuses the attention on the events at Agincourt which will presently be depicted and does not infer that we need to be aware of the story so far.

Furthermore, as a dramatic function the chorus changes the nature of the play from its predecessors: while *Richard II*, *Henry IV Part One* and *Henry IV Part Two* make no reference to their artificiality, *Henry V* opens with a direct address of its dramatic status which continuously reminds us that we are watching an artificial representation. The Chorus acts as a bridge between the audience and the events depicted, but in creating this bridge Shakespeare both acknowledges and accentuates the distance between the audience and the events on stage. Subsequently, the altered style of the play marks it as distinct from the plays it succeeds.

However, this same Chorus who offers *Henry V* an individual framework also implicates the play within the structure of the cycle at the play's close. His reference to the misfortunes of Henry's son 'Which oft our stage hath shown'(Epilogue 13) forms a historical link to the events which follow, and also the dramatist's own acknowledgement of his previous works, which he expects the audience to know. Brian Walsh suggests that 'There is a deliberate circularity to the Chorus's epilogue', suggesting that the purpose of this reference to *Henry VI* is to deepen the plays' explicit metatheatrical commentary on

loss in performing the past.’<sup>58</sup> Walsh considers the mention of *Henry VI* to be part of *Henry V*’s preoccupation with its own representation of history. As a play with such references to its own artificiality, the final reference to another work by the author need not be so conspicuous, but rather an acknowledgment of the theatrical context to this work.

Intriguingly, Annabel Patterson discusses the impact of the first quarto edition of the play, in which the chorus has been cut. Consequently, ‘these last lines, which subsume the heroic moment in the recursive patterns of history’ are absent, so that ‘there is no final let-down, no admission that the legendary victory at Agincourt accomplished nothing’.<sup>59</sup> The result, intentional or not, is an upbeat ending without the ominous forecast of doom to follow, and it is little surprise that the lines regarding Henry VI’s reign were also cut from Olivier’s film. In later individual productions, such as Branagh’s film, the epilogue has been treated as a sombre judgement on the victory of Agincourt in keeping with the prevalent interpretation of a troubled king. Arguably, in such cases, the reference to the events having been shown on stage before is left in to maintain meter, but ultimately makes little sense to a popular audience.

The most interesting treatment of the speech occurred in Quayle’s cycle. As discussed in chapter two, the epilogue was reworded to glorify the events depicted, rather than foretell the events which follow. The alterations confirmed Henry as the hero of the cycle and transformed the epilogue into a conclusion not just for this play, but all four histories presented that season, telling the audience how the ‘theme/From Richard’s winter builds

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<sup>58</sup> Brian Walsh, “Unkind Division”: The Double Absence of Performing History in *1 Henry VI*, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 55 (2004), 119-147 (p. 124).

<sup>59</sup> Annabel Patterson, *Shakespeare and the Popular Voice* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), p. 73.

this summer throne/Which oft our stage hath told'.<sup>60</sup> The doom-laden reference to the events of *Henry VI* both detracts from the up-beat nature of the wooing of Katherine, and also highlights the inconclusiveness of the play; so even Quayle's cycle production needed to suggest that the story ends here.

### Richard III

As the final part of the sequence, *Richard III* might be expected to have a stronger sense of conclusion than the other histories. In Tillyard's view, the fall of Richard and the crowning of Richmond concludes 'the main business of the play [which] is to complete the national tetralogy and to display the working out of God's plan to restore England to prosperity'.<sup>61</sup> Whilst bearing no inherent structural differences to Shakespeare's other histories, Tillyard's vision of it as the final chapter implied that after the close of the play there is no more of the story to be told. However, the subsequent reading of the histories as a cycle by Kott has detracted from the play's sense of closure. For Kott, history repeats itself, so that even Richmond's ascent to the throne was just another tragedy waiting to happen. Kott drew specific attention to the treatment of Richmond in the closing scene of the 1958 production of *Richard III* at the Warsaw House of Culture:

A new young king will now talk of peace. Rows of bars are lowered from above. Henry VII speaks of peace, forgiveness, justice. And suddenly he gives a crowing sound like Richard's, and, for a second, the same sort of grimace twists his face. The bars are being lowered. The face of the new King is radiant again.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Prompt book for *Henry V*, directed by Anthony Quayle at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, 1951. Additional lines by Patrick Dickinson.

<sup>61</sup> Tillyard, p. 205.

<sup>62</sup> Kott, p. 46.



If the histories were a cycle, then by definition they had to turn full circle. One bad king was replaced by another. When Barton and Hall produced the play the success of Richmond was equally disturbing. Gillian Day writes that after the closing speech 'the space emptied, leaving Richmond walking slowly down the forestage to retrieve Richard's sword. Before turning upstage to leave, however, he looked out, calm but unsmiling, into the audience.'<sup>63</sup> This, along with Richmond's subsequent exit, dragging the sword behind him to make a screeching noise reminiscent of a sound effect used in the production throughout Richard's rise to power, was interpreted by Day as 'a threatening note that, while it did not drown out Richmond's rhetoric, denied the play the comfortable closure that he had prayed for' (p. 65). Barton and Hall's perception of the histories relied on the play not concluding, but suggesting that even after the close of the final part, history continued.

Whilst the end of *Richard III* has been both supported and destroyed by the cycle, its place as the last play has encouraged the recognition that it is the history most in need of prior explanation, and in the wake of staged cycles many critics have been prompted to consider 'how much of Richard III is lost by severing it from the trilogy?'<sup>64</sup> In the course of the drama constant references are made to the past through the reappearance of Margaret and Henry VI's ghost, along with further reflections on the civil war which England has supposedly seen come to an end. The opening speech of the play begins with a direct comparison between the state of the past compared with present affairs: 'Now is the winter of our discontent/Made glorious summer by this son of York' (1.1.1-2). Simultaneously

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<sup>63</sup> Gillian Day, p. 64.

<sup>64</sup> Dominique Goy-Blanquet, *Times Literary Supplement*, 4 November 1988.

however, there appears to have been a passing of time between the end of the last play and the beginning of this; Hastings has been locked up in the tower, and Edward's son is no longer a 'sweet babe' (5.7.29) but has grown up and been joined by a brother, information that the audience is assumed to accept as prologue to this play without having seen it dramatised. Within this context the opening speech can equally be considered as little more than a summary of the story so far, which leaves the intrusion of Margaret and Henry as the strongest link to the past plays.

The appearance of Henry's ghost in *Richard III* as one of those Richard has wronged is curious given that we are not shown this event in the confines of the play. Cibber's adaptation rectified this with the inclusion of Henry's murder in the opening act, but it is my belief that Shakespeare addressed this issue himself with the appearance of Henry's corpse in 1.2. Given the time lapse between the plays that allows for Prince Edward to have grown from infant to child, the appearance of Henry's corpse so many years after his murder contradicts the serial nature of the play. Nor is it feasible to suggest that the passing of time occurs after we see the corpse else this would entail Clarence being imprisoned for over twelve years. The scene may be better explained as an attempt to make the play free-standing; by showing Henry's corpse it allows for Anne to recount the murder, and in the apparent bleeding of the corpse it is possible to confirm Richard's guilt and prepare the audience for the supernatural element to Henry's death that will come to fruition in the ghost scene. That Henry should have died before the play's opening marks him as no different to Hamlet's father.

If Henry's ghost, and relevance, is recognised through Anne's account, it prompts the question of why Shakespeare should go to such lengths. One simple consideration is that the murder of pious Henry would have been famous as one of Richard's crimes and further proof of his tyranny, thus justifying the depiction of his overthrow as a positive occurrence. Equally, however, for all its attempts to make the play free-standing, Henry's ghost serves to tie the play in to the *Henry VI* plays and present an epilogue to the weak King's reign, one in which he achieves the positive resolution he did not enjoy in life. Shakespeare appears to be offering a conclusion to the tetralogy whilst simultaneously allowing for the play to be understood individually.

The appearance of Margaret is less clear still in its purpose, and furthermore is complicated by the supposed banishment of the character in the previous play, which makes her appearance in the English court unfathomable. The fact that the interchange between Richard and Margaret, which provides an explanation of her return, is cut from the quarto, as discussed in my introduction, suggests that theatre audiences watching the play in Shakespeare's time experienced no confusion. However, as the twentieth century had adopted the practice of serial productions, this moment of confusion was self-inflicted on an audience with knowledge of the preceding plays, and the Folio's extra lines proved invaluable.

Margaret's dramatic potency is greatly reliant on prior knowledge of her involvement in the Wars of the Roses; in 1988, one critic remarked that in the closing play of the cycle 'Penny Downie's absolute superb performance of Queen Margaret comes into its own', and when she gave her curses the court religiously crossed themselves in defence of this

dreaded queen.<sup>65</sup> The most remarkable image of Margaret's power occurred in Jane Howell's 1982 production for the BBC Shakespeare series, when the drama did not stop with Richmond's success, but continued to show Julia Foster's Margaret clutching Richard's dead body on top of a pile of corpses, laughing hysterically to herself: the final image which the director presented to the audience was of Margaret's, not Richmond's, triumph.

Yet a serial production also justifies Richard's rebuke of Margaret's curse. This was especially evident in the ESC production, when Richard responded to her curses with a recount of her own misdemeanours:

The curse my noble father laid on thee  
When thou didst crown his warlike brows with paper,  
And with thy scorn drew'st rivers from his eyes,  
And then to dry them gave'st the Duke a clout  
Steeped in the faultless blood of pretty Rutland:  
His curses then from bitterness of soul  
Denounced against thee are all fall'n upon thee,  
And God, not we, hath plagued thy bloody deed.  
(1.3.171-178)

Rather than striking a pitiful figure, the audience was reminded of Margaret's own villainy, supported further by Queen Elizabeth's judgement: 'So just is God to right the innocent' (1.3.179). Ironically Margaret's tirades actually united the other characters against her for one moment, and the former, greater, struggle of the War of the Roses was resurrected as Edward's associates squared up against Henry's advocate. The scene as a whole drew its strength directly from the past.

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<sup>65</sup> Christopher Edwards, *Spectator*, 8 April 1989.

But ultimately it is the political nature of the play which leans most heavily upon the previous works. In his explorative documentary *Looking for Richard*, Al Pacino starts his explanation of the play with a look at the history of the War of the Roses. To Pacino, an American unfamiliar with British history, the mass of characters and their relation to one another is puzzling. Even within a serial production such as the ESC's, it was felt that an explanation was necessary: they included an introductory scene with all the characters at a cocktail party while the compere announced their names, their past and what would befall them later in the play. Having thus reeled off this complicated yet truncated account of the play, he summarised the characters thus: 'The Politicians, the ladies, the Woodvilles, the Plantagenets'. Immediately afterwards he turned to the audience and said mockingly 'simple.' *Richard III* is built upon the events of the previous plays of the first tetralogy, through Henry's approval of Richmond to Clarence's alienation of the King (attributable to his revolt in *Henry VI Part Three*), which clarify and consolidate the unfolding drama.

## Conclusion

It may be argued that, before critical views seeped into the stage and popularised the history cycle, the independence of each of these three plays depended on an ignorance of the sandwiching dramas: they were presented as individual because no-one had attempted to present them in any other way upon the stage. Nevertheless, in the post-cycle age individual productions of these plays have had to be re-evaluated to allow for the common awareness of a larger saga and the characters involved in that, such as Hotspur, Falstaff and Margaret. At the same time they have had to maintain the individuality of the plays and gloss over any direct references to other plays that would require too much explanation on the stage. The fact that directors have

achieved this presents a case study of what could equally be applied to the other histories in order to present eight distinct works of drama in the theatre, if only a willing director, and audience, could be found. I shall now move my focus away from these popular and individual histories to the other end of the scale, to consider the unfortunate state of the *Henry VI* plays, to see how the same procedure may be applied to these dramatic works so that they may be seen to be just as capable of individual performances as *Richard II*, *Henry V* or *Richard III*.

## Chapter Four

### Three Glorious Suns: Individuality in *Henry VI*

Time, and criticism, have not been kind to the *Henry VI* plays. John Dover Wilson announced in the preface to his edition of *Henry VI Part One* that he ended his work on all three plays ‘with some relief’ as the task of editing them all had, even for an experienced editor like Wilson, ‘proved a large and arduous undertaking.’<sup>1</sup> Similarly when Barton and Hall presented the *Wars of the Roses* in 1964, John Davenport’s review summarised the feelings of many towards the *Henry VI* plays:

Is it good? Is it bad? It is, at any rate, *done*.<sup>2</sup>

In the century of cycles the *Henry VI* plays have been performed more than in any other period; not that this translates as a particularly rich dramatic history: Ric Knowles noted in 2003 that ‘the performance history of the tetralogy as a linked group is limited to four professional productions in the past four decades’.<sup>3</sup> The *Henry VI* plays have far to go before they can be said to be performed regularly. On those occasions when they have been performed it has been done with a spirit of novelty and martyrdom: when Terry Hands directed the plays Georgina Crampton felt that ‘the first words’ of her review must ‘stimulate a standing ovation to the Royal Shakespeare Company for their courage.’<sup>4</sup> Reviews of all productions have been immersed in a view that staging the *Henry VI* plays is

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<sup>1</sup> John Dover Wilson, ed., William Shakespeare, *Henry VI Part I*, New Shakespeare (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952), p. vii.

<sup>2</sup> John Davenport, *Plays*, 13 August 1964.

<sup>3</sup> Ric Knowles, p. 267.

<sup>4</sup> Georgina Crampton, *Gloucestershire Chronicle*, 22 July 1977.

almost an inconvenience to both actors and audience, so any analysis of the production is secreted between excusing the plays, remarking upon their irregularity on the stage and praising the company, not for how it has presented the plays, but for the achievement of presenting them at all. Worse yet, all three plays are often reduced to little more than a warm-up for the final part of the tetralogy, as Michael Hattaway notes:

To those experiencing the play as part of a sequence, the conclusion of a long day of play-watching, the play might appear as something akin to a prolonged movement [...] coming before the highly patterned and more readily explicable *Richard III*.<sup>5</sup>

Whether they are providing a bridge between *Henry V* and *Richard III*, or forming an alternative season at the theatre, all involved seem to breathe a sigh of relief at the end of *Part Three* that the trilogy is, at any rate, done.

This is not, of course, a healthy attitude to presenting the plays and one that can only breed further contempt of them; though the plays are performed more regularly this is not in a format which encourages appreciation of their artistic merit. The weariness which Dover Wilson and others feel at the end of these plays can be linked to the popular perception of them as chapters in a cycle: the relative lack of autonomous stage interpretations has resulted in the serial approach dominating our reading of each individual text, and consequently each play is viewed as a confusing segment of a larger story. Even as early as 1774, the plays were criticised under the influence of a cyclical reading by John Bell in his complete works:

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<sup>5</sup> Michael Hattaway, ed., William Shakespeare, *The Third Part of King Henry VI*, New Cambridge Shakespeare (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 36.



We think [Shakespeare] particularly unhappy in tracing the trouble and imbecilities of *Henry* the Sixth; for though he is very faithful and adequate in delineating personages, and correct in regard to facts, yet there is such an unavoidable sameness of incidents [...] such a confused precipitancy of events, that these pieces cannot, with any great hope of success, be produced in action.<sup>6</sup>

That these plays may be disregarded as having ‘an unavoidable sameness of incidents’, is a direct result of seeing them as one extraordinarily long play. Tillyard noted how the general reader ‘very naturally finds it hard to remember which part of *Henry VI* is which’.<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately this view was compounded in the twentieth century with the unrealistic expectations that theatre companies held for their audience to watch such a story unfold over nine or more hours and draw out a coherent sense of what occurred when and where.

Despite the lack of any conclusive contemporary evidence, the plays continue to be presented on stage primarily as a trilogy, and attacked for issues relating directly from the decision to present them as a series. In response, directors have sought to impose clarity upon the plays through a governing theme: Barton and Hall’s invention of a democratic government seated around a council table was a distortion of Henry VI’s court which Bamber Gascoigne felt ‘would of course be scandalous if only it didn’t work so extremely well.’<sup>8</sup> In contrast, Hands tried to achieve clarity with a simplistic approach: one critic noted that Hands had ‘no great thematic revelations to make; indeed his strength is to have cast off the intellectual superstructure’.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> John Bell, ed., *Shakespeare’s Plays*, 8 vols (London: John Bell, 1774; repr. London: Cornmarket Press, 1969), VII, p. 275.

<sup>7</sup> Tillyard, p. 163.

<sup>8</sup> Bamber Gascoigne, *The Observer*, 2 August 1964.

<sup>9</sup> Irving Wardle, *The Times*, 13 July 1977.

The most common, and drastic, approach to simplifying the trilogy has been to conflate them into two. When Noble conflated them in 1988, he acknowledged the original structure but believed it was too much for his audience:

I think they are a tetralogy. Now if you say that, then how do you reveal that to the public? I have tried to create one play; but how long can that be? Fifteen hours is just not possible.<sup>10</sup>

Rather than acknowledge the demands of a cycle, Noble and his editor Charles Wood squeezed in what they could to give 'what sounds like a viable compression job.'<sup>11</sup> But the plays have also been conflated within the larger cycles of Barton and Hall, and the ESC, which contradicts Noble's justification of compression as a necessary to keep the cycle as a whole under fifteen hours. Barton justified his own decision as economical, claiming that 'however much we want to explore and popularise the lesser-known plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, we cannot afford to present more than two of them in a single season.'<sup>12</sup> The compression appears to have gone unnoticed at the time, as critics were keen to announce it as an achievement and not focus on the loss of an entire play.

What an enterprise too for this company to bring forward in one season, all seven history plays from 'Richard II' to 'Richard III.'<sup>13</sup>

The praise of 'all seven' plays betrays the impact of conflation: a drastic loss of material. When Edward Hall and Roger Warren compressed the trilogy to two plays for Hall's production *Rose Rage* in 2001, one reviewer felt that 'Hall and Warren - by stripping away

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<sup>10</sup> Adrian Noble, in interview with Robert Gore-Langton, *Plays and Players*, October 1988 p. 9.

<sup>11</sup> Robert Gore-Langton, *Plays and Players*, October 1988 p. 9.

<sup>12</sup> John Barton, in John Barton and Peter Hall, *The Wars of the Roses* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1970), p. xvi.

<sup>13</sup> Eric Shorter, *Daily Telegraph*, 30 July 1964.

about 90 per cent of Part One, and maybe 40 per cent of Part Two and Three – have somewhat over-compressed them.’<sup>14</sup> The obvious victim of such conflation is *Henry VI Part Two*, which is halved and attached to the other plays, its own structure quite lost; but it is actually *Henry VI Part One* that is often most heavily cut, having the least references to the Wars of the Roses and therefore being misinterpreted as largely irrelevant. For *An Age of Kings*, all the histories were presented over two episodes save for *Henry VI Part One* which was cut and condensed into one; the brevity of the adaptation’s duration being explained by the play’s standing as ‘a long work containing, by common acceptance, lesser passages’.<sup>15</sup> The title of the episode, ‘The Red Rose and the White’, demonstrates its purpose within that series as a prelude to the larger story of the ensuing civil wars. The characters of Henry and Margaret have benefited greatly from this approach; Talbot, Joan, the Dauphin, and Salisbury have not: Ronald Knowles notes that when Seale presented a conflation of the three plays at the Old Vic in 1957, ‘almost nothing remained of the “Talbot play”’.<sup>16</sup>

While cycles require continuity across plays, individual readings of each play allow characters to meet the requirements of that specific text. Wilson notes that Gloucester ‘appears as two different men. In Part II he is, as Salisbury describes him, “a noble gentleman” and the “good Duke Humphrey” [...]. In Part I, the first act especially, he shows neither dignity nor self-control, but conducts himself like a common brawler’.<sup>17</sup> Similarly Warwick is a different character in the three texts. In *Part One* he is an experienced politician, supporting York’s claims with measured recognition of the potential

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<sup>14</sup> Alastair Macauley, *Financial Times*, 13 February 2001.

<sup>15</sup> Michael Barry, *Radio Times*, 22 April 1960.

<sup>16</sup> Ronald Knowles, ed., William Shakespeare, *King Henry VI Part II*, Arden 3<sup>rd</sup> Series (Walton-on-Thames: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1999), p. 9.

<sup>17</sup> Wilson, ed., *Henry VI Part I*, p. xii.

consequences. In *Henry VI Part Two*, he is young and eager, hot-tempered and focused on action; he weeps at the loss of Anjou and Maine which he fought for, and is quite unsubtle in his plotting. In *Part Three*, he is a political animal, leading the sons of York and shifting his allegiances as suits him best; a far more devious and self-serving character.

Individual approaches also free each play from discontinuities in character and plot. The vast time-span of the three plays is soon resolved when we approach each one separately. Thus, the sudden appearance of Henry's son in *Part Three*, or the growth of Edward's son between that play and *Richard III* do not need to be addressed. But most of all I would argue that individual readings of the text allows each the chance to have its own theme and structure appreciated. Roger Warren argues that, regardless of whether we view them as part of a cycle or not, each play still has its own motif:

Part One is based on the opposition between Talbot and Joan of Arc, leaders of the English and French forces. The structure of Part Two is quite different, built upon the fall of Duke Humphrey and the rise of York. Part Three is more diffuse, depending upon several major climaxes.<sup>18</sup>

This chapter will explore each of the three plays in turn in an individual light, addressing points of contention which seem to argue for a reliance on surrounding plays, and suggesting what conclusions can be found within the confines of each separate text. To support their individuality, it is useful to refer to them by titles other than that which the Folio suggests: calling a play *Henry VI Part One* does not encourage its autonomy. *Parts Two* and *Three* have earlier titles offered in the quarto and octavo editions: *The First Part of the Contention* and *The True Tragedy of Richard Duke of York*. Whilst the First Folio

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<sup>18</sup> Roger Warren, *Henry VI Part Two*, p. 5.

offered short titles on its contents page and subsequent page headers, the covering page of each play in the Folio presents a title with echoes of these earlier editions: *The second Part of Henry the Sixt, with the death of the Good Duke Humfrey* and *The third Part of Henry the Sixt, with the death of the Duke of Yorke*. What this suggests is that the editors were aware of the alternative titles, and believed in their validity enough to use them to clarify which play is which.

*Henry VI Part One* is at a disadvantage, not having an edition outside of the Folio which might offer an individual title. However, the majority of critics agree that the play referred to in Henslowe's diary as 'harey the vj' is the play we now know as *Henry VI Part One*. Certainly the play appears to have been performed at this time, in order to justify Nashe's famous description of 'brave Talbot' in his pamphlet *Piers Penniless*, published in 1592. Assuming therefore that *Part One*, containing the fortunes of Talbot, is the play Nashe refers to, it is a reasonable conclusion to believe that Shakespeare's play is indeed the one noted in Henslowe's diary. Taking my cue from this, I shall refer to *Part One* simply as *Henry VI*.

### *Henry VI Part One/Henry VI*

Three fundamental factors have damaged *Henry VI*'s credibility for modern audiences: first is the continuing question over authorship and quality, second is the canonisation of Joan of Arc, and third is the focus upon the Wars of the Roses. Each one of these factors has centred critical and theatrical focus on the wrong aspects of the play, layering

unwarranted significance on the scenes in England at the expense of the scenes in France.

This, as I will show, has restricted the capacity of the play as an individual drama.

The unity of *Henry VI* has been affected by investigations of multiple authorship; F. G. Fleay suggested that the whole of the first tetralogy was a revision by Shakespeare of plays written predominantly by Marlowe, with assistance from Greene, Kyd, Peele, Lodge and Shakespeare himself on *Henry VI*.<sup>19</sup> But the authorship debate has been predominantly fuelled by issues of quality; for many years the argument was less concerned with whether the play was by Shakespeare so much as whether it deserved to be by Shakespeare. This has led to a general agreement that whoever wrote the rest of the play, 'probably the most indisputably Shakespearean scene in *Henry VI* is the Temple Garden scene', in which scene 'of action [...] there is little enough', therefore leaving more room to focus on more Shakespearean qualities such as the poetry.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, the selection of roses is a key link to other plays; the 'authenticity' of this scene has given it a disproportional sense of importance in the general plot of the piece, becoming a central scene in critical opinion, and paintings, and one by which the rest of the play should be judged. When determining the plot of his adaptation for the Dream Factory in 2005, Richard Pearson found 'that wonderful scene at the very beginning in the temple garden sets out clearly what it's going to be all about.'<sup>21</sup> This may apply to the trilogy, but it is not what the first play is about, which inevitably creates disappointment; given that the Wars of the Roses does not erupt in the running time of the play, it may be interpreted that the text fails to deliver what it promises. Consequently the play has been rejected as incomplete.

Restricting and damning opinions of the play were further strengthened by the change of opinion of Joan of Arc. After Joan was canonised, many felt dissatisfied with Shakespeare's portrayal of her:

Joan of Arc had overthrown English power in France, and not even the claim to a divine mission could save her character from the foulest slander the genius of Shakespeare could invent.<sup>22</sup>

This further fuelled debate over whether Shakespeare could have written such slander, many critics ignoring the fact that Shakespeare wrote in a time before Joan was a saint.

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<sup>19</sup> Fleay, p. 273.

<sup>20</sup> John Dover Wilson, ed., William Shakespeare, *Henry VI Part 3*, New Shakespeare (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952), pp. vii-xiii.

<sup>21</sup> Richard Pearson, in interview with the author.

<sup>22</sup> *Sunday Independent*, 16 November 1936.

Allison Gaw, believing the play to be a revision, triumphantly concluded that ‘Shakespeare’s memory is relieved of an old reproach. He is cleared of all responsibility for the abusive elements in the treatment of Joan of Arc except for the fact that he did not give a through-going revision to the original portrait of her’.<sup>23</sup> While the historical Richard III is still dominated by his monstrous fictional counterpart, the relative obscurity and low regard of *Henry VI* allows the historical Joan to dominate readings of the text. Even when a drama group at Ellesmere College made the unusual decision of presenting the play ‘To mark the quincentenary of Joan of Arc’ in 1929, it was ‘played with extensive but judicious “cuts” and considerable rearrangement of the scenes.’<sup>24</sup> The most drastic effect of Joan’s subsequent sainthood has been the cutting of her character altogether, as Dingelstedt chose to do. If not cut, then the dissatisfaction with Joan’s character has encouraged critics and theatre practitioners to focus on the scenes in England, in which she had no involvement, rather than in France.

The final negative influence on how we perceive the play has been *Henry VI*’s insecure position either as a prologue or prequel to the apparent two-play story depicted in *The First Part of the Contention* and *The True Tragedy of Richard Duke of York*. As those two plays seem to be dominated by the rise and outbreak of the Wars of the Roses, so the English scenes in *Henry VI* have been misinterpreted as a prelude, whilst the French scenes are a distraction, as a review of the 1964 production demonstrates:

The numerous battle scenes, around, inside and outside Orleans do little to add to the main presentation – that of the indecisive

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<sup>23</sup> Allison Gaw, *The Origin and Development of 1 Henry VI* (Los Angeles: University of Southern California, 1926), p. 168.

<sup>24</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 20 December 1929.

Henry VI becoming the pawn of jealous nobles and tortured prisoner of his own conscience.<sup>25</sup>

Similarly, Cairncross believed that Shakespeare 'first shed off the events grouped around Talbot and Joan of Arc and the loss of France' so that in the succeeding action he could focus on England, rather than suggesting that Shakespeare may have had a purpose in choosing to present the wars in France.<sup>26</sup> Stuart McGill, the director of the 2005 production at the Dream Factory in Warwick, was clear on his intentions, as the adapter Richard Pearson recalls:

When Stuart McGill wanted to do [the plays], it was very much to the extent that he said 'I want you to adapt, but I don't want the French' [...]. This isn't a revelation, you can do that.<sup>27</sup>

This meant that in the first draft, 'Everything had to go; Talbot went, it all went'; but as Pearson remarked, 'If you don't have the French in, it's a little bit lop-sided' and in the final edit of the adaptation, Talbot and the French were reintroduced. Whether we accept *Henry VI* as the first of Shakespeare's plays set during the reign, or a prequel to the other two, the war in France constitutes the bulk of the play and therefore figures more heavily than the allusion to the civil war to come.

The proof of this lies in individual production, but the play was never performed as such in the twentieth century. The most recent single production to have been offered on the English stage occurred in 1889 at Stratford, when the efforts of Charles Flower resulted in a staging of his adaptation of the text directed by Osmund Tearle. Without the support or

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<sup>25</sup> K. G., *Daily Worker*, 31 July 1964.

<sup>26</sup> Andrew S. Cairncross, ed., William Shakespeare, *King Henry VI Part 2*, Arden 2<sup>nd</sup> Series (London: Methuen, 1957), p. li.

<sup>27</sup> Richard Pearson, in interview with the author.



hindrance of the accompanying plays, this text focused on the wars in France. The scenes of Shakespeare's texts were reshuffled so that the first act covered events in England, such incidents providing only a backdrop to the play's remaining scenes in France. The first act of Flower's adaptation consisted of 1.1 (Henry V's funeral), 2.4 (The Temple Garden scene) and 3.1 (Henry's coronation), whilst Gloucester and Winchester's feud outside the tower, Mortimer's death scene, and Henry's plans for marriage, both to Armagnac's daughter and Margaret, were all cut.<sup>28</sup> The play's concern was not the fortunes of England and Henry, but France and Talbot, the playing of whom by Tearle himself suggesting that this was considered a star part.

While references to the Wars of the Roses, saving the celebrated garden scene, were cut, the neglected scene with the Countess was present in this production: Talbot's triumph over the French trick, his pride in his men and his winning of the Countess' admiration, formed a suitable closing of the first half of the play. His nemesis Joan was included, though tamed to the tastes of the day: all references to her witchcraft were cut, as were her claims of pregnancy. The play ended with the truce between England and France, and York's proclamation to 'Hang up your ensigns, let your drums be still,/For here we entertain a solemn peace' (5.4.173-4).

The decision to conclude the play at this point was promoted by the analysis of Gaw, and later Peter Alexander. They both felt that the scene with Margaret and Suffolk were evidence of later revisions, intended to strengthen the unity of the trilogy. Alexander argues:

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<sup>28</sup> Prompt book for *Henry VI Part One*, directed by Osmund Tearle at the Stratford-upon-Avon festival, 1889.

The two scenes that deal with the Margaret match can be regarded as interpolations, because unlike the Talbot scenes they have nothing to do with the plot and are clearly additions to link *1 Henry VI* to *2 Henry VI*.<sup>29</sup>

Gaw agreed that the scenes had ‘no purpose but that of link to *Part 2*’ and argued that this ending ‘envelops and supersedes as conclusion a more satisfactory ending intended for the isolated play.’<sup>30</sup> Cutting the text is an accepted part of theatrical practice, and as Flower’s adaptation of the text shows, cutting the scenes with Margaret does provide the play with a necessary individuality on stage, and the war in France makes an exciting backdrop for what Tillyard dubbed ‘the *Tragedy of Talbot*’.<sup>31</sup> However, when we are considering the text itself, rather than a production, I would argue that unless it can be categorically proven that these scenes are later additions, and not true to Shakespeare’s intentions, it is unethical to simply cut the scenes from critical consideration for sake of individual clarity. Many critics ignored the scenes in France to avoid discussion of Joan, or to focus on those scenes they felt were by Shakespeare, or else to look beyond the play’s close to the Wars of the Roses. Gaw and Alexander’s argument to cut the scenes with Margaret, though serving a different purpose, repeats the same mistake. To appreciate *Henry VI* critically as an individual play we must accept it in its entirety as it is presented to us. What I shall now investigate is how this play can lay claim to its own themes and closure within the confines of the text.

### A Non-cyclical Interpretation of the Play

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<sup>29</sup> Peter Alexander, *Shakespeare’s Henry VI and Richard III* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1929), p. 185.

<sup>30</sup> Gaw, p. 35.

<sup>31</sup> Tillyard, p. 163.

What I find most interesting about the play is not the hints at what is to come, but the continual references to what has passed. Henry V has as great a stake in this play as his son, and the play's battle in France bears more relation to Agincourt than the Wars of the Roses. E. A. J. Honigmann comments upon the stereotype in the play of 'A heroic or idealized figure from the immediate past [who] serves as a yardstick for, and overshadows, the next generation.'<sup>32</sup> Ronald Knowles comments that 'The "background" to *I Henry VI* is primarily the legacy of the chivalric and territorial achievement of Henry V'.<sup>33</sup> Michael Taylor furthers the argument by saying that the play 'is an immensely nostalgic play, hence its frequent emphasis on the lost golden time of Henry V and on an earlier, vaguer time when the spirit of a romantic chivalry was thought to inspire the actions of an uncorrupted aristocracy.'<sup>34</sup>

The play, seen thus, is steeped in generational anxiety, wherein an old guard of noble lords, represented by Gloucester, Bedford, Salisbury, Mortimer, Talbot and Henry V, are succeeded by political wranglers like Somerset and Suffolk. The scenes in England are therefore a deliberate contrast rather than an unstructured interruption: idle lords exchanging angry words shows a different generation of nobility to those in France who employ honourable words and violent actions. The result is a shaming of the bourgeois at home who do not fight, whilst the plain honest folk fighting in France are losing battles and lives due to 'no treachery, but want of men and money' (1.1.69) and the indecisive apathy

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<sup>32</sup> E. A. J. Honigmann, 'Shakespeare's Self-Repetitions and *King John*', *Shakespeare Survey*, 53 (2000), 175-183 (p. 175).

<sup>33</sup> Knowles, ed., *King Henry VI Part Two*, p. 48.

<sup>34</sup> Michael Taylor, ed., William Shakespeare, *Henry VI Part One*, Oxford Shakespeare (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 72.

of those in command who 'whilst a field should be dispatched and fought [...] are disputing of [their] generals' (1.1.72-3).

The central scene to this play is not the garden scene as supposed, but the death of Talbot, not because it depicts the demise of a protagonist, as critics searching for one hero have supposed, but because it clearly emphasises the betrayal of the soldiers by the politicians. The preceding scenes with York and Suffolk clearly show the author's contempt for those who do not help, sealing Talbot's death through their apathy. Whilst Lucy pleads with them to save Talbot, their replies constantly bring the subject back to their own dispute with each other: it is politics, rather than the French, that Shakespeare blames for Talbot's death: Lucy's condemnation of this is decidedly apparent:

The fraud of England, not the force of France,  
Hath now entrapped the noble-minded Talbot.  
Never to England shall he bear his life,  
But dies betrayed to fortune by your strife. (4.4.36-9)

Politicians are further condemned in the play in Talbot's attack on Fastolf. In response to Fastolf's cowardice, Talbot tears the Garter from him to general agreement from the watching lords. Talbot, incensed, is insensible to their consent and continues to argue his case in a wave of nostalgia:

When first this order was ordained, my lords,  
Knights of the Garter were of noble birth,  
Valiant and virtuous, full of haughty courage,  
Such as were grown to credit by the wars;  
Not fearing death nor shrinking for distress,  
But always resolute in most extremes.  
He then that is not furnished in this sort  
Doth but usurp the sacred name of knight (4.1.33-40)

Michael Taylor suggests that Fastolf's 'de-gartering offers the opportunity for Talbot to reminisce about a long-lost time when knights were knights and ladies like Joan of Arc existed only in mythology' (p. 73). It suggests both a preference for the sensibilities of yesteryear and an inability to adapt to the climate of today. Talbot is a tragic figure in his displacement in the world he now exists in; when the BBC presented the plays their consultant John Wilders noted that 'Talbot, in his patriotism, courage and uprightness, appeared to be a relic of a former age'.<sup>35</sup>

In the context of this theme even the scene with Mortimer is explained not as a suggestion of wars to come but a reflection on one of many deaths of the old generation seen throughout the play. The old lord has spent a service in jail through the reigns of two kings, and the timing of his death so close to Henry V's is further evidence of a general drift away from the past era. It is important to note also that there is no explicit mention made at any point in this play of York's intentions to be king. Both his argument with Suffolk and his discussion with Mortimer all allude to him regaining his father's title of York; Suffolk's argument is that he is a 'yeoman' (2.4.81) rather than a usurper, and their dispute over whether Cambridge's status as traitor therefore robs the son from the heritage his forefathers have enjoyed. Even after Mortimer reveals his own attempts on the crown, York still desires only 'to be restored to [his] blood' (2.5.128). Any references in the plays to York assuming the crown are unspoken; Mortimer says 'Thou art my heir. The rest I wish thee gather' (2.5.96), in response to which York claims to 'lock his counsel in my breast' (2.5.118); later still Exeter feels York does best to 'suppress thy voice' (4.1.122).

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<sup>35</sup> John Wilders in William Shakespeare, *Henry VI Part 3*, ed. by John Wilders and others, BBC Shakespeare (London: BBC, 1983), p. 15.

The idea of York as king is conspicuously left silent. It is something that will happen historically but which is not to be developed in this play. The plans for the kingdom belong entirely to the York of *The First Part of the Contention*, whilst in *Henry VI* York's character is enigmatic; his wrangling in England define him as a man of the younger, political generation, but by the final act he has evolved, in Talbot's absence, to a man of honour who is incensed by the senseless trading with France while the advantage is on the English side.

As the play progresses we see the attempt to recreate Henry V's campaign in France fall spectacularly wrong, and the old soldiers prove themselves unable to cope in unchivalrous times. The domination of politics over honour is best shown in an individual production as, freed from the pressure of continuous casting, Henry himself can be played by a child. The historical events in the play do not go beyond the twenty-second year of Henry's reign, and in most scenes he would have been much younger than that. The crumbling of rule and the rise of opportunists is best displayed on stage by the strong symbolism of a boy king. Michael Taylor points out that 'Henry VI himself, the eponymous (and anonymous) hero of the play, is clearly a youth of words not action in a play that prizes action. Henry is neither an active warrior nor a wooer. He woos and is wooed by proxy' (p. 60).

Such a character is little more than a physical embodiment of the state, pliable in the hands of the lords who ultimately have control over him. A reviewer of Benson's 1905 production concluded that 'George Buchanan as the boy King looked the character and acted it consistently, but perhaps a younger representative would have better met the requirements of the play': an adult actor cannot convey the weakness of the King so

effectively as the actual presentation of a child playing the part, towered over by the lords and understandably ineffectual in controlling them.<sup>36</sup> It is interesting to note of a dramatic reading by the Nottingham Shakespeare Society in 1935, which predates the cycles of Seale and the RSC, that the reviewer discussed ‘All the scenes in which the *boy king* appears’ (my italics).<sup>37</sup> More significantly, Edward Burns, having noticed ‘Henry’s childlikeness’, suggests that the role was ‘arguably in the original performances played by a child’.<sup>38</sup>

If Henry is indeed intended to be played by a child, it also builds up the contrast between one king, who is small and weak, with his father, and it is important to remember that this play was written before Shakespeare had dramatised Henry’s achievement at Agincourt. Thus, as Brian Walsh notes, ‘The Elizabethan audiences attending performances of *1 Henry VI* watched enactments of an absent history that was itself infused with nostalgia for an absent past.’<sup>39</sup> When we look at *Henry VI* without reference to the tangible hero of *Henry V*, we can recognise the references to the dead king as more akin to a mythological character, often alluded to but never realised. Consider the references to the old King in the first scene, where those who recall him do so not with accuracy but with exaggeration:

His brandished sword did blind men with his beams,  
His arms spread wider than a dragon’s wings,  
His sparkling eyes, replete with wrathful fire,  
More dazzled and drove back his enemies  
Than midday sun fierce bent against their faces. (1.1.10-14)

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<sup>36</sup> *Stratford-upon-Avon Herald*, 4 May 1906.

<sup>37</sup> *Nottingham Journal*, 6 December 1935.

<sup>38</sup> Burns, ed., *King Henry VI Part 1*, p. 66.

<sup>39</sup> Walsh, p. 124.

Obviously the demigod described here is at odds with the human protagonist of Shakespeare's later play; the purpose of such a description is not to remember, but to enforce the standards of the past on the present protagonists. The descriptions of Henry V go beyond metaphor and show a fervent belief in the power of the last King, of whom the judgement 'virtue he had, deserving to command' (1.1.9) prepares the audience to notice the opposite in his son. Wilders suggested that the play 'demonstrates how the empire in France which had been won by Henry V came to be lost by his son.'<sup>40</sup> Hattaway is even more explicit over the impact of Henry V as a comparison to his son:

Henry V in fact will haunt the ensuing action: like the Ghost in *Hamlet*, he is a presence whose honour, prowess, and acquisition of empire throw into contrast the attacks of fatalism and debilitating piety suffered by his contemplative son.<sup>41</sup>

Such a consideration of the young Henry in relation to his father offers a thematic conclusion in the play, for in the choice of a peaceful truce and Margaret for his Queen the young King betrays the sensibilities of the past generation. In a play where honour has been fought for by so many in France, Henry is attacked by Gloucester for not maintaining such standards himself:

How shall we then dispense with that contract  
And not deface your honour with reproach? (5.6.28-9)

The remaining problem for an individual performance to resolve is the matter of Margaret. Cyclical productions have emphasised her as a powerful character; she is the

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<sup>40</sup> John Wilders in John Wilders and Henry Fenwick, eds, William Shakespeare, *Henry VI Part 2*, BBC Shakespeare (London: BBC, 1983), p. 10.

<sup>41</sup> Hattaway, ed., *The First Part of King Henry VI*, p. 5.



only one to appear in all four plays of the presumed tetralogy. In this play however, she is rather less significant. She has one scene in which she is less a she-wolf of France than a sexually aware girl manipulated by the attentions of Suffolk. Cyclical productions have cast Margaret based on the character in the other two plays, at the expense of the character and plot of *Henry VI*. When the ESC cast June Watson in the role, intending to link the Margaret of Henry's reign with the more contemporary iron lady Margaret Thatcher, the consequence was that the young girl who turns Suffolk's head in *Henry VI* is the same domineering Queen of the later plays, a concept which does not work.

Given Suffolk's love language, it comes as something of a shock to find that an actress rather far from the attractive bloom of youth has been cast as Margaret. The actress, June Watson, has sharp features matched by an equally sharp voice, and as Margaret she had a puzzlingly contemporary kind of matronly coiffure.<sup>42</sup>

It is unlikely that a contemporary audience would see Thatcher as a figure of desire, nor as a character who can be made to comply with another's wishes; within the framework of *Henry VI* it is precisely Margaret's youth and beauty that not only explains her compliance with Suffolk, but also his lust for her. In the text, seen individually, he is most concerned initially with the fulfilment of his own desires, for which the marrying of such a girl to the King satisfies those needs. Any concept of ruling the realm through her occurs to him only in the final scene, and this provides a conclusion to the struggle of politics and honour: Henry submits to Suffolk's plan, not Gloucester's.

Michael Hattaway presumes the final couplet, 'Margaret shall now be Queen and rule the King/But I will rule both her, the King and realm' (5.7.107-8), to 'act as a kind of

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<sup>42</sup> Knowles, ed., *King Henry VI Part Two*, p. 27.

commercial for the second part'.<sup>43</sup> That the end promises things to come after the curtains close makes it no different to Malcolm's intention to be crowned at Scone at the end of *Macbeth*, or Lucius' gruesome plans for his defeated foes at the conclusion of *Titus Andronicus*; Shakespeare's couplets predominantly end with a focus on what is to happen next. But this does not imply that these events are necessary to achieve closure; at the end of the play we must reflect, not anticipate. While the play begins with lords of the old generation mourning the great King, it closes with a lord of the political age plotting over the new King. The end of the play informs the audience that the new King has failed to fulfil the promise which his father showed; the new generation has betrayed the old.

### *Henry VI Part Two/The First Part of the Contention*

Under the title of *Henry VI Part Two*, this play would appear to lack both beginning and end, which suggests a dependency on the other two plays; the two single productions offered in recent stage history by Benson in 1899 and Seale in 1951 have both been developed into cycles at a later point by the directors. John Wilders argues that the play 'cannot be fully understood in isolation [...]. Looked at on its own, the plot is perfectly intelligible but the motive and the relationships between the characters are not.'<sup>44</sup> However, the growing belief that this was the first of the three plays to be written has prompted critics such as Wilson to suggest that 'Part II and its sequel [...] really constitute a single two-piece drama', which directly challenges the play's dependence on a precursor.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Hattaway, ed., *The First Part of King Henry VI*, p. 185.

<sup>44</sup> Wilders, ed., *Henry VI Part 2*, p. 8.

<sup>45</sup> Wilson, ed., *Henry VI Part 3*, p. xxii.

Influenced by this, even serialists have acknowledged the strong opening: Cairncross notes that ‘Shakespeare seized his centre of action, squarely, placed it firmly in the forefront and grouped round it, in the opening scene, the various internal factions, clearly framing the attitude of each, and reflecting the weakness of Henry and the anarchy of the commons.’<sup>46</sup> Certainly, the opening scene is masterful in setting up the characters, their affiliations and the basis for the events that are to follow. Each character walks on almost in a procession, the levels of duplicity being unveiled one by one: the King, Margaret and Suffolk’s happy idyll is challenged after their exit by Gloucester, who becomes the unknowing target of Winchester, who in turn is being used by the remaining noblemen. York’s presence to the end identifies him to the audience as the most politically aware, the master manipulator.

The beginning also provides the necessary details to set the scene for the audience, summarising the loss of France, the court’s jealousy of Gloucester and the treasonous ambitions of York, none of which are depicted in *Henry VI*: that play offers nothing which is necessary for the context of the unfolding drama. However, be it *Henry VI Part Two* or *The First Part of the Contention*, this would still leave the text in need of a resolution to be found in another play, which appears to be offered in *Henry VI Part Three* or *The Tragedy of Richard Duke of York [...] with the whole contention*. A supporting factor of such an argument might be found in the supernatural predictions in 1.4: of Suffolk it is promised ‘by water he shall die’ (1.4.33) which is fulfilled by his decapitation by Walter Whitmore (4.1), Somerset’s cryptic advice to ‘shun castles’ (1.4.35) is realised in Richard’s slaying of

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<sup>46</sup> Cairncross, ed., *Henry VI Part 2*, p. li.

him by the inn called 'The Castle in Saint Albans' (5.2.18), but the prophesy regarding York and Henry does not reach its fruition in the play:

The duke yet lives that Henry shall depose,  
But him outlive, and die a violent death. (1.4.30-1)

Henry is not deposed until the next play, nor does York die a violent death in the closing of *The First Part of the Contention*. The prophecy can be explained in three ways: firstly, unfulfilled prophecies have been used again by Shakespeare such as in the promise of Banquo's sons as kings in *Macbeth*, without requiring the existence of a sequel; alternatively, some prophecies act to look ahead to the world beyond the histories to contextualise them for the audience, such as Cranmer's promise of the glorious reigns of Elizabeth and James in *Henry VIII*; finally, the decision is plausibly a political one. In the close of Elizabeth I's reign it would not have done to show the deposition of a monarch without showing the dire consequences; even *Richard II* was censored despite conveying the tragic nature of the rightful King's abdication. If *The First Part of the Contention* had ended on a note of Henry's total defeat it may never have been approved by the master of revels; Henry had to live to fight another day. Had Shakespeare planned to make the theme of this play the defeat of Henry he would thus have allowed sufficient space to show the consequent disaster that follows such an action, and the fact that this play dwells on the actions preceding the event suggest that we should be looking for quite a different story in Shakespeare's text.

Michael Hattaway argues that while the play looks upon 'the large and public concerns of dynastic wars' it focuses equally upon 'the most complex web of petty jealousies and

private agonies. This human interest, however, depends upon a clarity of historical analysis that can be understood only if a reader or spectator attends closely to the play's particular analytic techniques and does not interpret it in terms of any grand design.'<sup>47</sup> Therefore, putting the grand design aside, as the relegation of the contention to subheading in *The Tragedy of Richard, Duke of York* suggests of that play, we need to review the quarto's full title for an indication of the play's focus:

The  
First Part of the Con-  
tention betwixt the two famous houses of Yorke  
and Lancaster, with the death of the good Duke Humphrey:  
And the banishment and death of the Duke of  
Suffolk, and the Tragicall end of the proud Cardinall  
of Winchester, with the notable Rebellion  
of Jack Cade:  
And the Duke of Yorkes first claime unto the  
Crowne

The lengthy title betrays a number of significant events and characters, for which the contention between York and Lancaster is merely a background. When compared with the Folio's subtitle of 'the death of Good Duke Humphrey', the play's main theme becomes apparent. Gloucester is a hugely significant character that dominates the play up until his death. Not a scene before that fails to include him or mention his name. In contrast, the other lords, when they are mentioned, are discussed as a group. When Margaret complains of Gloucester's power in 1.3, she adds as an afterthought:

Besides the haughty Protector have we Beaufort,  
The imperious churchman, Somerset, Buckingham  
And grumbling York (1.3.69-72)

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<sup>47</sup> Michael Hattaway, ed., William Shakespeare, *The Second Part of King Henry VI*, New Cambridge Shakespeare (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 1.

Ronald Knowles discusses G. K Hunter's theory of a pattern in the first tetralogy of 'the "pack", the animal-like hunting of a group to bring down an individual'.<sup>48</sup> The identity of the lords together, as a pack, including Margaret and Suffolk, sets them up as a threat to Gloucester in their multitude, rather than suggesting that any of them are an individual foe. The importance of this may be realised by looking at this play through the model of Shakespeare's later political play, *Julius Caesar*. Hattaway notices the similar concerns addressed in both plays, 'having at its centre the murder of a national leader'.<sup>49</sup> Roger Warren also notes how the Folio and Quarto titles reference the death itself:

Both texts recognise the centrality of this cataclysmic event to the first half of the play [...] the removal of Humphrey's strong central government leads to the rise of York, prepared for by the rebellion of Cade, and ultimately to the outbreak of the Wars of the Roses in Act 5.<sup>50</sup>

The death of Gloucester forms a central point to the play, just as Caesar's does; the plot revolves around the anticipation of the event, and the subsequent consequences for those involved in the murder. Knowles suggests that 'As soon as it has happened, the consequences for those who engineered it are powerfully dramatised in the scenes that follow' (p. 40): Gloucester's death is not a conclusion, but a centrepiece.

Winchester's death is clearly identified as punishment for his part in Gloucester's death, and indicates Shakespeare's manipulation of his sources. In Hall, Winchester shows little guilt over his nephew's murder; his only comment on it being that 'when my nephew of

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<sup>48</sup> Knowles, ed., *King Henry VI Part II*, p. 23.

<sup>49</sup> Hattaway, ed., *The Second Part of King Henry VI*, p. xi.

<sup>50</sup> Warren, ed., *Henry VI Part Two*, pp. 36-7.

Bedford died, I thought myself half up the wheel, but when I saw mine other nephew of Gloucester defeated, then I thought my self able to be equal with kings'.<sup>51</sup> Holinshed's account suggests a gap of one year between the death of Gloucester and his persecutor.<sup>52</sup> Shakespeare condenses the passage of time so that immediately after Gloucester's death the Cardinal leaves 'assisted by Somerset' (3.2.202SD), and the following scene leaves no doubt of the direction of the play, bearing less relevance to Winchester's death and more to his guilt.

In the Quarto this is suggested by a very definite presence of Gloucester's spirit: Winchester cries 'Oh see where Duke Humphrey's ghost doth stand', which suggests a scene similar to Macbeth's vision of the murdered Banquo.<sup>53</sup> This was further suggested in Michael Boyd's 2000 production when Richard Cordery's Gloucester walked onto the stage, seen only by Christopher Ettridge's Winchester. At the point when Henry gives the Cardinal the chance of redemption, asking him to 'Hold up thy hand, make signal of thy hope' (3.3.28), Gloucester's ghost forcibly held down Winchester's struggling arms. Even without a ghost, the scene is dominated by Winchester's horror at what he has done: 'O torture me no more – I will confess' (3.3.11).

After this indication that Gloucester's death is being avenged, the play continues to pick off each conspirator. Suffolk is banished in the same scene in which Gloucester's death is discovered, and the murder is recalled before his death: 'thou that smiledst at good Duke

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<sup>51</sup> Edward Hall, *The Union of the Two Noble Families of Lancaster and York* (1550; repr. Menston: Scolar Press 1970), The xxvi year of King Henry the VI.

<sup>52</sup> Raphael Holinshed, *Holinshed's Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland in Six Volumes* (1587, repr. London, J. Johnson et al., 1808)

<sup>53</sup> William Montgomery, ed., *The First Part of the Contention* (Oxford: Malone Society, 1985), line 1448.

Humphrey's death/Against the senseless winds shalt grin in vain' (4.2.76-7). Wilders

argues that 'Suffolk's crime leads directly to his banishment and death'.<sup>54</sup> Additionally,

both he and Margaret are punished by their separation. Their leave-taking is a surprisingly tender scene, where each feels the pain of being rendered asunder:

MARGARET:                    Even thus two friends condemned  
                                        Embrace, and kiss, and take ten thousand leaves,  
                                        Loather a hundred times to part then die.  
                                        Yet now farewell, and farewell life with thee.  
SUFFOLK:    Thus is poor Suffolk ten times banished –  
                                        Once by the King, and three times thrice by thee.  
                                        'Tis not the land I care for, wert thou thence,  
                                        A wilderness is populous enough,  
                                        So Suffolk had thy heavenly company.  
                                        (3.2.357-365)

Margaret's agony, and punishment, is completed in Suffolk's death, and the return of his disembodied head to her: 'who can cease to weep and look on this?/Here may his head lie on my throbbing breast,/But where's the body that I should embrace?' (4.4.4-6)

The fourth conspirator may be argued to be Henry himself, and it is through this final piece of retribution that a conclusion may be found within the text. Hattaway suggests that at the centre of the play is 'a portrait of a relationship between the king and his Protector, Good Duke Humphrey, which is as complex as that between Prince Hal and his father Bullingbrook.'<sup>55</sup> In some respects the close relationship between them makes Henry's part in the conspiracy the most damning; the King's complicity at the trial of Gloucester makes him just as guilty as those who attack him; indeed his conscience and awareness of the wrong he has done sets him up as a parallel to Brutus. During the trial he reveals to

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<sup>54</sup> Wilders, ed., *Henry VI Part 2*, p. 10.

<sup>55</sup> Hattaway, ed., *The Second Part of King Henry VI*, p. iii.



Gloucester that 'My conscience tells me you are innocent' (3.1.141), but after the Duke is taken away, he walks away having done nothing to reverse Gloucester's fortunes.

Even so myself bewails good Gloucester's case  
With sad unhelpful tears, and with dimmed eyes  
Look after him, and cannot do him good (3.1.217-9)

Hattaway suggests 'it may be that the king is proclaiming an inability to help the Protector precisely because he is not certain that he wants the Protector to be helped' (p. 38). The interpretation of Henry's intentions need not make him so duplicitous; it is equally possible that, in his inability to protect his Protector, we see Shakespeare exploring the test, and ultimate failure, of Henry's weak resolve. At the close of the third act Henry acknowledges his own guilt and draws the portion of the text concerned with the lead-up to Gloucester's death to a suitably foreboding close.

Forbear to judge, for we are sinners all.  
Close up the curtain, and let us all to meditation. (3.3.32-3)

It is at this point that many productions, in their confections, have chosen to end their first play. By doing so this has a drastic effect on the play's structure, for the story of Gloucester's death is not complete until the consequences are full realised. Just as Julius Caesar focuses on the fortune of Brutus, so here the play turns to Henry's decline. The apparent inconclusiveness of the play, and the descent into chaos, can be understood better when that chaos is seen as a conclusion in itself, the result of a crime against Gloucester being repaid on Henry and, as a result, the state. It is Gloucester's death that provokes the first uprising of the citizens, which prepares the ground for the subsequent rebellion of which York and his lackey Cade play a part.

York's absence from England at the time of the murder removes him from the conspirators, and he in turn becomes either part of the divine retribution heaped upon the conspirators or else an opportunist seizing his chance to rule. In relation to *Julius Caesar*, York becomes a far more interesting figure than Mark Antony, for having incited the country into riot through his intermediary Jack Cade, he goes on to abuse that chance for his own gains. Cade himself, and the scenes in which he appears, offers an in-depth exploration of mob mentality and manipulation of the people which Shakespeare only skims across in the murder of Cinna the poet in *Julius Caesar*.

As the rioters continue their reign of terror across London, the play cuts back to Henry, unable to control the situation and in desperate need of his Protector. By the time York returns, the weakness of Henry's resolve has already been shown: we know he will not win the battle. Wilders suggests that 'The descent of England into civil war at the end of 2 *Henry VI* is brought about not by God or Fortune but by the fatal passivity of the King, the hostility to the Lord Protector, and the ambitions of York who is left free by Duke Humphrey's death to carve out his own future.'<sup>56</sup> Gloucester's warning to Henry in 3.1 of 'dogged York that reaches at the moon,/Whose overweening arm I have plucked back' (3.1.158-9) comes true; even York himself admits a revolution is only possible once the Protector is gone, 'For Humphrey being dead, as he shall be,/And Henry put apart, the next for me' (3.1.382-3). Roger Warren considers the two to be inseparable, and the achievement of York to be a resolution born out of the death of Gloucester.

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<sup>56</sup> Wilders, ed., *Henry VI Part 2*, p. 13.

This last act draws all the threads together. After the destruction of Duke Humphrey's government and the chaos created by Cade's rebellion, the public declaration of what the Quarto's title-page calls '*the Duke of York's first claim unto the crown*' becomes inevitable. This is important if the play is not to end in anti-climax.<sup>57</sup>

The rise of York is conclusion enough for the purposes of the plot; his subsequent seizing of the crown need only be inferred for Henry's punishment to be realised. The inevitability is suggested in Henry's defeatist tone: 'Can we outrun the heavens?' (5.4.2), and is even more explicit in the quarto as York gives a clear outline of what is to come:

Now Lancaster sit sure, thy sinowes shrink,  
Come fearfull Henry grovelling on thy face,  
Yeeld up thy Crowne unto the Prince of Yorke.<sup>58</sup>

York voices what the audience suspects: that Henry will yield the crown. But even without these passages from the quarto, the play still suggests that the conclusion is ultimately a moment of defeat for Henry and his party. Clifford, whom in the next play will be depicted as a character of monstrous brutality and little reasoning, in this play suggests the only option is retreat: 'But fly you must; uncurable discomfit/Reigns in the hearts of all our present parts' (5.4.15-6). The rise of York and the Wars of the Roses are both incomplete, but that is not the tale which pervades this text; the death of Gloucester, and all the consequences of his murder, have been dramatised by the play's close.

### *Henry VI Part Three/The True Tragedy of Richard Duke of York*

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<sup>57</sup> Warren, ed., *Henry VI Part Two*, p. 57.

<sup>58</sup> Montgomery, ed., *The First Part of the Contention*, 2162-4.

*The True Tragedy of Richard Duke of York*, under the perception of *Henry VI Part Three*, bears the unfair weight of concluding previously developed themes; it is wrongly assumed that the play's structure is therefore more concerned with a rapid succession of events aiming to fulfil that which has been hinted at in previous parts. Michael Hattaway feels that 'This is a play without a hero, a political essay that must, by virtue of the secularising point of view, remain a chronicle [...]. Inevitably the story of the play is centred on its battles.'<sup>59</sup> Such a view both supports, and is supported by, the theory that the *Henry VI* plays have weaker poetry and more action than Shakespeare's other works; consequently, little exploration has been made for the play's individual dramatic structure, and critics such as Cairncross have viewed it primarily in terms of the superstructure applied to all three plays where the 'general purpose' was 'to glorify England', a view obviously at odds with the bloodshed and dissension that pervades the text of *The True Tragedy of Richard Duke of York*.<sup>60</sup> Cairncross accordingly blames the shortcomings on the material:

There was only a linear unity in the events - the unity of a chronicle or diary - a long series of victories and defeats, with significant dramatic developments only in the breach of Edward's marriage, and the perfidy of Clarence. The rest was the completion of the Clifford-York duel of 2 *Henry VI*; the preparation, in the murder of Prince Edward and the king, for *Richard III*; and a series of battle-scenes [...] but no dramatic 'moral pattern'. Within the limits imposed by the chronicles, Shakespeare could have done little more (p. li).

The play was seen as a completion of *Henry VI*, and a preparation for *Richard III*. Many critics have focused on 'the man we recognize from *Richard III*', assuming Richard of

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<sup>59</sup> Hattaway, ed., *The Third Part of King Henry VI*, p. 30.

<sup>60</sup> Andrew S. Cairncross, ed., William Shakespeare, *Henry VI Part 3*, Arden 2<sup>nd</sup> Series (London: Methuen, 1969), p. 1.

Gloucester to be a leading man also in *The Tragedy of York*.<sup>61</sup> The same is true in theatre: Randall Martin feels that the majority of productions ‘have decided to centre the play on [Henry’s] emerging dramatic rival and ideological adversary, Richard of Gloucester, albeit for reasons that have more to do with the latter’s stage life after this play.’<sup>62</sup> When Terry Hands staged the three plays in 1977 Don Chapman remarked as early as *Henry VI Part Two* that ‘Seeing Anton Lesser’s tempting thumbnail sketch of York’s young son - the future Richard III - you can’t help thinking of later, greater histories.’<sup>63</sup> Hands’ production was felt to be disappointing and ‘downright frustrating’ precisely because it did not present the later stage life of Richard, a frustration ‘intensified by the brilliant Gloucester of Anton Lesser, whom one longs to see in full command of the role.’<sup>64</sup> Audiences and critics cannot help but be reminded of the more famous play and its eponymous anti-hero; consequently *The Tragedy of York* is perceived as a prequel, forever inconclusive. At the close of the play Wilson argues:

The portrait is complete except - a large exception - for the engaging gaiety we associate with Shakespeare’s first great essay in villainy. That comes when success crowns him in *Richard III*.<sup>65</sup>

But it is our expectations, not Shakespeare’s text, which imposes the later play upon the earlier. The strength of this association between the two plays has not been helped by the choice in many productions of *Henry VI Part Three* to include the first speech of *Richard III* at the close of the play. In the 2005 production, Pearson explained the need to end the

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<sup>61</sup> Wilson, ed., *Henry VI Part 3*, p. xxxii.

<sup>62</sup> Randall Martin, ed., William Shakespeare, *Henry VI Part Three*, Oxford Shakespeare (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 44.

<sup>63</sup> Don Chapman, *Oxford Mail*, 14 July 1977.

<sup>64</sup> Irving Wardle, *The Times*, 15 July 1977.

<sup>65</sup> Wilson, ed., *Henry VI Part 3*, p. xxxviii.

play ‘with a bang. It either needs to end on a bang with music, trumpets, whatever, but if it ends on “our lasting joy”, it’s a bit of an anti-climax.’<sup>66</sup> It does not seem satisfactory to think of the end of the play as an anti-climax, nor does it seem appropriate to conclude an individual drama with reference to another play, especially in productions where *Richard III* has not been presented in the same season, such as the 1977 cycle in Stratford and Pearson’s own adaptation in 2005.

Randall Martin argues that ‘Such assimilation is symptomatic of the tendency to view 3 *Henry VI* as an induction to *Richard III*’, and is a curious reversal of the practise begun in Cibber’s adaptation of *Richard III*; where once it was felt this play needed a depiction of events from *Henry VI Part Three*, now the latter is felt to be incomplete without some acknowledgement of Richard’s grasping of power.<sup>67</sup> But unlike *Richard III*, *The Tragedy of York* is an ensemble play, with many characters of equal stature; Martin notes that ‘Verbally the two longest roles in the play belong to Warwick and Edward’. Therefore a focus on Richard either presents many moments on stage where the audience is bereft of their self-imposed main character, or results in other parts of greater length and, arguably, importance, being minimised to the play’s discredit.

The misdirection of audience focus strengthens the view of the play as chaotic and without order, ‘a study in anarchy’.<sup>68</sup> Wilson, focusing on Richard in the play, argues that he ‘reflects the anarchy and the agony that reigned in England between the battles of St Albans and Tewkesbury’.<sup>69</sup> Wilders suggests that while ‘The confusion increases as the

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<sup>66</sup> Pearson, in interview with the author.

<sup>67</sup> Martin, ed., *Henry VI Part Three*, p. 47.

<sup>68</sup> Cairncross, ed., *Henry VI Part 3*, p. liii.

<sup>69</sup> Wilson, ed., *Henry VI Part 3*, p. xxvii.

play develops [...] it is a confusion which Shakespeare plots with some care.’<sup>70</sup> Hattaway describes it as ‘ritualised anarchy’, which he sees as a more suitable term than rebellion ‘given the absence of monarchical power and authority’.<sup>71</sup> But the idea of no order as a structure for the play is both contradictory and unhelpful in determining individual clarity.

The play was produced individually only once in the twentieth century (not including Douglas Seale’s production of 1952, which in terms of both director and cast followed on from the preceding year’s *Henry VI Part 2*), by Katie Mitchell at The Other Place in 1994. A notable exception amongst the RSC’s ritual of cycles, Mitchell’s production did not attempt to condense two plays into one, or improve the text; it was, as Ric Knowles remarks, ‘The only significant exception to this history of conservative appropriation’ which has applied to previous adaptations of the play for the stage. Mitchell’s one major change was the wise decision to re-title the play as *Henry VI: Battle for the Throne*, avoiding the sense of incompleteness that *Part Three* suggests.

But the initial challenge was in overcoming the critics’ desire for context that prior productions in Stratford had encouraged them to look for. One was utterly unable to see the play as separate from surrounding history, referring to it as an ‘absorbing and compelling War of the Roses tale’ in which ‘King Henry, played by Jonathan Firth [...] ascends the English throne at 9 months of age’, a historical fact that bears no importance on the text of this play.<sup>72</sup> Meanwhile Robert Gore-Langton complained that ‘without the benefit of seeing Parts One and Two, there is of course a degree of confusion as to exactly what’s going on’,

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<sup>70</sup> Wilders, ed., *Henry VI Part 3*, p. 10.

<sup>71</sup> Hattaway, ed., *The Third Part of King Henry VI*, p. 30.

<sup>72</sup> Alastair Macauley, *Financial Times*, 12 August 1994; Ian Hughes, *Leamington Spa Observer*, 18 August 1994.

whilst Margaret Ingram believed that ‘everyone’s enjoyment of the play will be intensified by a reading of it beforehand.’<sup>73</sup> However, Paul Taylor, of the *Independent*, suggested the lack of context could prove a benefit, not a burden:

Mounting it on its own, as though it were a clean, free-standing work, has scarcely been done before and is an activity hedged about with both opportunities and liabilities. Can, say, the fact that the characters don’t stand out, in this showing, already burdened with our sense of their accumulated history be turned to dramatic advantage?<sup>74</sup>

Mitchell stepped away from the pageantry and grandeur that had become synonymous with the histories through the epic nature of serial productions. The stage was kept simple, the costumes were white gowns with occasional pieces of armour worn on top for battle scenes; what props there were on stage went no further than plain stools, and Benedict Nightingale described the throne as ‘a squat chunky lump, more desirable than the wooden chairs beside it only because it has arms and some rudimentary carving at the top.’<sup>75</sup> None of the Henrys had ever been presented at Stratford in such a basic form before, and critics applauded the bold innovation. In the same review Nightingale saw this not as a budget led decision, but because ‘Rough theatre suits rough people in rough times.’ Peter Holland concurred that ‘The result was a bleak exploration of the viciousness of human behaviour, a tense vision of political brutality’; furthermore he felt that ‘the action was set out with exemplary clarity.’<sup>76</sup> Indeed, though the direction of the play contradicted expectations, it was well received:

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<sup>73</sup> Robert Gore-Langton, *Daily Telegraph*, 15 August 1994; Margaret Ingram, *Stratford Herald*, 18 August 1994.

<sup>74</sup> Paul Taylor, *Independent*, 10 August 1994.

<sup>75</sup> Benedict Nightingale, *The Times*, 12 August 1994.

<sup>76</sup> Holland, p. 199, p. 202.



Playing it in immediate close-up pays mixed dividends. You lose the sense of blood-soaked pageantry, of huge-events rocking and wrecking the country; but you gain a sense of political clarity, of personal arguments, of power shifting to and fro between small, close-knit groups of people. Stylistically, you lose the grand theatrical lyricism of the writing, the sense of big public passions, of purposeful Tudor spectacle; but you gain in precision, in the careful, intimate articulation of the speeches. This means, quite simply, that it is rather clearer than usual what is happening.<sup>77</sup>

The consequence of a single production was that characters were freed from the events that shaped them in previous parts; it was felt that Mitchell's 'approach inevitably favours the bookish Lancastrian King over the brutally pragmatic Yorkists without fully exploring his fatal irresolution: for that you need Parts One and Two as well.'<sup>78</sup> One reviewer felt this to be a distinct disadvantage as 'Firth turns Henry VI's mildness into sheer dullness', but another felt that the character offered 'an unostentatious portrayal of weakness and indecision cloaked in dignity.'<sup>79</sup> As a direct contrast to this, in a conflation of all three *Henry VI* plays by John Doyle at the Theatre Royal in York that same year, the character of Henry was precisely what would be expected from a larger perspective: 'a thoughtful, gauche, mild-mannered monarch who has neither the guts nor the guile to withstand the Yorkist onslaught.'<sup>80</sup> But in Mitchell's production, because the character did not have the baggage of Gloucester's death, or the audience's experience of seeing the King so dependent upon the protector, Firth's Henry had more confidence and dignity than is normally found in the role: he entered the first scene with genuine command and anger at seeing a usurper in his throne.

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<sup>77</sup> *Sunday Times*, 14 August 1994.

<sup>78</sup> Michael Billington, *The Guardian*, 11 August 1994.

<sup>79</sup> Alastair Macauley, *Financial Times*, 12 August 1994; *Sunday Times*, 14 August 1994.

<sup>80</sup> *Sunday Times*, 23 October 1994.

Margaret also benefited from an individual perspective; a reviewer felt that an ‘effect of presenting the piece on its own is to make Ruth Mitchell’s powerful Margaret seem a woman more sinned against than sinning, a mother who rightly wants to see her disinherited son reinstated but who instead sees him hacked down.’<sup>81</sup> Consequently another critic felt that within the play Margaret was ‘By far its most vigorous character’.<sup>82</sup> The production also allowed other characters within the text to receive praise never normally given in reviews of cycles, so that Nicola Barker felt ‘Jamie Hinde steals the show as a gloriously sadistic, well spoken Clifford.’<sup>83</sup>

Inevitably, attention was drawn to Richard of Gloucester once more, hailed by one critic as ‘a Richard III in embryo’, whilst another felt that Tom Smith delivered ‘a magnificent performance which cries out for him to continue the role in Richard III.’<sup>84</sup> Perhaps similar comments might have been made about Hinde’s Clifford had that character also appeared in the subsequent play; it would be comforting to think that the enjoyment of the character, rather than anticipation of the later play, induced audiences to want to see more. The experiment did yield suitable enthusiasm, and raised the awareness of the potential for the play, which one critic felt ‘now gets the individual attention it deserves.’<sup>85</sup>

### An Individual Reading: What is *The Tragedy of York*?

The play’s central theme is the destruction of the family. Wilders felt that in the text ‘Shakespeare was very sensitive to the feelings which bind together the family, the natural

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<sup>81</sup> Paul Taylor, *Independent*, 10 August 1994.

<sup>82</sup> Margaret Ingram, *Stratford Herald*, 18 August 1994.

<sup>83</sup> Nicola Barker, *Observer*, 14 August 1994.

<sup>84</sup> Michael Billington, *Guardian*, 11 August 1994; Nick Curtis, *Evening Standard*, 11 August 1994.

<sup>85</sup> Robert Gore-Langton, *Daily Telegraph*, 15 August 1994.

and instinctive tenderness which links husband to wife, parents to their children'.<sup>86</sup>

Cairncross believed that, as the play develops, 'The basic social bond of the family is similarly disrupted'.<sup>87</sup> Henry defies his own family by robbing his son of the crown for his own ends; Clifford is a man without humanity having become consumed by the death of his father, both York and Margaret see their sons killed before their eyes. The theme is given an entire scene to be theorised upon when Henry sees the father that has killed his son and the son that has killed his father. Wilson felt that the scene 'is the dramatic centre of the play, and reveals [...] the nature of the war as a whole.'<sup>88</sup> This is realised in the dominant plot of the play as recognised in its title: *The Tragedy of York*.

The title of the play, as presented in the octavo and quarto editions, appears confusing at first glance: how can this be the tragedy of York if he dies in the first act? Even Julius Caesar survived into the third act. To understand this, and the nature of the play in its own right, we must determine precisely what the nature of York's tragedy is. York in this play is once more quite distinct from the previous two Yorks of the other plays. In *Henry VI* the character called York wavered between nobility and politics, seeking to regain his father's title. The York in *The First Part of the Contention* manipulates the conspiracy of the other lords to his own advantage, wreaking havoc upon the state to fulfil his own desire to be king. In *The Tragedy of York*, however, the character gives up his own claim to the throne in the first scene, allowing Henry to rule in peace in order that York's sons may then reign.

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<sup>86</sup> Wilders, ed., *Henry VI Part 3*, p. 13.

<sup>87</sup> Cairncross, ed., *Henry VI Part 3*, p. liii.

<sup>88</sup> Wilson, ed., *Henry VI Part 3*, p. xxxvii.

When Bernard Hill played York for the BBC in 1982, he felt that in this play the character's actions were indicative of 'the general sense of growing tiredness, war-weariness throughout the cycle.'<sup>89</sup> But in cycle productions the play follows directly on from the action of *The First Part of the Contention*, and the five years between the battle of St Albans and York's pact with Henry is conflated. Consequently, York's weariness of the endless war makes no sense, as the preceding scene shows him eager for the chase, victorious in battle, only to then, in this scene, stop short of taking the crown in favour of a peaceful solution. Only an individual production can avoid this contradiction.

The tragedy lies in York's intentions, not York's life. He looks to create peace in the kingdom and allow his sons the chance to reign in peace. The parallel that arises is that of *King Lear*, where in that play's opening scene the protagonist also plans 'To shake all cares and business from our age,/Conferring them on younger strengths' (1.1.38-9). What occurs in the rest of both plays is the slow unravelling of this plan into chaos, as York himself dies and his sons, whom he wished to live in peace, turn upon one another; Cairncross noted that 'York's three sons, at first united [...] could not in the end be further divided'.<sup>90</sup>

It can be argued that York's tragedy is self-inflicted: in 1.2 he goes back on his word and agrees to once more start the war. It is important that Margaret's own plans to resume the violence are only discovered by York after he breaks his vow, else the subsequent battle could be misinterpreted as retaliation or self-defence. Once York breaks his word, his tragedy begins. His youngest son Rutland is killed, and as soon as York himself dies, the shift of focus moves to his sons and the dynamic between them.

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<sup>89</sup> Bernard Hill in Wilders, ed., *Henry VI Part 3*, p. 27.

<sup>90</sup> Cairncross, ed., *Henry VI Part 3*, p. liii.

The three sons of York do not appear together until Act 2, George being absent in the preceding act. From then on, in the majority of addresses they make to one another, the word 'brother' is included: for example: 'How fares my brother?' (2.1.8); 'Brother of Gloucester' (3.2.1); 'brother Clarence' (4.1.1); 'brother Richard' (4.8.1). Shakespeare is continually emphasising the relationship between these three. The fourth brother, Rutland, remains separate. His dramatic purpose is as the slaughtered innocent and tragic condemnation of war; when his brothers do refer to him it is by name rather than relation, and he is never seen on stage with them for the audience to make a connection of filial bonds. The remaining three however, are treated as a pack, who in the second half of the play disband and betray one another. It is significant that York's wife does not appear in this play, for she has no dramatic function: it is essential to the play's dynamics that the three sons of York are left under their own authority after his death. As soon as the crown falls into their hands, the moment that York had hoped for turns to tragedy as the family is torn apart. Edward incenses his allies and brothers by marrying Lady Gray, and then marrying the female nobility of the land to her family rather than his own brothers. The betrayal of matrimonial bonds is just as important as the breaking of filial bonds; Edward betrays his pledge to marry the daughter of France, which becomes the catalyst for further punishment on the house of York in Warwick's abandonment.

Clarence is outraged by the preferment of Edward's in-laws over his own kin, and therefore openly defies his brother, joining Warwick and Henry, and, significantly, marrying Warwick's daughter so that he becomes the son of Warwick: a new family bond is created above his previous ties to his brothers. Richard, however, keeps his thoughts

close. Following his brother's wooing of Lady Gray, he begins his soliloquy of 3.2 with 'Ay Edward will use women honourably' (3.2.124) and from that contempt of his actions moves on to plans to take the crown for himself. While York was willing to sacrifice his own right to the crown for the good of his family, his children are not so noble in their intentions. There then follows an interweaving of betrayal; as Clarence leaves Edward, so Richard declares his allegiance, though admitting this to be for his own purposes; then when Clarence redeems himself, giving up his own role as protector to rejoin his brothers, Richard is becoming ever more intent on evil. His speech after Henry's death has little to do with the murder of a title character of a three-part play, and more to do with the breaking down of his own family ties:

I have no brother, I am like no brother,  
And this word 'love' which greybeards call divine,  
Be resident in men like one another  
And not in me: I am myself alone. (5.6.80-3)

The play ends not with the death of Henry, or the defeat of his armies, but with the sons of York surrounding the next generation. The scene is one of outward calm and hidden danger as Richard's asides make the audience too aware. The dramatic irony of the scene is emphasised by Edward's words to his son which mirror the intentions of his own father in the opening scene:

Young Ned, for thee, thine uncles and myself  
Have in our armours watched the winter's night,  
Went all afoot in summer's scalding heat,  
That thou mightst repossess the crown in peace (5.7.16-9)

Structurally, the mirroring of the opening and closing scenes offer a framing device to the whole tragedy that in itself calls for an individual production. Dramatically, the repetition of intentions is akin to the closing of *Titus Andronicus* where the suggestion is that the protagonists have not learned their lesson from history, so are doomed to repeat it again. The end reflects the beginning, and so closes the drama.

### Conclusion: 'Each one a perfect sun'

The title for this chapter comes from *The Tragedy of York*, when Richard of Gloucester comments on the curious phenomenon of three suns visible in the sky.

Three glorious suns, each one a perfect sun;  
Not separated with the racking clouds,  
But severed in a pale clear-shining sky.  
See, see – they join, embrace, and seem to kiss,  
As if they vowed some league inviolable.  
Now are they but one lamp, one light, one sun.  
In this the heaven figures some event.  
(2.1.26-32)

Substitute the word 'sun' for 'play' and Richard's speech becomes an effective discussion of the three parts of *Henry VI*. What were once three distinct plays on the Elizabethan stage, each one perfect and clearly severed from one another, have since become one in a league inviolable, though the cause of the plays' union may be found in man, rather than heaven. Like the suns that Richard sees, once the plays have begun to join, they inevitably become indivisible; in presenting the plays as a cycle the majority of theatre companies and critics have ceased to distinguish each play individually. Equally, any attempt to reverse the process, to present the plays individually once more, can seem as achievable as having three suns in the sky.

There is some hope in the continued debate over the order in which the plays were written. As previously noted, the discussion that *Henry VI* might be a prequel has encouraged critics to consider how *The First Part of the Contention* can operate without the need of a predecessor; indeed the initial use made of distinguishing *Henry VI* was to focus on the 'single two-part drama' which Wilson identified in the remaining two plays. In the latest Arden edition of the play, Edward Burns acknowledges that 'There is in fact nothing in *1 Henry VI* that we need to know to follow the story of *Parts Two* and *Three*. Indeed, those plays can be seen to be stronger without it.'<sup>91</sup>

However, whereas Wilson wrote at a time when *Henry VI* was judged as an inferior play, and therefore divorced it from the other two in order to focus on them, modern criticism has become more objective, especially in relation to collaborative works, and focus is now falling on *Henry VI* alone. Accordingly, the focus of Burns' discussion is to consider the positive repercussions for *Henry VI*: 'Detaching *1 Henry VI* from the other two plays allow us to isolate its tone, to see its differences from the other histories in theatrical style and in its attitude to the events portrayed' (p. 4) The possibility that *Henry VI* was written after the other two plays is no longer being seen as a reason to dismiss it from consideration of a two-part drama, but an opportunity to focus on this particular history as an individual work:

So, in this edition *1 Henry VI* is a free-standing piece, designed originally to draw on audience knowledge of the two earlier plays for ominous and ironic effect, but enjoyable on its own as a witty and spectacular piece of physical theatre' (p. 6).

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<sup>91</sup> Burns, ed., *King Henry VI Part 1*, p. 5.



The consideration of *Henry VI* as a free-standing piece may, by example, prompt other editors to re-evaluate the remaining histories, and it is encouraging, after the unified editorial works of Wilson, Cairncross and Hattaway, to see that the Arden and Oxford series have assigned different editors to each play, encouraging different viewpoints of each one, rather than, as Wilson opted to do, presenting one interpretation of all three plays for which he wrote ‘a common introduction’.<sup>92</sup> Most significantly, however, the consideration that the play we have come to know as *Part One* was not written before *Part Two* poses a direct challenge to the order which the First Folio imposed; by challenging the Folio’s authority on this issue, other decisions made by the editors become equally open to question.

Whether *Henry VI* is proven to be a prequel or not, the very presence of the argument continues to provoke the questions I have asked in this chapter. Even if unquestionable evidence were found tomorrow that proved *Henry VI* to be the earliest of the three plays, there now exists a critical inheritance of individual considerations of this play which, in time, may bear its full impact on our approach to the histories, and allow for us to see them as three glorious suns once again.

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<sup>92</sup> Wilson, ed., *Henry VI Part I*, p. viii.

## Chapter Five

### **‘Two Stars Keep Not Their Motion in One Sphere’: *Henry IV***

*Henry IV* is the epitome of how serialisation can affect our understanding of a play: even before the history cycle had been established, controversy already reigned over whether these two plays should be addressed as individual works or a two-part drama. But the critical and theatrical approach to the plays became even more confused as they then became considered either as the first two parts of a trilogy following the journey of Henry V, the middle two chapters of a tetralogy focusing on Henry IV and his son, the first and third chapters of a tetralogy about Falstaff, or the second and third chapters in an octology charting the rise and fall of the house of Lancaster. The continual reassessment of the plays' structures has compromised their identity and the treatment of the themes presented in each work.

I shall now review the critical discussion of unity in these two plays specifically, before considering how each of the above interpretations has affected the themes and characters of each play in stage performances. I shall then focus on rediscovering the individuality of each play, considering structure and questioning the nature of each play's relation to the other.

#### The Critical History

In 1746 John Upton argued that the two plays 'are independent each of the other' and that 'to call [them] *first and second parts* is as injurious to the author-character of Shakespeare as it would be to Sophocles, to call his two plays on Oedipus, *first and second parts of King Oedipus*.'<sup>1</sup> In 1765 Samuel Johnson responded to the argument:

Mr Upton thinks these two plays improperly called *The First and Second Parts of Henry the Fourth*. The first play ends, he says, with the peaceful settlement of Henry in the kingdom by the defeat of the rebels. This is hardly true for the rebels are not yet fully suppressed. The second, he tells us, shows Henry the Fifth in the various lights of a good-natured rake, till on his father's death he assumes a more manly character. This is true; but this representation gives us no idea of a dramatic action.<sup>2</sup>

Johnson hit upon the two fundamental criticisms that have since confounded individual interpretations: the first part appears to lack a definite resolution, and the second part, showing that resolution, seems to lack any real substance without the first part to support it. Thus Johnson concluded that the plays are 'so connected that the second is merely a sequel to the first; to be two only because they are too long to be one.' But while Johnson felt *Part Two* existed because Shakespeare ran out of time in *Part One*, Edward Capell believed that 'both these plays appear to have been plan'd at the same time, and with great judgement'.<sup>3</sup> Thus the argument shifted to whether the sequel was planned, or unplanned.

This consequently became enveloped in the growing consideration of the historical cycle. When Schlegel proposed the series, he made no distinction in the connection of

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<sup>1</sup> John Upton, *Critical Observations on Shakespeare*, cited in *Henry IV Part 2*, ed. by A. R. Humphreys, Arden 2<sup>nd</sup> Series (London: Methuen & Co Ltd., 1966), p. xxi.

<sup>2</sup> Samuel Johnson, *Notes on 2 Henry IV*, repr. in *Samuel Johnson on Shakespeare*, ed. by H. R. Woudhuysen, (London: Penguin Books, 1989), p. 201

<sup>3</sup> Edward Capell, *Notes and Various Readings*, 1779, cited in *Henry IV Part 2* (see Humphreys, above), p. xxii.

*Henry IV Part One* to *Henry IV Part Two*; for him each history was connected to those surrounding it, so that *Richard II* had just as much bearing on *Part One* as the second part might. However, the focus upon the cycle encouraged later critics to group the two parts of *Henry IV* together, seeing them as more connected to each other than to the other histories; many subsequent critics sectioned the cycle off by the reign of kings rather than the original texts. When Ulrici put forward his views of the histories, both parts of *Henry IV* were considered together and categorised as the second act, just as Dingelstedt had done in his stage production of 1864.<sup>4</sup> Whether arguing for them as part of the cycle or not, the two plays continued to be considered as a single unit, indistinct from one another, and, as this point was not being contested, it was barely explored. Quiller-Couch covers the topic in less than a sentence when he interrupts his introductory line to the topic with a structural judgement that appears to be almost an afterthought:

Anyone, coming to the two parts of *King Henry IV*. – which in fact make one – can see that here is something new.<sup>5</sup>

The union of the two parts was no longer a debate but a fact. Both Quiller-Couch and his colleague Wilson considered that the two plays contained a morality tale; Wilson suggested that Hal's journey was populated by character types from the morality plays: 'Falstaff typifying Vanity in every sense of the word, Hotspur Chivalry of the old anarchic kind, and the lord Chief Justice the Rule of Law.'<sup>6</sup> Both parts became a continuing story of Hal's progress in life.

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<sup>4</sup> Ulrici, *Shakespeare's Dramatic Art*; Sarlos, *Dingelstedt's Celebration of the Tercentenary*.

<sup>5</sup> Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, *Shakespeare's Workmanship* (London: T Fisher Unwin, 1918), p. 134.

<sup>6</sup> John Dover Wilson, *Fortunes of Falstaff* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1943), p. 17.

In 1948 M. A. Shaaber objected to the views of Wilson, and Tillyard also, both of whom assumed the unity of the plays within a larger structure of the history cycle. Shaaber's concerns were raised not because of the content of their opinion, which he felt was 'at least as old as Dr. Johnson', but by the lack of justification which either critic felt necessary, which prompted Shaaber to claim that the unity 'has rarely been assumed so confidently or worked into so elaborate an interpretation.'<sup>7</sup> Shaaber argued that the apparent 'incompleteness assumed by both interpreters is not apparent to me' (p. 218), as to classify the plays as history excused the drama from the necessity of a definite end:

So far as the play is incomplete, it is incomplete because history is an endless chain, and Shakespeare is dramatizing history (p. 219).

Shaaber also identified the element that unionists had struggled to find a satisfactory answer to, namely that 'Structurally *2 Henry IV* is almost a carbon copy of the first play' (p. 221). Consequently there followed 'another reason for hesitating to see the two plays as one' in that 'in the second the clock is turned back most flagrantly. At the end of *1 Henry IV* the king and the prince are *en rapport* and united against the Welsh; in *2 Henry IV* we find them estranged all over again so that they must be reconciled a second time' (p. 222). To Shaaber this was proof that the second play was not planned and therefore that the two plays were not intended to be one. Irving Ribner answered this by returning to the morality theory, arguing that the process undertaken is symbolic rather than historic:

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<sup>7</sup> M. A. Shaaber, 'The Unity of Henry IV', in *Joseph Quincy Adams Memorial Studies*, ed. by James G. McManaway and others (Washington: The Folger Shakespeare Library, 1948), p. 217.

Each of the reformations is a ritual process to be taken more symbolically than literally, and each is necessary to the creation of the perfect king.<sup>8</sup>

Consequently the repetition of events was irrelevant, as Ribner suggested we should not view the plays simply as a linear, literal plot. This actually contrasts Wilson's earlier use of the morality structure which suggested that *Part One* did not offer the completion of Hal's progress, but merely 'the return to chivalry', later to be followed in *Part Two* by 'The Attonement with Justice'.<sup>9</sup> Instead, Ribner's argument embraced the idea that the Prince's education was completed in the first play. He argued that 'in *2 Henry IV* Shakespeare repeats the same symbolic morality pattern he had used in the first play, and it is for this reason that Hal must again be educated and won from Falstaff, with little regard to his reformation at the end of *Part I*, and in spite of any inconsistency this may present to modern readers.'<sup>10</sup> Given that Shaaber had exposed the genre of history to disprove the proposal that separately the plays are incomplete, it is interesting that Ribner also denounces the historical element of the play, to reach the opposite conclusion. He believed that 'The reformation of Hal in both plays is presented primarily as symbolic ritual for didactic purposes, rather than as documentary exposition of historical fact' (p176). The plays could be unified only if we chose to consider the reformation of Hal as a moral illustration rather than a chronicle event. In the second half of the twentieth century unity in the plays depended on the education of the prince, and a split-decision that either events did indeed repeat themselves, or else the Prince was never fully reformed at the close of *Part One*: either *Part Two* was unnecessary, or *Part One* is incomplete; neither opinion being a generous account of either text.

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<sup>8</sup> Ribner, *The English History Play in the Age of Shakespeare*, p. 171.

<sup>9</sup> Wilson, *Fortunes of Falstaff*, p. 64.

<sup>10</sup> Ribner, *The English History Play in the Age of Shakespeare*, p. 176.

## Putting the Theories into Practice

Paul Yachnin deplored the time that had been spent on the structure of the plays as a blatant disregard for one missing, yet vital, piece of evidence:

The question of whether Shakespeare's *Henry IV* plays constitute one ten-act play or two separate plays of five acts each is one of those embarrassments literary criticism has brought on itself by its investment in the notion of organic form. The fact that the two plays were never performed together in Shakespeare's time should have constituted definitive evidence against the view that the two plays are in fact one play with two parts – but it has not, and the view is still current.<sup>11</sup>

Yachnin's view relies upon the lack of evidence; though it is extreme to say that the two plays were never performed together, there is not any evidence to suggest that they were. Given the lack of a recorded precedent for the critical theories, it is unusual how the idea of one play in two parts has become so fixed in our minds. Since the development of these theories, they have since inspired theatrical productions, creating ready examples in the absence of any from Shakespeare's own time. I will now consider how these productions from the last century have been informed by their context, seeing to what extent the cycle in its various shapes and sizes has influenced our views on the plays.

## *Henry IV* in an Eight-play Cycle

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<sup>11</sup> Paul Yachnin, 'History, Theatricality and the 'Structural Problem' in the *Henry IV* Plays', repr. in *1 Henry IV*, ed. by Gordon McMullan, Norton Critical Editions (London: W. W. Norton & Co., 2003), p. 114.

The *Henry IV* plays were performed as part of a complete cycle on the English stage three times in the second half of the twentieth century; in Barton and Hall's 1964 cycle, the ESC's touring production in the late 1980's and the 2000 'This England' cycle at the RSC. One of the difficulties of stretching a plot across eight plays (or in the first two cycles, only seven) is determining the hero. Tillyard had nominated England as his hero identifying 'the Tudor myth [...] the Morality idea of Respublica' and 'the epic idea' as 'the great unifying motives', a concept which by necessity minimises the part of each individual living within the nation.<sup>12</sup> The 1964 cycle emphasised this especially, which helped the first tetralogy to be celebrated in a way it had not before, but caused consternation when it came to dramatising the second tetralogy and its myriad of recognised characters. Hal, Falstaff, Hotspur and Henry all became cogs in the machine. One critic despaired at the 'puny stature of Henry V' the result of which was that the 'overall picture was drab and uninspiring.'<sup>13</sup> Another felt that 'Hugh Griffith's Falstaff is perhaps something of a disappointment. It is impossible to tell whether his humour is subdued to fit the mood of the production or not.'<sup>14</sup>

The ESC offered a similar focus on politics rather than heroics in its cycle; however, as its cycle originated as a three-part series stretching from *Henry IV Part One* to *Henry V*, it was the latter play that had the strongest influence on the two *Henry IV* plays in the ESC production. *Henry V* was a cynical production that questioned the morality of England's campaign in France, especially in the infamous 'Fuck the frogs' slogan that the cast displayed when the Eastcheap characters waved goodbye to the Boar's head. This reading

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<sup>12</sup> Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays*, p. 248.

<sup>13</sup> *Leicester Mercury*, 4 June 1964.

<sup>14</sup> *Liverpool Post*, 17 April 1964.



of the play, and its protagonist, was reflected back into the characterisation of Hal in *Henry IV* as quite cold and far more remote than an audience had come to expect of the prince. The audience never quite saw the warmth in the relationship of the prince and Falstaff that was evident in most other productions.

When the RSC attempted to stage a complete cycle once more in 2000, it was felt during *Henry IV Part One* that ‘One does not feel the RSC is building up to a great statement.’<sup>15</sup> In a cycle of multiple directors, both parts of *Henry IV* were nonetheless assigned to the same director, Michael Attenborough; once more in the scheme of this cycle, the *Henry IV* plays were unified as one chapter for simplicity’s sake. As such, the production values tended towards those evident in two-part cycles, with the focus falling upon Falstaff and Hal. ‘The joy of this play’ wrote Robert Gore-Langton ‘is this bizarre double-act between Falstaff and Hal.’<sup>16</sup> The minimisation of characters that the 1964 cycle had affected did not carry forward into the 2000 cycle. Instead, the strong presence of two-part cycles that dominated the interim encouraged the last cycle of the twentieth century to present the two plays as one individual play amongst a series of other histories.

#### *Henry IV* in a Four-play Cycle

When Quayle presented the *Henry IV* plays in a tetralogy, the characters were prioritised over history. Hal especially, being present in three of the four chapters, was seized upon as a central protagonist. In the programme notes for each play Quayle stressed his opinion not only that the four plays ‘were planned by Shakespeare as one great play’

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<sup>15</sup> Michael Coveney, *Daily Mail*, 21 April 2000.

<sup>16</sup> Robert Gore-Langton, *Daily Express*, 21 April 2000.

but that ‘The true hero of the whole play is *Henry V*’.<sup>17</sup> Consequently the production always looked ahead to the final play; and Hal was portrayed not as a wanton prince, but the future king. Furthermore the incorporation of *Henry V* as conclusion to the plays encouraged the production to emphasise inconclusiveness in the earlier plays. Of Shakespeare’s *Henry V*, according to that play, ‘The breath no sooner left his father’s body/But that his wildness, mortified in him, seemed to die too’(1.1.26-8): the transformation was sudden and complete. Burton’s Henry, however continued to be Hal in Agincourt, showing doubt and confusion where other Henrys displayed certainty and glory. One critic remarked that ‘Oddly enough, now that he is king at last, this Henry seems to hanker after ignoble company, and he is at his very best when colloquing in disguise with his own troops on the night before the battle of Agincourt.’<sup>18</sup> The production continued the education of Hal beyond the death of Henry IV, and so left the progress of the character incomplete even at the end of *Henry IV Part Two*.

But while Quayle championed Hal, it was not long until Falstaff regained control of the plays once more. When Terry Hands presented the cycle in 1975 he removed *Richard II* and replaced it with *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Falstaff was now seen or reported in all four of the chapters while Hal only appeared in three; Falstaff became the connecting figure that united the plays together as a Falstaffiad. Hal’s education became a struggle between the influences of two contrasting father figures. But while critics such as John Elson noticed how the young prince’s ‘mind is being formed by two mutually opposing fathers’, the focus quickly became enveloped by the effect of this tug of war not on the prince, but on the father who is ultimately rejected.

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<sup>17</sup> Programme for *Richard II*, directed by Anthony Quayle at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, 1951.

<sup>18</sup> Alan Dent, *News Chronicle*, 1 August 1951.

Hands stresses the finality of Falstaff's decline with a short tableau. The stage has been cleared of kings, courtiers and riff-raff: only the tangled, white branches of a dead tree stretch across, wall to wall bones. The massive figure of Brewster Mason's Falstaff stands, head bowed, beneath them. He could be dangling in the dying wind.<sup>19</sup>

Elson's review veers towards the poetic rather than a strict account, but betrays the audience's reaction to the difficult scene of Falstaff's rejection. That same year *Merry Wives* was hailed as the play with 'probably the strongest cast of all four presented since June': Alan Howard, and Hal, were not missed.<sup>20</sup> Critics also noticed the effect on Falstaff once freed of the impositions the history cycle demanded: 'Brewster Mason's Falstaff, no longer streaked with the cruelty that qualified his relationship with Prince Hal, expands like some preposterous bull-frog.'<sup>21</sup> Ironically, Falstaff needed Hal, and the rejection, to maintain a character which the critics could support: without the sombre implications that his relationship with Hal evoked, Falstaff was merely a 'preposterous bull-frog' in a comedy.

#### Henry IV as a Two-play cycle

This focus on Falstaff is most dominant when the plays are performed as a duet. Of the many cycle productions of *Henry IV Part One* and *Two* in the twentieth century, the majority have been duets dramatising only the two parts, within which, Falstaff has reigned supreme. Noble's 1982 production was a melodramatic spectacle in which Joss Ackland

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<sup>19</sup> John Elson, *The Listener*, 3 July 1975.

<sup>20</sup> *Solihull News*, 16 August 1975.

<sup>21</sup> Sheila Bannock, *Stratford-Upon-Avon Herald*, 15 August 1975.

played a loveable rascal living in ‘an almost Dickensian Eastcheap.’<sup>22</sup> In this sentimental setting John Barber felt that Falstaff was ‘for once, not made up and stuffed into a caricature but a believable, ruined aristocrat’.<sup>23</sup> Michael Billington noted the effect on the presentation of the plays:

The intention is clear: to treat these twin masterpieces as an almost novelistic work about a wracked, divided England and about a prince symbolically caught between two fathers. But, in performance [...] the tragedy of Falstaff eclipses the spiritual progress of Hal.<sup>24</sup>

Another review concurred that ‘If a winner is to be named in this marathon, it is Joss Ackland’s Falstaff, increasingly dominating the production as surely as he did his creator.’<sup>25</sup> Equally when the two plays were produced in 1991 the attention of reviews was focused on Robert Stephens as Falstaff, who Charles Spencer saw as ‘an old man who knows he is living on borrowed time, and fear and self-pity lurk movingly beneath the boozy, bleary bonhomie.’<sup>26</sup> Now it was not only Hal who was looking ahead to Falstaff’s rejection, but Falstaff himself was somehow, implausibly, aware of the events waiting at the end of *Part Two*.

One of the problems of emphasising Falstaff’s tragedy in a two-play cycle is that the result is not tragicomedy, but comitragedy, which ultimately is a more unsettling format. The eighteenth-century tradition of presenting double bills recognised the importance of presenting a tragedy first, followed by a comedy; a particularly popular combination was *The Winter’s Tale* followed by *The Taming of the Shrew*. This allowed for the dramatic

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<sup>22</sup> Desmond Pratt, *Yorkshire Post*, 10 June 1982.

<sup>23</sup> John Barber, *Daily Telegraph*, 10 June 1982.

<sup>24</sup> Michael Billington, *The Guardian*, 11 June 1982.

<sup>25</sup> *Glasgow Herald*, 11 June 1982.

<sup>26</sup> Charles Spencer, *Daily Telegraph*, 18 April 1991.

range of tragedy, but ensured that the audience left in a positive frame of mind, their last image of the night's drama being comic, rather than tragic. In contrast the two parts of *Henry IV*, offered with a focus on Falstaff, reverts this order, providing light entertainment in the first half and then reducing this to tragedy and sorrow in the second. In this order the end does not resolve the beginning, nor does the theme conclude to the audience's satisfaction. Audiences promised a drama with the comic elements of Hal and Falstaff are left with the tragedy of a man abandoned by his friend: dissatisfaction is inevitable.

The recent production at the National Theatre by Nicholas Hytner shows how the plays are now perceived in the theatre; Hytner explains that his plans for the production began with casting Michael Gambon in the role, which he felt to be entirely appropriate:

So it all started off with Michael. Though I suspect that every production of *Henry IV* should start there, because if you don't know who's going to play Falstaff there's no point in doing them.<sup>27</sup>

In the context of a two-part cycle, Falstaff is no longer one of the main parts: Falstaff *is* the cycle. Gary Taylor notes the extent of Falstaff's power in the refusal of many critics to refer to the character by Shakespeare's intended choice of Oldcastle, summarising that 'Editors might be inhibited by the fact that in changing "Falstaff" back to "Oldcastle" they would "create" an inconsistency in the canon'.<sup>28</sup> The character must be 'Falstaff' in both parts: it is no longer possible for many critics to distinguish the two. The popularity and dominance of the character has resulted in a distortion of *Part One* especially: in *Part Two* Falstaff holds the largest role, and a focus upon him is not unwarranted, but in the first play Falstaff is, I believe, merely a comic character in a predominantly historical drama.

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<sup>27</sup> Nicholas Hytner cited in Bella Martin, *With the Rogue's Company: Henry IV* (London: Oberon, 2005), p. 2.

<sup>28</sup> Gary Taylor, 'The Fortunes of Oldcastle', p. 87.

The effect that Falstaff's notoriety has brought to the play could be witnessed in Alan Strachan's production at Regent's Park Open Air Theatre in 2004. This was an individual production of *Part One* that was nonetheless embedded in the framework of all the histories. Whilst the text offers the opportunity for a positive conclusion, as Hal is redeemed in his father's eyes, the directors instead opted to show a mimed version of Falstaff's rejection. As Henry IV beckoned Hal to follow him after his closing speech, Christopher Benjamin's Falstaff called him from the other side of the stage whilst waving a bottle of sack invitingly. Hal shrugged him away with disgust and followed his father to redemption, leaving Falstaff alone at the play's close. Such is the prominence of Falstaff in the modern theatre's mind that even in a production of *Part One* by itself, the director felt it necessary to include the final chapter of Falstaff's stage life. I shall now offer an alternative, by exploring how each play can be concluded and enjoyed without the presence of the other.

### *Henry IV Part One: The Fortunes of Hotspur*

#### The Rise and Fall of Hal and Hotspur in *Part One*

In the fifth act of *Henry IV Part One*, the two young Henrys finally meet. Harry Percy, Hotspur, announces his own name and asks if the youth in front of him is Harry Monmouth, to which the young Prince replies:

Why then, I see  
A very valiant rebel of the name.

I am the Prince of Wales; and think not, Percy,  
To share with me in glory any more.  
Two stars keep not their motion in one sphere,  
Nor can one England brook a double reign  
Of Harry Percy and the Prince of Wales.  
(5.4.60-66)

The moment constitutes the climax of the play as the two Henrys face off against one another, one destined to fall and the other to rise. Ironically Shakespeare's scene foreshadowed the success of the characters in the play's afterlife: since the first performance, Hotspur has declined in importance and popularity next to the ever growing focus on Hal, a shift in focus that I believe can be directly attributed to the serialisation of the histories.

It appears that Shakespeare had some purpose in mind for Hotspur in relation to Hal, as he altered history to make Hotspur the same age as Hal, even though the historical Harry Percy was twenty-three years older. The play's opening, after a brief summary of the current state of England, focuses upon the two young Henrys. King Henry contrasts Northumberland's noble son Harry Percy with his own riotous child, Harry Monmouth.

Yea, there thou makest me sad, and mak'st me sin  
In envy that my Lord Northumberland  
Should be the father to so blest a son –  
A son who is the theme of honour's tongue,  
Amongst a grove the very straightest plant,  
Who is sweet Fortune's minion and her pride –  
Whilst I by looking on the praise of him  
See riot and dishonour stain the brow  
Of my young Harry.  
(1.1.77-85)

The common name of the two sons is pushed further by King Henry when he wishes that it could be proved that some night-tripping fairy had exchanged the infant Harrys in their beds, and that Harry Percy was in fact his son after all. After outlining the contrast of the two characters in this speech, Shakespeare continues to suggest the duality of the two Henrys in the structure of his scenes (see appendix 1, table 1).

Save for the brief interlude of Gadshill and the carriers in 2.1, the play takes us back and forth between each Harry, and when they do not appear, they are talked of and contrasted again. Shakespeare builds up anticipation for the final battle by teasing the audience, inferring the connection of Hal and Hotspur with references to the two Henrys. They both experience similar situations: in 1.3 Hotspur is brought to a reckoning in front of the King, and later, Hal too must account for himself before his father. It is a meeting by proxy, and again serves to contrast them in their differing reactions: the noble Hotspur responds with rebellion while the riotous Prince of Wales promises obedience. In 2.4 Shakespeare gives us a large, boisterous scene in the tavern, in which we see Hal at rest as he goads Falstaff. In the very next scene the focus falls on Hotspur, and again we have an equally large scene with the rebellious lords now at rest, and Hotspur goading Glendower just as Hal teased Falstaff. By putting them in similar situations Shakespeare both contrasts the characters and strengthens the link between them. Each one talks of the other: in 1.3 Hotspur vows to have ‘that same sword-and-buckler Prince of Wales [...] poisoned with a pot of ale.’ Hal retorts in 2.4 by announcing to Poins and the audience that:

I am not yet of Percy’s mind,  
the Hotspur of the North – he that kills me some six or  
seven dozen of Scots at a breakfast, washes his hands,  
and says to his wife, ‘Fie upon this quiet life! I want



work.’ ‘O my sweet Harry,’ says she, ‘how many hast thou killed today?’ ‘Give my roan horse a drench,’ says he, and answers, ‘Some fourteen,’ an hour after; ‘a trifle, a trifle’ (2.4.102-109).

The reference to Hotspur bears no relation to any preceding conversation in this scene; Poins merely asked the Prince why he had been teasing Francis. However, for the audience the reference is very apt as we have just seen Hotspur and his wife in the previous scene. Each Harry has a metatheatrical knowledge of the play’s structure as they refer to the progress of one another. The conflict is confirmed in 3.2 when King Henry goads his son with the glory of Hotspur, and in retaliation Hal pinpoints Henry Percy as the culmination of his successful transformation that the audience has been promised since his soliloquy in 1.2. Hal’s promise to his father in 3.2 confirms Hotspur’s defeat as the conclusion of his transformation, and the drama.

I will redeem all this on Percy’s head,  
And in the closing of some glorious day  
Be bold to tell you that I am your son;  
When I will wear a garment all of blood,  
And stain my favours in a bloody mask,  
Which, washed away, shall scour my shame with it.  
And that shall be the day, whene’er it lights,  
That this same child of honour and renown,  
This gallant Hotspur, this all-praised knight,  
And your unthought-of Harry chance to meet.  
(3.2.132-141)

Note that the young Prince does not suggest that Falstaff’s banishment will scour his shame, nor does the King reproach him specifically about Falstaff. Derek Cohen recognises that ‘Hotspur’s death [...] is directly referable to Prince Hal’s vow of fealty to the King’.<sup>29</sup> The structure is quite clearly laid out and the audience clearly informed that when Hal

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<sup>29</sup> Derek Cohen, ‘The Rite of Violence in “1 Henry IV”’, *Shakespeare Survey*, 38 (1985), 77-84 (p. 77).

defeats Hotspur, he will throw off his shame. At no point in the play does Hal or his father name Falstaff's rejection as the moment of truth; only Hotspur's defeat is nominated here as that moment when Hal will fulfil his prior aim to break through the 'foul and ugly mists/Of vapours that did seem to strangle him' (1.2.199-200).

Some critics have queried why, having defeated Hotspur, Hal should relinquish credit for the deed to Falstaff. Beatrice Groves, reading the drama as a morality, suggests it is a necessary step towards another play, that 'The design has gone awry and before Hal can become the victorious king of *Henry V* he must wait through another play.'<sup>30</sup> Alternatively Jesse Lander sees Hal's modesty as a rejection of the Machiavellian principles in the plot, suggesting that 'Hal's willingness to "gild" Falstaff's actions with a lie reveals a degree of magnanimity that appears to be beyond calculation; indeed, this episode serves to distance Hal from the calculative rationality that informs his thinking throughout the play.'<sup>31</sup> For Hal to truly defeat Hotspur and distinguish himself from the other Harry requires for him not only to best him in a swordfight, but also to reject the appealing fame and honour which led to Harry Percy's downfall.

In the final battle, Hal's retort to Hotspur specifically tries to differentiate the one Harry from the other. Hotspur calls him Harry Monmouth, but Hal identifies himself throughout the scene as the Prince of Wales. Hal's attempt to distance himself from his own name gives a second meaning to his judgement that Harry Percy is 'a very valiant rebel of the

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<sup>30</sup> Beatrice Groves, 'Hal as Self-redeemer: The Harrowing of Hell and *Henry IV Part I*', *Shakespeare Survey*, 57 (2004), 236-248 (p. 248).

<sup>31</sup> Jesse M. Lander, "'Crack'd Crowns" and Counterfeit Sovereigns: The Crisis of Value in *1 Henry IV*', *Shakespeare Studies*, 30 (2002), 136-161 (p. 154)

name.’ To be a Harry and to dishonour, as Hotspur does in his rebellion, goes against that honour in which Harry Monmouth hopes that his name be considered.

### Hal vs. Hotspur Outside the Play

If we consider the early reception of the play, it appears that Hotspur was undoubtedly the more popular character. The first quarto’s title page announces that the play is:

The /History of /Henrie the /Fourth; /With the battell at  
Shrewsburie,/ betweene the King and Lord/ Henry Percy,  
surnamed / Henrie Hotspur of /the North. With the humorous  
conceits of Sir /John Falstalffe.

What stands out in this title to a modern reader is the complete absence of Hal. In the nine quartos that appeared of the text, not one title mentioned the Prince of Wales. In contrast Hotspur’s name alone takes up nine words of a thirty-two word title: almost a third, which suggests that he was either an important part of the plot or else a distinctive feature of the play by which it might be recognised. Roberta Barker agrees that ‘Such foregrounding of Hotspur suggests that his presence was one of the play’s major selling points in its own time.’<sup>32</sup> When both parts of *Henry IV* happened to be presented as part of a larger group of plays at the wedding celebrations for Princess Elizabeth in 1613, they were not called *Parts One* and *Two*. The second play was called *Sir John Falstaff*, while the first play was entitled *The Hotspurre*. For a further indication of Hotspur’s popularity, Francis Beaumont quotes the character in his parody *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*.

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<sup>32</sup> Roberta Barker, ‘Tragical-Comical-Historical Hotspur’, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. 54, No. 3, 288-307 (p. 288).

When the apprentice Rafe is hauled onto the stage and told to speak an ‘uffish part’, he does not quote, Hal, or Falstaff, or even Hamlet:

By heaven, methinks it were an easy leap  
To pluck bright honour from the pale-faced moon,  
Or dive into the bottom of the sea,  
Where never fathom-line touched any ground,  
And pluck up drowned honour from the lakes of hell.<sup>33</sup>

The speech is not an exact copy of Hotspur’s; ‘sea’ in Beaumont is ‘deep’ in Shakespeare, and Hotspur proposes to pluck drowned honour up by the locks rather than from the lakes of hell. As the speech is not different enough to be a mockery, but not exact enough to be a copy, I would suggest it is a memorial reconstruction: Beaumont is citing a well-known speech. Certainly the joke relies on the audience recognising it, so Beaumont must have been confident that Hotspur’s speech is one which a contemporary audience would immediately identify.

In subsequent years Hotspur maintained his popularity over Hal in the play, though both were under increasing threat from Falstaff. Roberta Barker notes how before the twentieth century ‘Luminaries such as Thomas Betterton, David Garrick, William Macready and Edmund and Charles Kean all chose to wear Hotspur’s sword, while Hal was most often played by supporting actors’ (p. 291). The last such production was as recent as 1945, when Laurence Olivier took the role of Hotspur alongside Ralph Richardson’s Falstaff at the Old Vic. As discussed in chapter two the actor playing Hal, Michael Warre, is barely remembered, having been put in a production alongside Olivier

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<sup>33</sup> Francis Beaumont, *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, ed. by Michael Hattaway (London: Ernest Benn, 1969), Induction.76-80.

and Richardson, one critic damningly concluded that Warre ‘inevitably remains in the junior school.’<sup>34</sup>

But Hal’s fortunes were to forever alter with the 1951 cycle, that which McMillin felt changed the focus of the play from Falstaff and Hotspur to Hal. He argues that the growing critical focus on the prince prompted the cycle, remarking that ‘the change of emphasis required a change of format.’<sup>35</sup> However, I believe it is equally valid to suggest that the change of format required a change of emphasis. By presenting a story which spreads across four plays, the main characters of that story will become those who are present the longest: characters are ranked by endurance. Henry IV and Hal are both spread across three plays, however sparse their parts may be in *Henry IV Part 2*, and so became main parts of the cycle. In contrast, other characters that used to be star roles, such as Richard II and Hotspur, become brief interludes.

Consequently in 1951, *Part One* became a conflict not between Hal and Hotspur for the title of honour, but of Falstaff and Henry IV for the love and loyalty of Hal. Scenes became distorted, most notably the play extempore scene of 2.4, which now became of utmost significance, predicting the rejection of Falstaff. For a cycle this was essential; it developed links between each play, encouraging audiences to return to the theatre for the next thrilling instalment, and consequently extended the education of the prince beyond *Part One*, and even *Part Two*, and into the battlefields of Agincourt. One reviewer noted that ‘an excellent feature of this production is the emphasis on Prince Hal’s sense of destiny.’<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Ivor Brown, *The Observer*, 30 September 1945.

<sup>35</sup> McMillin, p. 1.

<sup>36</sup> Ivor Brown, cited in *Shakespeare’s Histories at Stratford 1951* (see Wilson and Worsley, above) p. 69.

But these changes did not bode well for Hotspur. Quayle himself felt that ‘In *Henry IV Part 1*, Hotspur’s part is far more rewarding than Hal’s, so Hotspur has always been the choice of the star, who naturally plays it for all the sympathy he can get. But in doing this he distorts the true dramatic value of the play’.<sup>37</sup> Appearing as he does only at the beginning of Hal’s story, he was no longer the culmination of the prince’s transformation, but just another marker on the way. In his book commemorating the production, T. C. Worsley revealed how the treatment of Hotspur was a distinct difference brought about by a cycle, rather than an individual, production. ‘It is customary when playing *Henry IV* singly for Harry Hotspur to assume the hero’s role. But in this production a conception of Hotspur has to be found which will be congruent with all that we hear about him, but yet will be quite different from the usual admired romantic [...]. He is a fighter and a little too much of the boaster. We can’t help admiring his spirit and attack, but that over-plus of bragging is just what prevents us preferring him to Hal.’<sup>38</sup> Michael Redgrave was admired for his generosity in stepping back from the glory of Hotspur’s part to allow Hal to shine – in Worsley’s words ‘it is a great credit to his unselfishness that he refrained from spoiling the design by “stealing the play.” That he should not do so was implicit, of course, in the conception’ (p. 71). It’s interesting to note that in a cycle which championed the continuity of characters between plays, especially Harry Andrews’ Bolingbroke and Richard Burton’s Hal, that Hotspur was played by two actors; for whilst Redgrave was playing Richard II, Robert Hardy played the small role of Harry Percy in the play.

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<sup>37</sup> Quayle in *Shakespeare’s Histories at Stratford 1951* (see Wilson and Worsley, above), p. viii.

<sup>38</sup> Worsley in *Shakespeare’s Histories at Stratford 1951* (see Wilson and Worsley, above), pp. 44-5.

Not only was Hotspur diminished in favour of Hal, but his impact upon Hal was also downplayed. Worsley remarked that in the 1951 production 'Prince Hal's development is traced principally in relation to two characters, to Falstaff and his father' (p. 48). Subsequent productions following Quayle's 1951 cycle have focused upon the pull of Henry IV and Falstaff upon Hal, and it has been these three characters which now attract the leading actors. The posters for the recent production at the National Theatre depicts just the three actors: the main roles of David Bradley as Henry IV, Mathew MacFayden as Hal and Michael Gambon as Falstaff. Hotspur and Shallow appear on the fringes in the programme photo, an acknowledgement of two good roles that only last one play each; an unfortunate condition for a cyclical performance.

The emphasis on the nature of fathers and sons in the two plays has led to a focus upon the contrast of court and tavern, and it is this that productions tend to emphasise in their staging, rather than the contrast of the scenes of Hal and Hotspur. The continual emphasis upon the play extempore has elevated 2.4 to a scene of utmost importance in every production, while the following scene of 3.1, in which Hotspur has his moment of glory, is usually cut or diminished. Simon Callow, who had played Falstaff himself, in writing on the play spoke of 2.4 as a 'whole, vast scene' that 'covers extraordinary amounts of ground, narratively and in mood, action and relationships' whilst he denounced its counterpart 3.1 saying that 'it's hard not to feel impatient with it. We know that Hal is about to meet his father for the first time in the play, and it is a confrontation we are eager for.'<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Simon Callow, *Henry IV Part I*, Actors on Shakespeare (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), p. 62, p. 67.

Furthermore as a mere marker on the way to Hal's growth, Hotspur has become a caricature, an overblown portrayal of honour gone too far that only serves to highlight the virtues of Hal's understated honour, what Quayle described as 'that over-plus of bragging'.<sup>40</sup> Whilst the court looks upon the glory of Hotspur, the audience is made to question whether this peculiar brand of honour is worthy of the name. Actors tend to strut the role, glorying in the absurdity of the character, and Hotspur has been subjected to various acts of indignity, most notably the disposal of his corpse in a pig-trough in the 1964 production.

I have noticed a dismal predictability in recent productions of *Henry IV Part One* that continue to focus on Falstaff and the education of Hal. The recent National Theatre production by Nicholas Hytner once more presented the play extempore as a forecast of Falstaff's rejection, and ended the play with a focus on Falstaff, and a consequent sense of incompleteness. By focusing on the education of Hal, and suggesting that this is not completed in *Part One* but in Falstaff's rejection in the next part, the play becomes a study of an unruly prince who, in the boundaries of the text, does not change: it becomes a play with no clear conflict, development or interest. In contrast, by returning to an individual focus, the Hal and Hotspur conflict offers vitality to *Henry IV Part One*. Both roles offer the actor a chance to be the most sympathetic in the play; either part can be construed as the hero depending on the interpretation of director, actor and audience. In an ideal production, the audience, and indeed the actors themselves, should be unaware at the start of each night who the victor will be; the two actors playing Hal and Hotspur each vying for

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<sup>40</sup> Quayle in *Shakespeare's Histories at Stratford 1951* (see Wilson and Worsley, above), p. viii.



the audience's support in making the drama appear as either the triumph of Hal, or the tragedy of Hotspur.

### Championing the Unpremeditated *Part Two*

#### Planned or Unplanned?

When the ESC presented *Henry IV Part One*, it rearranged the ending, so that Falstaff's arrival on stage with Hotspur's body occurred *after* the King's triumphant closing speech. Michael Bogdanov's intention in doing this was that 'The King patently believes Falstaff has killed Hotspur and that Hal's claim to have done so is a lie.'<sup>41</sup> Bogdanov justifies the change by turning to Shakespeare's conception of *Henry IV Part Two*:

The problem is that he wrote the second part some time after the first. It is possible, though unlikely, that (a) on completing *Part 1* he didn't know he would write *Part 2* and (b) taking *Part 1* complete in itself, the story had to have a resolution. For us, *Part 2* following *Part 1* on Saturdays one hour later, the effect of finishing *Part 1* with this reversal was electric. It left the story wide open, with the audience buzzing with excitement to know what followed (p. 55).

Despite Bogdanov's firm assurance that 'It involved no text alterations' (p. 55), this reversal of scenes highlights a number of issues that concern our appreciation of either play. First, it draws on the issue already discussed of the apparent repetition of events which occurs in *Henry IV Part Two*. Secondly, it shows the interpretations which directors and critics impose on *Part One* to void its resolution and justify *Part Two*. Finally,

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<sup>41</sup> Bogdanov and Pennington, p. 55.

Bogdanov's decision, along with his judgement that *Part Two* being uncalled for is 'unlikely' shows the unwillingness of many to consider that perhaps the play was an example of Shakespeare making an unplanned sequel.

Whilst critics are coming to terms with the concept of Shakespeare as collaborator, there still appear to be prejudices of the master-dramatist making a play ad hoc on the back of another play's success, giving rise to the opinion that it is either a good play and planned, or a bad play and unplanned. Giorgio Melchiori questions this, arguing that 'To see *Henry IV Part Two* as the unplanned sequel [...] entails no diminution in appreciation of its theatrical qualities.'<sup>42</sup> I now intend to show how *Part Two* was unplanned, before addressing how we can still appreciate the play as an autonomous drama.

Opinion on whether *Henry IV Part Two* was premeditated permeates every discussion of the play, much more so than it is asked of any of the *Henry VI* plays. Wilson focuses on the points of inconclusiveness in the first part that requires resolution in the second: naming Hal's promise in 1.2 to cast off Falstaff, and the requirement to see Hal on the throne in order to complete his story. The rejection of Falstaff, as I have discussed, is never promised in the first play outside of the mirthful scene of 2.4. That this scene has been interpreted so readily in the second half of the twentieth century as an indication of Hal's plan to banish plump Jack speaks more of our own desires as an audience and less of the structure of the play. Hal's resolution to reform and redeem time in 1.2 is realised by the close of the play. Wilson's second example, Hal's accession to the throne, is another critical fallacy. Only in the post-cycle age has the education of Hal become important, and a reading of the text will

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<sup>42</sup> Giorgio Melchiori, ed., William Shakespeare, *The Second Part of King Henry IV*, New Cambridge Shakespeare (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 14.

show how Hal's accession to the throne bears no significance to the arc of the plot. Hal's growth is a personal journey to acquiring public honour, and the placing of a crown upon his head is an unnecessary piece of window dressing following upon the successful transformation of the 'madcap Prince of Wales' (4.1.95) into a man to whom 'England did never owe so sweet a hope' (5.2.67).

Nor is Johnson's argument of the undefeated rebellion an issue, for the King's closing speech is strong enough in resolve to suggest that rebellion will be quelled, and Hal's heroic and victorious behaviour against the foreboding Hotspur indicates that the worst threat is now over. Shaaber, as has been cited, argues that the play's end with rebellion still at large in the country is merely a comment on the nature of history, and furthermore he suggests that the quelling of the rebellion in *Part Two* 'is an invention of Shakespeare's intended [...] to add a poignant irony to the king's death.'<sup>43</sup>

The main challenge to *Part One*'s autonomy is the introduction of the Archbishop, who will then become a major character in *Part Two*. This has been interpreted as evidence that 'the dramatist was working in larger terms; was preparing us, thus early, for the rebellion crushed at Gaultree Forest in the *Second Part*.'<sup>44</sup> But to interpret the presence of a one-scene character as preparation for a later play is a reading informed solely by prior knowledge of *Part Two*. We do not interpret the Sexton's appearance in 4.2 of *Much Ado About Nothing* as the introduction of a character who will play a significant role in Don John's trial after the play's close. Our awareness of *Part Two* has led to an unwarranted focus upon the character, rather than the action, of the scene.

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<sup>43</sup> Shaaber, 'The Unity of Henry IV', p. 219.

<sup>44</sup> Sprague, *Shakespeare's Histories: Plays for the Stage*, p. 78.

Shaaber argues that the scene's 'business is to foreshadow the outcome of the Battle of Shrewsbury. There the rebels are to meet with a decisive check, and Shakespeare, after his usual fashion, anticipates what is to come.'<sup>45</sup> By 'usual fashion' we may draw reference to other examples of such scenes throughout the canon: Gloucester and Edgar discuss the battle in *King Lear* 5.2, the Chorus describes the many battles throughout *Henry V*, the three citizens discuss the state of the nation in *Richard III* 2.3, and in *The Winter's Tale* 5.2 the three gentlemen conveniently describe in detail the many wondrous events that Shakespeare needed to fit in before the play's close. In 4.4 of *Henry IV Part One*, Shakespeare builds upon the tension and anticipation of the battle to come, once more outlining the protagonists of the battle and what is at stake, allowing for Hal and Hotspur's coming confrontation to be hinted at once more. Nothing in the scene encourages the audience to wish to see the Archbishop himself join the fray, nor suggests that he personally constitutes any significant threat. Any dramatic tension in the scene relies specifically on its relation to the Battle of Shrewsbury, and not the encounter at Gaultree. The scene therefore keeps the focus within the boundaries of the text and does not, as others have suggested, look beyond into the events of the next play. The expansion of the Archbishop's character in *Part Two* indicates an opportunistic development of a minor character; it suggests that *Part One* is autonomous, but *Part Two* is drawn directly from its predecessor.

While the evidence for a premeditated sequel can be questioned, there are a number of factors which argue that *Part Two* was not planned, most significantly *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Whilst popular myths of Queen Elizabeth's request to see more of Falstaff cannot

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<sup>45</sup> Shaaber, 'The Unity of Henry IV', p. 220.

be substantiated, the play itself stands as a testament to the popularity of Falstaff himself. Given that *Henry IV Part One* in its original conception offered the character of Oldcastle, we can assume that an entirely fictional play revolving around such a character was not premeditated; regardless of whether Shakespeare anticipated the controversy that placing Oldcastle on the stage would invoke, there is absolutely no precedent for planning a comic play about an obscure fifteenth century character set in Elizabethan times. *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is a play which owes its existence entirely to the popularity of *Henry IV Part One*. Having allowed for one unplanned sequel, the concept of another which places the action back during the time of the original play is not so far-fetched, despite the implications it may have for our conception of Shakespeare as a master-dramatist. I have shown how in productions of the twentieth century that our obsession with Falstaff has distorted our view of *Henry IV Part One* and its structure, but this is not meant to suggest that Falstaff is not the main character of *Part Two*. The change in focus which occurs between *Part One* and *Part Two* suggests that Shakespeare, or the playhouse, recognised the lucrative charms that the character offered and immediately took advantage of that popularity.

This is further supported by the reference in The Kings Office of the Revels to ‘nd part of Falstaff’, as discussed in chapter one, which highlights not only the popularity of the fat knight and the dependence of the second play upon the first, but furthermore, by using Falstaff’s name as a point of continuity in the title, this suggest that the play’s relationship to *Part One* spans beyond historical narrative and into the more practical realm of popular characters and box-office success. But while audiences going to see *Henry IV Part Two* may have been doing so based upon their enjoyment of Falstaff and the first play, it is still

undetermined to what extent this was felt to be necessary in appreciating the second play. If we are to talk of box-office success, we must also acknowledge the impracticality of a play which would discourage a potential customer who had not seen an earlier play; it is far more likely, from a financial point of view, that the play, whilst trading on the success of the first part, would strive to be self-sufficient enough not to repel first-time audiences.

As backdrop to Falstaff's extended role, Shakespeare adopted the safest tactic and repeated the character arcs that he had used in the previous, successful play. This, I would suggest, offers a simple explanation for the repetition of Hal and Henry IV's animosity. Throughout the play, only two elements of *Part One* are referred to: Hotspur, and Falstaff's victory at Shrewsbury. In these references Shakespeare reminds his audience of the two most popular characters of the last play, and also provides a backdrop to Falstaff's story in this drama. Interestingly, no mention is made of Hal's prior adventures in *Part One*, indeed Shakespeare introduces a new background for him in the episode of striking the Chief Justice. In contrast, the recollection of Falstaff's actions at Shrewsbury encourages the audience to connect the renamed character with the popular role of Oldcastle in the last play. But if *Part Two* is an unplanned and opportunistic sequel, how does this affect its individuality?

### *Part Two without Part One*

LORD CHIEF JUSTICE: Well, God send the prince a better companion!  
SIR JOHN: God send the companion a better prince! I cannot rid my hands of him (2.1.199-202).

In the interchange between the Chief Justice and Falstaff, we find the elements which apply to a discussion of the merits of *Part Two* in comparison to *Part One*. The critic or theatre-goer will exalt in the comedy and joy of *Part One* and wish that it had a better companion to continue that vein. Attempts to view the sequel in the same mould as its predecessor have resulted in our having a poor view of *Part Two*. Perhaps it is better to question whether the companion may have a better prince; whether *Part Two* might be appreciated more if *Part One* could prove to be a more appropriate predecessor, or if we attempted to view the sequel without weighing it down in our expectations brought about by the original.

The quarto title proclaims the play to be 'The second part of Henrie/the fourth, continuing to his death,/and coronation of Henrie/the fift./With the humours of Sir John Fal-/staffe, and swaggering Pistoll.' In its very first print it is identified in its relationship to *Part One*, which had in contrast been given a sense of autonomy in its singular title of 'The life of Henry the Fourth'. The key elements that *Part Two*'s quarto title highlights are the continuation of the earlier play, the emergence of Henry the Fifth, and the return of Falstaff, alongside the comic character of Pistol. In this context Henry IV's presence is little more than a reference to the first part. Equally Hal is of little interest, as the reader's attention is focused upon the coronation of Henry the Fifth, not the antics of the Prince of Wales. Whilst the King's minimal part in the play has often been commented on, it is interesting to note that Hal only has eighty-five lines more than his father. The second play then rests upon the humours of Falstaff, and swaggering Pistol.

There has been a contrast in critical and theatrical approaches to the plays in a serial context: Wilson argued that while Falstaff is ‘the most conspicuous [...] fascinating, character in *Henry IV* [...] all critics are agreed, I believe, that the technical centre of the play is not the fat knight but the lean prince.’<sup>46</sup> In contrast the majority of stage productions, intentionally or not, have promoted the role of Falstaff in both plays. Which approach is correct? Whilst *Henry IV Part One*’s dynamic comes from the duality of Hal and Hotspur, rendering Falstaff as little more than a comic aside, I believe that in *Part Two* the focus has completely shifted in the fat knight’s favour.

In *Henry IV Part Two* Shakespeare removed Hal from Falstaff’s company for most of the play, possibly to permit a smoother transaction from madcap prince to king of England and to lend some weight to his rejection of Falstaff at the end. However, having separated the two characters who appeared together so regularly throughout the first part, Shakespeare did not then present a play based around the adventures of Hal, but reduced his role to merely five scenes in the whole play, and pushed his first appearance back to 2.2, whilst Falstaff’s eight scenes are interspersed evenly throughout the play to give him a regular presence on the stage. Hal’s scenes are divided between his accession to the throne, and providing a commentary on Falstaff, whilst Falstaff is allowed an independence from both history and the prince in his scenes with Justice Shallow. In many ways *Henry IV Part Two* has the least claim to the title of history compared with the other nine presented in the folio; in *Part One* Falstaff provided a commentary on the larger subject of history, but in *Part Two* history is merely a background to Falstaff.

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<sup>46</sup> J. Dover Wilson, *The Fortunes of Falstaff*, p. 17.



Attempts to link the play to its predecessor in serial productions have produced a disappointing effect. Hal's character, personable enough in *Part One*, cannot survive the audience's disapproval of Falstaff's rejection. Furthermore, to prove that Hal continues to grow in *Part Two*, and in order to nullify the conclusion of *Part One*, it is necessary to minimise Hotspur's impact, which has inspired a search for a new foil to Hal within the boundaries of *Part Two*. Wilson identified the Lord Chief Justice as Hal's next obstacle, the atonement with justice being the final task he must complete to become king. The folio alterations promote the Archbishop as a threat even greater than Hotspur. Irving Ribner suggested that it is Prince John who presents Hal's counterpart in the play and that his actions at Gaultree act to highlight the approach Hal may have adopted were it not for the humanity he has inherited from his time with Falstaff and the Eastcheap crew:

If there is any character to fill the previous dramatic role of Hotspur, it may be Prince John of Lancaster. Just as Hotspur had stood for a seeming valour in battle, Prince John now stands for a seeming virtue in government.<sup>47</sup>

However, all of these attempts to find an alternative to Harry Percy cultivate a negative effect on the play, as none of these three characters have the same degree of stage presence. Hotspur dominated half of the first play, and within those scenes he had numerous speeches and opportunities to display his honour and draw upon the audience. The Archbishop, John and Lord Chief Justice are all fine parts within their own boundaries, but not one of them has the magnetism that Hotspur's part allows. Consequently the false perspective of viewing these characters as a second Hotspur only results in disappointment. We have to allow for the possibility that there is no Hotspur character in *Part Two*, nor should we

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<sup>47</sup> Irving Ribner, *The English History Play in the Age of Shakespeare*, p. 177.

attempt to distort any of the characters into that mould. We feel the play has failed to meet the requirements that *Part One* met, but there is no evidence that *Part Two* is trying to meet those requirements.

Similarly on a larger scale we may question the viewpoint of critics such as G. K. Hunter who have highlighted a parallel structure in the two plays.<sup>48</sup> A comparison of the two structures reveals how tenuous such links are (see appendix 2, table 2). While coincidences exist, namely the presence of Lady Hotspur in 2.3 of both plays, and a large tavern scene in 2.4, close examination shows that the plays differ in all other scenes. The most significant alteration is the lack of the contrasting elements of the Hal and Hotspur plots from *Part One*: in *Part Two* the duality of structure has shifted to a contrast between Falstaff's scenes, and historical matter; there is no attempt to contrast Hal with a counterpart. Furthermore the tavern scenes of 2.4 bear little in common beyond the Prince tricking Falstaff; the goading of Francis, the exploits of Gadshill, the play extempore and the Sheriff's arrival have no echoes in Falstaff's wooing of Doll or the boisterous escapades of Pistol. While *Part One* gathers pace towards a final act dominated by battle, *Part Two* avoids a battle at the beginning of the fourth act and spends the remainder of the play focusing on Henry's accession or a fictional orchard in Gloucestershire. The plays should not be supposed to have the same structure.

This leaves us with the task of reconsidering the structure of *Henry IV Part Two*.

Barbara Hodgdon remarks how 'Spectators at the first performances of 2 *Henry IV* would

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<sup>48</sup> G. K. Hunter, 'Henry IV and the Elizabethan Two-Part Play', *The Review of English Studies*, V (1954), 236-248, (pp. 244-5).

have experienced a play that differed, in at least one respect, from its later configurations':<sup>49</sup>

That play would have been framed by two dramatic conventions: an Induction spoken by the figure of Rumour 'painted full of tongues' and an Epilogue, according to some editors, spoken by a dancer [...]. Familiar to late Elizabethan audiences as markers for theatrical fictions, these framing conventions are either transformed (Rumour) or absent (the Epilogue) [...] both offer evidence of a particular intersection between the theatrical event and its cultural context that gives 2 *Henry IV*'s first performance an exclusively 'local habitation' (p. 1)

Hodgdon raises the important issue of how the prologue and epilogue affect our perception of *Part Two*'s structure. Rumour's speech appears to offer a summary of the story so far, but to what extent are we considering it as such because a preceding story exists? All Shakespeare's plays begin with such a summary, but we do not expect there to be a predecessor to *Titus Andronicus*, for example, in which we might see the 'weary wars against the barbarous Goths' (1.1.28) depicted. In each of the histories we must question who is remembering the events: the characters, or the audience? Are we being invited to recall dramatic events previously shown on stage, or are we being presented with a background to an individual dramatic work? Rumour's speech is particularly ambiguous upon this point. He announces:

I run before King Harry's victory,  
Who in a bloody field by Shrewsbury  
Hath beaten down young Hotspur and his troops,  
Quenching the flames of bold rebellion. (Induction.23-26)

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<sup>49</sup> Barbara Hodgdon, *Henry IV Part Two*, Shakespeare in Performance (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), p. 1.

If this is an invitation to the audience to remember the events of *Part One*, why does Rumour not tell us of Hal beating down young Hotspur? Why is it announced as King Harry's victory? The reference bears more resemblance to the chronicles. This might suggest that Shakespeare had returned to his sources to bring out another tale from history, rather than return to his own earlier work to continue the drama. However, the identification of 'King Harry's victory' also bears more of a resemblance to the title, if not the action, of *Part One*, whose quarto title spoke of 'the battell at Shrewsburie,/betweene the King and Lord Henry Percy'. It is possible that Shakespeare's sequel does not attempt exact continuation of character and events, but a rough approximation; a play that uses the fame of its predecessor as a background, relying on the audience's awareness, rather than exact knowledge, of *Part One*. Thus *Part Two* draws inspiration from *Part One* without ever being entirely bound to the earlier play's definition of character and plot. Shakespeare uses what he needs, changing details as it suits his purpose. Falstaff's 'victory' at Shrewsbury remains in the second part, but the perception of Hotspur's threat becomes significantly reduced.

Rumour is further complicated by his intentions. This is not a typical summary of events, for Rumour's purpose is to present false report. Shakespeare boldly opens the sequel with information that deliberately contrasts both historical truth and the dramatic narrative of the earlier play. Shakespeare opens the play with Rumour's intention to 'noise abroad that Harry Monmouth fell/Under the wrath of noble Hotspur's sword' (Ind.29-30). We must ask ourselves how this scene was intended to be received, and ultimately our understanding of that rests upon the question of whether Shakespeare believed his audience would, or would not, have a recollection of the events of the previous play. If they had such

a knowledge, the opening scene would be a provoking scene in which the audience's memory is challenged and brought into question: Lord Bardolph proclaims that 'The King is almost wounded to the death' (1.1.14), and given the title of the quarto, which we may assume reflects the title upon the play-bills to some extent, an audience may well believe that the King is indeed wounded and that his death, as promised, is imminent.

It is possible that Shakespeare is deliberately highlighting the variety of reports from the event in order that he may in turn change aspects of the earlier play to make his new play work, such as reversing the transformation of the prince and undoing the high esteem he was held in by all the court at the close of *Part One*. Alternatively, Shakespeare may be challenging his audience to remember, throwing in trick memories of false events to prompt the audience to recall events as they have seen them depicted: in itself a dramatic portrayal of the misleading nature of history. As a final alternative, it may even be a moment's indulgence to give Hotspur his due triumph that Shakespeare's audience may have demanded for such a popular character, even if ultimately that triumph is exposed as a lie.

The framing of the piece is concluded in the epilogue, which proves equally ambiguous. The hints at what is to follow can be interpreted as a trailer for *Henry V*, or a promise of a positive resolution such as may be found in Shakespeare's other dramatic works. A. R. Humphries notes how, based upon references within the speech such as the epilogue's suggestion to 'dance out of your debt' (Epilogue.18), that 'Pope and many editors mark the whole epilogue as "*Spoken by a Dancer*"'.<sup>50</sup> This supposition would

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<sup>50</sup> A. R. Humphries, *King Henry IV Part 2*, p. 186.

suggest a reading interspersed with visual displays that would ultimately have an uplifting effect: Shakespeare may have been offering damage limitation after the rejection of a popular comedy character. Having seen Hal reject his companion, it is a wise policy to take the opportunity to remind the audience that this King will give England the triumph of Agincourt, as this great victory may restore the heroic aspect of the character in the audience's mind, and thus present a more satisfactory conclusion.

Many scholars believe that the epilogue, as presented in the Folio, is actually an amalgam of 'three sections written at different times and serving different purposes', the three sections corresponding to the paragraphs running from lines 1-15, 16-23 and 24-33.<sup>51</sup> The first paragraph makes reference to a previously displeasing play, the second to the epilogue's dance, and the third to the continuation of the story 'with fair Catherine of France; where, for anything I know, Falstaff shall die of a sweat' (27-8). P. H. Davison suggests that 'All three paragraphs might have been used on their own on different occasions.'<sup>52</sup> This in turn suggests three different approaches that the company employed to conclude the play. While the first and second paragraphs end with an attempt to lighten the tone and resolve the action, it is the third part of the epilogue which prompts the audience to expect a further play: could this be a deliberate trailer inserted to advertise the forthcoming *Henry V*? If so, then this does not demonstrate an intrinsic part of the *Henry IV Part Two*'s structure, but rather betrays an opportunistic addition made at a later date.

Ultimately the difficulty of concluding the play revolves around Falstaff. His rejection has been universally acknowledged as unsatisfactory, even by those who support the

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<sup>51</sup> Melchiori, *The Second Part of King Henry IV*, p. 187.

<sup>52</sup> P. H. Davison, *Henry IV Part Two*, p. 285.

necessity of the young King's actions. It threatens to end the play on a negative strain, which seems to suggest that the work should be interpreted as the Tragedy of Falstaff. I find two faults with this suggestion: first, the epilogue promises the return of Falstaff in the next play, thus suggesting that this is not the end of Falstaff, and therefore as the end is yet to be seen, Falstaff's story is yet to be proved a tragedy; secondly, it seems unlikely that a writer of Shakespeare's experience would, having realised the popularity and comic potential of Falstaff in the first play, then proceed to expand that character in two more plays, not as a further opportunity for 'humours' as the quarto-title suggests, but as a tragic figure.

Indeed if we examine the text we can see further evidence of how Shakespeare steers the play towards a positive resolution. Both King Harry and Prince John inform us that Falstaff's banishment is not absolute: the King tells Falstaff that 'as we hear you do reform yourselves/We will, according to your strengths and qualities,/Give you advancement.' (5.4.67-69) John confirms this opportunity for Falstaff's restoration along with assurance that he is not being mistreated:

I like this fair proceeding of the King's.  
He hath intent his wonted followers  
Shall all be very well provided for,  
But all are banished till their conversations  
Appear more wise and modest to the world.  
(5.4.95-99)

The speech, along with the King's offer, places the onus of responsibility upon Falstaff. If he is willing to change, he will be accepted in court. Furthermore, John places the responsibility of judgement into the hands of 'the world' and consequently the audience. It

is only when we, not Hal, concede that Falstaff and his followers appear more wise and modest, that they may be accepted; to an extent, it is our own judgement of Falstaff that determines how long his banishment may last. While the length of his sentence is thus unconfirmed, Shakespeare does clarify that it is not permanent when the epilogue promises that 'our humble author will continue the story with Sir John in it' (Epi.25-26). *Part Two* ends with a temporarily banished Falstaff, but not one whose story had come to a tragic end. Stripped of its finality, the rejection may be reinterpreted as a less sombre action; one that still contains gravity and importance, but not the fatality that modern productions have chosen to show on what hindsight informs them to be Falstaff's last on-stage scene in the history cycle.

## Conclusion

It is my belief that *Part One* was intended as an individual play, and that *Part Two* is an unplanned sequel. However, I contest that this affects the quality of the second play, or that it requires to be interpreted as a direct continuation of the first. In *Part Two* Shakespeare drew upon a popular play, and out of the ensemble of characters he placed a strong focus on Falstaff, who had gained so much applause. When we view *Part Two* directly after *Part One*, the drop in pace suggests an equal drop in quality. However, having set up his characters in the first play, Shakespeare now has time to explore them in the second play, especially Falstaff. In *Part Two* Shakespeare considers Falstaff's mortality and love, and we see his social world explored further with the introduction of Pistol and Shallow. Having given Hal due attention in the first play, Shakespeare turns that treatment to Falstaff in this; I would therefore suggest that the plays are best considered as parallel texts, not in



terms of structure, but in the second part's reconsideration of character perceptions and relations that were depicted in the first.

It is inappropriate to suggest that the second play must follow the other, as *Part Two* contains enough background information to support its autonomy; furthermore, for it to be a continuation of the first part would require for the second part to maintain its focus on Hal, which it does not. What actually occurs is that we are presented with a different viewpoint on the actions and characters of *Part One*. By considering the plays as alternatives, rather than one joint action, we may begin to appreciate the individual structure of each as considered in this chapter: directors choosing which play to produce must ask themselves if they wish to present Hal's version of events, or Falstaff's perspective.

## Epilogue

### ‘Other’ Histories: Beyond the Boundaries of the Cycle

#### Defining the Boundaries

Thus far with rough and all-unable pen I have focused my attention upon the eight histories which have been popularly considered as forming Shakespeare’s history cycle, and the many effects which the cycle has had upon them. Characters such as Bolingbroke, Falstaff and Margaret have been redefined in a post-cycle age to challenge the pre-existing conceptions of *Richard II*, *Henry V* and *Richard III*; the plays of *Henry VI* have been unfairly criticised as incomplete or lacking a central focus; and *Henry IV Part Two* has been pushed into the shadow of *Part One*, which in itself has become a play with no conclusion. But these eight plays are not the only ones to have been affected by our concept of the cycle. Apart from the works by Shakespeare with a historical basis that Heminge and Condell chose not to define as history, such as *Macbeth*, the Roman plays, *King Lear* and *Cymbeline*, there are still a number of renaissance plays which have been manipulated by the growing conviction in the concept of a unified historical series: works outside the central eight histories which are nonetheless being defined in some way by the boundaries of the cycle.

Yet those boundaries are equally open to interpretation. To take one example, Tillyard’s work, *Shakespeare’s History Plays*, has been consistently misinterpreted since its publication. Though critics and theatre practitioners have all cited Tillyard in reference

to the history cycle, no one to date has acknowledged the precise cycle that Tillyard proposed. It comprised of ten plays, incorporating two tetralogies: taken in sequential order the prologue would be *King John*, then having worked through the eight plays more commonly accepted as the cycle, Tillyard's version concluded not with *Henry VIII*, but *Macbeth*. Tillyard felt that 'Although an authentic tragedy *Macbeth* treats the body politic differently from the other tragedies'<sup>1</sup> and this, along with its shared source in Holinshed, supported the play as a history; furthermore Tillyard argued that this history was an integral part of Shakespeare's plan. He remarked of Shakespeare's cycle that 'in *Henry V* he failed to make interesting or consistent what should have been the perfect king in action' and that the finale of Shakespeare's cycle of kings could therefore be found in the Scottish play:

The culminating version, and with it the whole adjustment of politics to life, comes in *Macbeth*. This play, as well as being the last of the great tragedies, is the epilogue of the Histories (p. 319).

The inclusion of *Macbeth* in Tillyard's cycle, and the exclusion of this consideration from subsequent readings of Tillyard's work, highlights two key factors in approaching the constructed concept of the history cycle: where does the cycle begin and end, and who decides which plays are in and which are out?

The key to these considerations lies in a selection of plays which seem to bear a direct reference on the central eight commonly recognised as Shakespeare's history cycle. For sake of clarity these outsider plays may be divided into two groups: those which have been pushed out of the cycle, and those which are being pulled in. In the first category of course are *King John* and *Henry VIII*, both of which were considered as histories by the First

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<sup>1</sup> Tillyard, p. 319.

Folio, but which have subsequently become marginalised as focus has concentrated on the other eight plays. Also in this category may be included *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, which bears links to the *Henry IV* plays but has yet to confirm its place in the history cycle. The second category includes the histories of *Edward III* and, to some extent, *Sir Thomas More*, two plays of unconfirmed authorship which have recently been attributed, either in part or in total, to Shakespeare.

In this chapter I will focus in particular on the fortunes of *King John* and *Henry VIII* in comparison to *Edward III*, for as the former two have been drawn away from the cycle, the latter has attracted particular attention for the insight some critics feel it may offer to the eight histories of the cycle. I shall then consider the significance of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *Sir Thomas More* in relation to how we may define and challenge the history cycle.

## Outside the Cycle

### Before the Cycle: *King John*

In order to appreciate the effect of the cycle on *King John* and *Henry VIII*, it is appropriate to first consider the fortunes of the plays in the pre-cycle age. The critical discussion of *King John* was initially sparse; Joseph Candido suggests that ‘The guarded and sometimes grudging appreciation so regularly accorded *King John* extends to its critical beginnings. The prominent group of seventeenth century writers [...] have,

literally, nothing of critical importance to say about the play.'<sup>2</sup> Nor did the eighteenth century yield any detailed analysis of the play, most critics focusing on what they considered to be the few characters of interest, such as Charles Gildon who felt that 'for the characters of this History I think there are none of any Figure but the *Bastard* and *Constance*'.<sup>3</sup> But there are significant comments amongst the essay that reveal Gildon's view of *King John*'s relation to the other histories: he remarked of 'the Historical Plays of Shakespeare' that 'He begins with *King John*' (pp. 245-6). That this comment is left unsupported in Gildon's essay shows an unquestioning faith in the ordering of the First Folio, as well as a recognition of *King John*'s place amongst the histories. When Lewis Theobald wrote on the histories two decades later, he not only placed *King John* with the other histories, but ranked it on a par with some of the more popular plays.

The two *Henry IVs*, *Henry V* and *Henry VIII* are full of entertainment and fine things. *John*, *Richard II* and *Richard III* are of the middling stamp: but the three parts of *Henry VI* scarce come up to that character.<sup>4</sup>

The comment is hardly flattering, but nonetheless in comparison to the cycle plays *King John* had the advantage over *Henry VI* and was at least thought equal to the neglected *Richard II* and popular *Richard III*. Theobald's correspondent William Warburton felt the protagonist of *King John* deserved due attention, noting that 'Of all the *English* Princes that *Shakespeare* has taken into Tragedy *King John* was the fittest to have made a Hero for a

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<sup>2</sup> Joseph Candido, ed., *King John*, Shakespeare: The Critical Tradition (London: Athlone Press, 1996), p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Charles Gildon, 'Remarks on the Plays of Shakespeare' (1710), repr. in *Shakespeare: The Critical Heritage* (see Vickers, above), II, pp. 226-262, (p. 246).

<sup>4</sup> Lewis Theobald, 'Letter to William Warburton, 3 January 1730', repr. in *Shakespeare: The Critical Heritage* (see Vickers, above), II, pp. 352-365 (p. 459).

Tragedy on the ancient Plan.’<sup>5</sup> In their discourse on the play, neither Warburton nor Theobald offer any commentary that suggests *King John* is distanced from the other plays.

Meanwhile the play grew in popularity upon the stage, though initially in the seventeenth century there appears to have been a theatre vacuum to match the absence of critical writing, as A. J. Piesse notes: ‘There is no record of it having been performed in the seventeenth or early eighteenth century’.<sup>6</sup> Piesse suggests that, ironically, it was Colley Cibber’s attempt at another Shakespeare adaptation that prompted a revival, as the controversy surrounding his *Papal Tragedy in the Reign of King John* of 1745 generated enough interest to entice audiences to the production of the original play, after which, ‘During the next hundred years, *King John* was played frequently’, and at several times there were rival productions performing at the same time in London (p. 127). Indeed A. R. Braunmuller notes how David Garrick, John Phillip Kemble, Charles Kean and William Charles Macready all played the title part, and that ‘from Garrick’s time to Kean’s the text shrank and, it seems, the length of performance grew, as the stage spectacle became more elaborate and time-consuming.’<sup>7</sup> *King John* was very popular and in its presentation as grand spectacle, was treated exactly as the other history plays were. When Macready produced it at Drury Lane in 1842, John Forster exclaimed that ‘We have had nothing so great as the revival of *King John*. We have had no celebration of English History and English Poetry, so worthy of a National Theatre’.<sup>8</sup> *King John* was hailed and embraced as

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<sup>5</sup> William Warburton, ‘Head-note to *King John*’, from *Notes contributed to Theobald’s Works of Shakespeare* (1733), repr. in *Shakespeare: The Critical Heritage* (see Vickers, above), II, pp. 529-538 (p. 532).

<sup>6</sup> A. J. Piesse, ‘*King John*: Changing Perspectives’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare’s History Plays* (see Hattaway, above), pp. 126-140 (p. 127).

<sup>7</sup> A. R. Braunmuller, ed., William Shakespeare, *King John*, Oxford Shakespeare (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 82.

<sup>8</sup> John Forster, *The Examiner*, 29 October 1842, cited in Charles H. Shattuch, ed., *William Charles Macready’s King John: A Facsimile Prompt-book* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1962), p. 1.

part of Shakespeare's histories, and indeed English history. Braunmuller concludes that the play was 'Popular, even controversial, from the early eighteenth century to the early twentieth' (p. 84).

### Before the Cycle: *Henry VIII*

Criticism of *Henry VIII* bears many similarities to the fortunes of *King John*. Amongst a predominant absence of criticism in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, one persistent query raised was the concern over the play's structure. In an unsigned work written in 1698, the author attacked the play for its lack of unity and disregard for the correct passing of time:

The audience, who come both willing and prepar'd to be deceiv'd [...] and indulge their own Delusion, can pass over a considerable distance both of *Time* and *Place* unheeded and unminded if they are not purposely thrown too openly in their way to stumble at. Thus *Hamlet*, *Julius Caesar* and those Historick Plays shall pass glibly, when the Audience shall be almost quite shockt at such a Play as *Henry VIII*.<sup>9</sup>

The fault of the play was the representation of 'a Marriage and the Birth of a Child, possibly in two Acts, which points so directly to Ten Months length of time that the Play has very little air of reality, and appears too much unnatural' (p. 92). As a history play *Henry VIII* was derided for its lack of history; the play is more stylised than the other histories in the canon and this has been construed as a mark of failure. Nicholas Rowe tried to excuse the fault by arguing that the time in which the play was written dictated the necessity for not being realistic, that Shakespeare avoided any incriminating events from

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<sup>9</sup> Anonymous, 'A Defence of Dramatic Poetry: Being a Review of Mr. Collier's View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the Stage' (1698), repr. in *Shakespeare: The Critical Heritage* (see Vickers, above), II, pp. 89-92 (pp. 91-2).

the reign of Henry ‘out of regard to Queen *Elizabeth*, since it could have been no very great Respect to the Memory of his Mistress to have expos’d some certain Parts of her Father’s Life upon the Stage.’<sup>10</sup> John Upton made a similar concession when he argued that the ending of the play was a result of Shakespeare’s attempt at flattery, rather than any stylistic or structural design:

In his *K. Henry VIII* the story which should have ended at the marriage of Anna Bullen is lengthened out on purpose to make a christening of Elizabeth and to introduce by way of prophecy a complement to her royal person and dignity: and what is still worse, when the play was some time after acted before K. James, another prophetic patch of flattery was tacked to it.<sup>11</sup>

Both Rowe and Upton, in supposing that the end needed excusing, perpetuated the view that it was an unsatisfactory conclusion. Despite such faults, Theobald had saw fit to consider the play alongside *Henry IV* and *Henry V* as Shakespeare’s best histories, as cited previously, for being ‘full of entertainment and fine things’. Thirty years later Samuel Johnson had demoted the play, saying of the histories that ‘the two parts of *Henry the Fourth* and *Henry the Fifth* are among the happiest of our author’s compositions; and *King John*, *Richard the Third* and *Henry the Eighth* deservedly stand in the second class.’<sup>12</sup> Still, Johnson saw fit to include both *King John* and *Henry VIII* among the histories while not mentioning *Henry VI*: inclusion at this time was not based upon the representation of chronological events.

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<sup>10</sup> Nicholas Rowe, *Some Account of the Life, &c of Mr. William Shakespeare* (1709), repr. in *Shakespeare: The Critical Heritage* (see Vickers, above), II, pp. 190-202 (p. 199).

<sup>11</sup> John Upton, *Critical Observations on Shakespeare* (1748), repr. in *Shakespeare: The Critical Heritage* (see Vickers), III, pp. 290-323 (p. 300).

<sup>12</sup> Samuel Johnson, *Epilogue to the Histories*, repr. in *Samuel Johnson on Shakespeare*, ed. by H. R. Woudhuysen (London: Penguin Books, 1989), p. 218.



Just as *Henry VIII* bore similarities to *King John* in its critical reception, so too were their stage lives mirrored, for in the theatre *Henry VIII* proved popular. Gordon McMullan notes the play's 'success on the stage in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries' and even cites this success as 'a significant factor in the sustained visual familiarity of the King himself': just as *Richard III* has informed our perception of the historical King, so *Henry VIII* once held power over its historical source.<sup>13</sup> McMullan's extensive stage history draws reference to productions by William Davenant, Thomas Betterton, Barton Booth, James Quin, Colley Cibber, David Garrick, John Phillip Kemble, William Charles Macready, Samuel Phelps, Charles Kean and Herbert Beerbohm-Tree, which suggests the popularity that the pageant-play enjoyed in the theatre, much more than *Richard II* or any part of *Henry VI* received at the time.

#### After the Cycle

How then did the cycle affect the critical and theatrical approach to *King John* and *Henry VIII*? When Schlegel offered his views on the histories in 1815, he had suggested that the vast gap in chronological events between these plays and the central eight was no reason to separate them from the other histories:

King John reigned nearly two centuries before Richard II, and between Richard III and Henry VIII comes the long reign of Henry VII, which Shakespeare justly passed over as unsusceptible of dramatic interest. However, these two plays may in some measure be considered as the Prologue and the Epilogue to the other eight.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Gordon McMullan, ed., William Shakespeare, *King Henry VIII*, Arden 3<sup>rd</sup> Series (London: Thomson Learning, 2000), p. xvi.

<sup>14</sup> August Wilhelm von Schlegel, *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature* (1815), repr. in *Shakespeare, the Critical Tradition: King John* (see Candido, above), pp. 54-55 (p. 54).

The connection of the plays to other histories is tenuous; the time gap rules out the possibility of finding any strong narrative links, so instead Schlegel changed his tactics to look for thematic links between the plays, claiming that 'In *King John*, all the political and national motives which play so great a part in the following pieces are already indicated: wars and treaties with France; a usurpation, and the tyrannical actions which it draws after it; the influence of the clergy, the factions of the nobles' (p. 54). *King John* was an overture to the other plays in which the events of the cycle might be seen briefly in miniature. *Henry VIII* was felt to offer a similar 'transition to another age' with further repetitions of dangerous favourites and lords falling from power that linked the history cycle to Shakespeare's England:

By the prophecies on the birth of Elizabeth, Shakespeare has in some degree brought his great poem on English history down to his own time, as far as such recent events could be handled with security (p. 55).

Note how drastically this interpretation of Cranmer's prophecy differs from those of Rowe and Upton; as with *Henry VI*, the grand design of the cycle offered a profound sense of purpose to what had previously been, to paraphrase Upton, a bit of flattery tacked on. However, Schlegel's impression that in *Henry VIII* Shakespeare brings his great poem to his own time conflicts with the absence of any play on Henry VII, which would be needed to connect the play to *Richard III*. Schlegel's earlier comment that the reign is 'unsusceptible of dramatic interest' suggests double standards; either Shakespeare is trying to present all of English history, or he is selecting periods only with dramatic interest: he cannot be doing both.

The final point of interest in Schlegel's approach to the two plays is his assumption that Shakespeare 'composed the two plays of *King John* and *Henry the Eighth* at a later period, as an addition to the others' (p. 55). In Schlegel's scheme the plays became commentaries on the main cycle, offered after the completion of the central story as additional works. Even in Schlegel's enthusiastic approach to all of the histories, these two were being highlighted as 'other'.

As focus began to centre on the middle eight, other critics did not feel that these two end-plays were a suitable indicator of the other histories. Having once been considered part of 'the middling stamp', *King John* was later considered inferior to the other histories by Henry Norman Hudson in his introduction to the play in 1852.

The inferiority of *King John*, as an historical drama, lies in that, taking his other works in the same line as the standard, the facts of history are disregarded much beyond what the laws of art seem to require.<sup>15</sup>

The laws of art, we may assume, might be seen as an excuse to cover deviations from truth like Falstaff or the extreme villainy of Richard III, but *King John*, not meeting this standard, was not permitted to disregard historical fact. Meanwhile *Henry VIII* was facing graver accusations; in 1850 James Spedding printed the suggestion that the play was a collaboration with Fletcher. As has been seen in the critical approach to *Henry VI*, collaboration was initially considered as an accusation to be directed at inferior plays, and an excuse for any inadequacies in plot or language. Spedding's suggestion of collaboration in *Henry VIII* was no exception; in searching for the bard within the play Spedding felt that

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<sup>15</sup> Henry Norman Hudson, *The Works of Shakespeare* (1852), repr. in *Shakespeare, the Critical Tradition: King John* (see Candido, above) pp. 146-151 (p. 147).

‘The only satisfactory evidence upon which it can be determined whether a given scene was or was not by Shakespeare, is to be found in the general effect produced on the mind, the ear, and the feelings by a free and broad perusal’.<sup>16</sup> He based his argument on his dissatisfaction with the play’s structure, remarking that ‘the interest, instead of rising towards the end, falls away utterly’ (p. 1). Spedding’s solution to this is telling; he draws reference to Ulrici’s work on the cycle, in order to agree with him that ‘what we have was meant only for a first part, to be followed by a second in which the odds would have been made even’ (pp. 1-2). The only way to compensate for the inadequacies of the play’s ending would be the existence of a second part, just as each part of *Henry VI* was redeemed by being merely a section of a much larger and grander drama.

Ironically, whether critics agreed with the cycle or not, they all perpetuated the consideration of *King John* and *Henry VIII* in contrast to the other eight. Richard Grant White, an early opponent to the history cycle, sought to prove his case that the histories do not make a coherent whole by arguing that both *King John* and *Henry VIII* ‘are entirely isolated’.<sup>17</sup> However, a supporter of the cycle could, and ultimately would, interpret this not as a reason to doubt the cycle, but to maintain the cycle without the presence of the two end plays.

In the twentieth century *King John* found initial support in Benson. When he presented the first history cycle on the English stage in 1901, *King John* was included as part of his week of kings and was proclaimed by one critic as ‘a kind of prologue to the later plays,

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<sup>16</sup> James Spedding, *On the Several Shares of Shakespeare and Fletcher in the Play of Henry VIII*, collected in *New Shakespeare Society Transactions* (London: Trubner & Co, 1874), Series 1, No. 1, Appendix, p. 7.

<sup>17</sup> Richard Grant White, *The Works of William Shakespeare* (1859), repr. in *Shakespeare, the Critical Tradition: King John* (see Candido, above) pp. 175-180 (p. 176).

for which it served acceptably.<sup>18</sup> As discussed in chapter one, Benson's decision to revive the play that year may have been a commercial one in light of Beerbohm-Tree's celebrated production two years earlier, but whatever the intention, the play was received as part of the cycle. *Henry VIII* was absent, but not missed, the consensus being that 'A fitting close to this series of Kings is Richard III'.<sup>19</sup>

Critically the separation of *Henry VIII* from the cycle began to take effect while support still continued for *King John*. In 1903 Richard Green Moulton was one of the last few to argue that both *King John* and *Henry VIII* offered an announcement of and commentary upon the significant themes to be found in the main body of the cycle:

A certain principle of history, simple yet highly impressive, appears dramatically enunciated in the prologue play [*King John*], worked over on the largest scale in the succession of eight historic dramas, and recast with a striking variation in the play which serves as epilogue [*Henry VIII*].<sup>20</sup>

Richard Garnett, who was dubious about the concept of a planned history cycle, felt that looking at the finished product '*King John* may nevertheless be regarded as in some measure a prologue, not merely or chiefly because the action precedes that of the other plays in order of time, but because it embodies in the most concentrated form the patriotic idea by which the entire series is animated.'<sup>21</sup> Significantly, Garnett's discussion favours the prologue to the epilogue, remarking of *Henry VIII* that 'The purpose of *King John* is much more profound' (p. 336). By criticising *Henry VIII*, Garnett actually supports the

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<sup>18</sup> *Literature*, May 4 1901.

<sup>19</sup> *Stratford-upon-Avon Herald*, 12 April 1901.

<sup>20</sup> Richard Green Moulton, *The Moral System of Shakespeare* (1903), repr. in *Shakespeare, the Critical Tradition: King John* (see Candido, above), pp. 324-328 (p. 324).

<sup>21</sup> Richard Garnett, *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* (1907), repr. in *Shakespeare, the Critical Tradition: King John* (see Candido, above), pp. 336-341 (p. 336).

profoundness and clarity of purpose in *King John*, which had hitherto been questioned for its lack of structure and unity; the cycle was offering the same sense of purpose to *King John* which it had offered to the central eight histories.

The cycle's effect was now being found even in an individual edition of the play, edited by N. V. Meeres in 1937, where the new found connection of *King John* to this grand cycle elevated the editor's perception of its purpose. Though Meeres felt that 'no central or unifying theme can be discovered at all so long as attention is fixed upon the principal character', he applauded the potential of the play as fulfilled in the other histories.<sup>22</sup>

Thus the glory of England is seen to be the true inspiration and underlying theme of the play. At first it is the king himself who figures as the national hero, in his defiance of France and the papacy; afterwards it is the Bastard, who becomes 'the healthy substance of the corrupt shadow which is King John.' Later still it will be Hotspur and Henry V, for the last lines of the play are in reality only the end of a chapter and contain a clear promise of stirring events to come (pp. xv-xvi).

While *King John* was being embraced by the critics, the suspicion that *Henry VIII* was merely a collaboration threatened to distance it from the canon, and this situation was not aided by the construction of a cycle to which the other histories might belong, and from which the inferior work might be excluded. The equally derided *Henry VI* had the distinct advantage of being chronologically placed in the centre of the cycle as a necessary bridge between the championed histories of *Henry V* and *Richard III*; in contrast *Henry VIII*'s tenuous placement at the end, after a gap of one king's reign, left it open to further

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<sup>22</sup> N. V. Meeres, ed., William Shakespeare, *King John* (London: MacMillan, 1937), p. xiv.

detachment than the *Henry VI* plays: *Henry VIII* had neither the support of sole authorship or narrative continuity to maintain its part in the cycle. When Tillyard offered his view of Shakespeare's histories, *King John* was in, and *Henry VIII* was out. The reasons for the omission of what had so far been the cycle's epilogue were clearly laid out in Tillyard's preface:

I have omitted *Henry VIII*, not being convinced that Shakespeare wrote it all.<sup>23</sup>

Tillyard defends his omission by arguing that 'the case of this play is entirely different from that of *Henry VI*' (p. 8), for while any lack of Shakespeare's style in the early plays may be explained by the impressions other playwrights may make on a young author, the same lack of style which Tillyard felt was apparent in *Henry VIII* was less excusable being written so late in Shakespeare's career. As a final attempt at justification, Tillyard remarks that 'Anyhow, *Henry VIII* is so far removed in date from the main sequence of History plays that its omission matters little to the argument of this book' (p. 8). Tillyard's contemporary, Lily Campbell, presented a similar argument, claiming that her omission of *Henry VIII* from her study of the histories was 'influenced by the fact that it does not occupy an assured place in the Shakespeare canon.'<sup>24</sup>

In contrast, *King John* was included in both works; though Campbell remained clear in her view that Shakespeare 'wrote of two cycles of history' (p. 124), namely the two tetralogies, and while Tillyard did include *King John* amongst his scheme, his analysis of the play is unflattering. He felt that 'in earnestness and width of political interest *King John*

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<sup>23</sup> Tillyard, p. 8.

<sup>24</sup> Campbell, *Shakespeare's Histories*, Preface.

cannot compete with the historical tetralogy it succeeded' and that 'there is much less of the cosmic lore which had been abundant in the tetralogy' (p. 224). He further distanced the play from the succeeding tetralogy, arguing that 'However large the apparent difference in style between *Richard II* and *Henry IV*, these plays are connected with a network of cross-references. On the other hand, although *Richard II* may have been written not long after *King John*, the connexions are fitful and unimportant. *Richard II* looks forward' (p. 240). *King John* was included in Tillyard's cycle, but at the cost of being unfavourably compared to the other histories, and while Tillyard acknowledged its existence he preferred not to embrace it into his scheme of cosmic lore. The attack on structure in *Henry VIII* was extended to *King John* as Tillyard claimed that 'In construction the play lacks unity' (p. 238). In establishing his view of the cycle, Tillyard's criticism focused mainly on the two tetralogies, two sets of continuing story. Cast amongst these two series, *King John* was consequently highlighted as being alone.

At this point in the mid-twentieth century the cycle became fully prominent on the English stage, with the three parts of *Henry VI* at the Birmingham Rep, and Quayle's *Henriad* in Stratford, followed a decade later by Barton and Hall's *The Wars of the Roses*. Neither *King John* nor *Henry VIII* featured in any of these productions; their absence remained unnoticed as theatre critics in 1964 wondered at seeing 'the full cycle of English histories'.<sup>25</sup> As the stage declared its sentence on the two end plays, critics wishing to support either *King John* or *Henry VIII* now found themselves battling against a public preference for the cycle histories. In his edition of *Henry VIII*, R. A. Foakes tried to stem criticism of the play's failure as a history, by redefining it as one of the late plays. For in

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<sup>25</sup> *The Times*, 30 July 30 1964.



the last plays, Foakes argued, ‘there is no central character, and several, perhaps six or more, share an equally important status. But it is not a sense of argument or inquiry, so much as a sense of range that is operative here’, which perhaps accounts for the criticism *Henry VIII* suffered when considered as a political play.<sup>26</sup>

Foakes’ concern returns to the recurring criticism levelled at both plays, namely ‘that of structure’ (p. xli). Separated from the cycle, but still labelled as history, both *King John* and *Henry VIII* were now being compared to the other histories without actually being accepted among them; an unfortunate method of comparison that could only result in discouraging opinions of the two outcast plays. Sprague remarks how in the first half of the twentieth century, ‘when a new source of interest had been discovered in the other histories, as political plays, *Henry VIII* was ignored.’<sup>27</sup> Similarly Braunmuller notes of *King John* that after a multitude of performances in the nineteenth century, ‘The play’s stage history in the twentieth century is a melancholy record of fewer and fewer productions.’<sup>28</sup>

At the end of the century critics were trying to revive interest in the plays. Deborah T. Curren-Aquino opens her work on *King John* with a lament that ‘as one of Shakespeare’s most neglected works, *King John* could well be labelled “the forgotten history play.”’<sup>29</sup> She tried to redefine the play in opposition to the cycle, claiming that ‘Where *Henry V* is one side of the picture, *King John* is the other, the nether side. Like a satyr play it stands in

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<sup>26</sup> R. A. Foakes, ed., William Shakespeare, *King Henry VIII*, Arden 2<sup>nd</sup> Series (London: Methuen, 1957), p. xli.

<sup>27</sup> Sprague, *Shakespeare’s Histories: Plays for the Stage*, p. 160.

<sup>28</sup> Braunmuller, ed., *King John*, p. 92.

<sup>29</sup> Deborah T. Curren-Aquino, ed., *King John: New Perspectives* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1989), p. 11.

opposition to the ideals of kingship expressed in the two Henriads' (p. 24). Even as a promoter of the play, Curren-Aquino found it necessary to incorporate the play as a satirical commentary on the cycle, part of a new series modelled on the ancient Greek tradition of drama. L. A. Beaurline noted how because '*King John* did not fit into revivals of the cycles of Shakespeare's history plays [...] the play was generally treated as something of a stepsister.'<sup>30</sup> Interestingly Beaurline marks the fall of *King John* in contrast to the rise of *Richard II*, which rose to prominence in the twentieth century under the influence of the cycle:

Apparently *King Richard II*, virtually never shown on the eighteenth-century and seldom on the nineteenth-century stage, has taken *John*'s place among the histories as one of the favourite vehicles for actors (p. 5).

Whilst accusations of collaboration in *Henry VIII* have subsided to a more objective approach, which no longer regards Fletcher's involvement as a mark of inadequacy, nonetheless the play has continued to dwindle on the stage in the last century. McMullan notes how only 'a century ago' marked 'the height of *Henry VIII*'s popularity on the stage' and feels 'a great pity that the play should be so under-appreciated now'.<sup>31</sup>

The issue of poor structure in both plays is still argued in modern criticism, Curren-Aquino remarking on the familiar issue that *King John* 'is criticised for lack of unity and telic design'.<sup>32</sup> I believe the plays have suffered on this point in the twentieth century specifically because they lack the support of the cycle. The apparent inconclusiveness of

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<sup>30</sup> L. A. Beaurline, ed., William Shakespeare, *King John*, New Cambridge Shakespeare (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 5.

<sup>31</sup> McMullan, ed., *King Henry VIII*, p. xvi.

<sup>32</sup> Curren-Aquino, ed., *King John: New Perspectives*, p. 11.

*Henry IV Part One*, or the *Henry VI* plays, are rectified in modern criticism by reference to the cycle and a reliance on the existence of a sequel. Unfortunately the ease of using the cycle to this end has resulted in an assumption that it is only through the support of the surrounding plays that any structure can be found in the histories. In my previous chapters I have attempted to show that this reliance on the cycle for a sense of completion in each separate play is unnecessary, but this viewpoint is outnumbered, and the damage of the prevailing opinion can be seen in its effect upon *King John* and *Henry VIII*.

The isolation of these plays results from a combination of a false perception of reliance and a subsequent lack of demand: in justifying the structure of the central eight through each other, students and audiences are encouraged to have a knowledge of the other seven to support their understanding of any one history in that cycle. This false reliance creates a demand for the eight central histories in both critical writing and theatrical performance, which subsequently detracts from the demand for *King John* and *Henry VIII*; a student looking at *Henry IV Part One* may believe it beneficial to read or see *Richard II*, *Henry IV Part Two* and *Henry V*, but there is no apparent need to see or read those histories whose narrative is detached from the events of the play. Students and audiences have become encouraged to view the histories through narrative, rather than thematic links.

Consequently when criticism turns to these two end-plays that apparently stand alone where the others stand united, the consensus confirms that they lack unity simply because we have become ignorant of how to view the histories individually. The closing of *King John* and *Henry VIII* leaves no more unanswered questions than any other history, yet because we cannot refer to a play by Shakespeare of Henry III or Edward VI, plays that

might seem to offer a continuation of events, we condemn *King John* and *Henry VIII* as being somehow faulty and incomplete.

### Inside the Cycle

In the same century that the history cycle took its hold upon both the stage and critical interpretations of the plays, the anonymous play *Edward III* has been increasingly viewed as being written, at least in part, by Shakespeare. I would argue that a link exists between the two events, that the acceptance of *Edward III* is both the triumph of the history cycle and a warning of how beguiled we have become by the concept of Shakespeare's historical saga.

Like the cycle, initial support for Shakespeare's part in *Edward III* was infrequent. The first record of it as Shakespeare's was in Thomas Goffe's *Careless Shepherdess* of 1656. Significantly, the same catalogue also included Marlowe's *Edward II* and Heywood's *Edward IV* as works by Shakespeare; either Shakespeare was renowned as a writer of histories to the extent that any which were anonymous were assumed to be his, or the narrative of his histories had extended itself to include other authors' plays within the saga.

No more was made of this until 1760, when Edward Capell included *Edward III* in his 1760 edition of Shakespeare's plays, claiming it to be 'a play thought to be writ by Shakespeare'.<sup>33</sup> In Germany, whilst Schlegel and Ulrici were proposing a unified cycle of England's history, both Ludwig Tieck and Ernst Ortlepp included *Edward III* in their

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<sup>33</sup> Capell, cited in Eric Sams, *Shakespeare's Edward III* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), p. 150.

translations of Shakespeare's plays of 1836 and 1840 respectively. Then in 1874 John Payne Collier published 'An essay in vindication of Shakespeare's authorship of the play', apologising for the omission of *Edward III* from his edition of the complete works and consequently including Capell's edition of the play in the next volume. One year later in 1875 the German critic Alexander Teetgen published his essay in London with the remarkably impassioned title: *Shakespeare's 'King Edward the Third,' absurdly called, and scandalously treated as, a 'DOUBTFUL PLAY:' An Indignation Pamphlet.*<sup>34</sup>

However the claims were not met with unanimous agreement. The play was published in 1886 by Karle Warnke and Ludwig Proescholdt as part of a series of 'Pseudo-Shakespearean plays.'<sup>35</sup> The editors admit that 'not only the subject itself, but the manner in which it is treated, reminds the reader of Shakespeare' (p. xxii), but ultimately do not consider the play to be his. Similarly in England, C. F. Tucker Brooke, in his influential work *Shakespeare's Apocrypha*, refused to accept any part of the play as Shakespeare's, ascribing it to Peele instead.<sup>36</sup> In between these poles, other editors like G. C. Moore-Smith believed Shakespeare at least collaborated on the play.<sup>37</sup> Alfred Hart suggested the play was Shakespeare's but warned others against placing this assumption on aesthetic merits, claiming that 'What Shakespearean study needs at present is more facts and fewer guesses.'<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Alexander Teetgen, cited in Giorgio Melchiori, ed., William Shakespeare, *King Edward III* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 1.

<sup>35</sup> Karl Warnke and Ludwig Proescholdt, eds, *King Edward III* (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1886).

<sup>36</sup> C. F. Tucker Brooke, *Shakespeare's Apocrypha* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1908).

<sup>37</sup> G. C. Moore Smith, ed., *Edward III* (London: J. M. Dent, 1897).

<sup>38</sup> Alfred Hart, *Shakespeare and the Homilies* (New York: Octagon, 1934, repr. 1977), p. 241.

Whilst authorship of the play was being debated, the history cycle was taking form. Tillyard acknowledged *Edward III* as a chronicle play bearing many similarities to Shakespeare's work. He considers that 'So much has been written on Shakespeare's possible share in *Edward III* that its Shakespearean affinities cannot be doubted.'<sup>39</sup> However, for Tillyard, the similarities in style remained merely that; in exploring the themes in the play Tillyard felt convinced that the play had a single author, and doubted 'if any serious critic today would credit Shakespeare with the whole play' (p. 128). Both Tillyard and Campbell located the basis of the cycle in the reign, if not the play, of Edward III, drawing upon Walter Raleigh's theory that the crime of a king will be 'visited on his grandson' (p. 68), as Tillyard notes:

It begins with Edward III. Edward put to death his uncle the Duke of Kent, for which crime his grandson Richard II had to suffer (p. 68).

Subsequent productions of the history cycle have drawn further material from Edward III's reign. Both critical editions of the histories and programmes from history cycles include a genealogical table beginning with Edward, using the family tree to explain the basis of the wars of the roses and Henry V's claim to France. Such an approach can seem detrimental, as it would suit the purpose of a series for the first part to mark the beginning of the story, rather than suggest that even in *Richard II*, the audience is approaching a story that is already underway. Yet the plays themselves make reference to the sons of Edward, for example in the Duchess of Gloucester's speech in *Richard II*:

Edward's seven sons, whereof thyself art one,  
Were as seven vials of his sacred blood,

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<sup>39</sup> Tillyard, p. 128.

Or seven fair branches springing from one root.  
Some of these seven are dried by nature's course,  
Some of these branches by the destinies cut;  
But Thomas, my dear lord, my life, my Gloucester,  
One vial full of Edward's sacred blood,  
One flourishing branch of his most royal root,  
Is cracked, and all the precious liquor spilt;  
Is hacked down, and his summer leaves all faded  
By envy's hand and murder's bloody axe. (1.2.9-21)

References to Edward's reign continue throughout the plays, whether it be the King of France's likening of Henry V to Edward's son, the Black Prince, or Mortimer and York's subsequent attempts to claim the throne through the elder brother of John of Gaunt. If the history cycle is strengthened by the cross-references between each play, then these references outside the cycle either challenge its unity, or suggest the inclusion of an additional play.

As support for the cycle grew, enthusiasm for Shakespeare's account of English kings affected the perception of *Edward III*. Brooke changed his mind, citing that 'in the play there are some good reasons for seeing Shakespeare's hand.'<sup>40</sup> Meanwhile, Kenneth Muir, in his work *Shakespeare as Collaborator*, suggested that 'apart from Marlowe's *Edward II* at the beginning of the period and Ford's belated masterpiece *Perkin Warbeck*, a generation later, there are no English history plays written by Shakespeare's contemporaries which are worth reading for their own sake.'<sup>41</sup> Only Shakespeare's histories warranted attention, so by virtue of its suspected authorship, *Edward III* was focused on above other contemporary histories of equal quality. Muir felt that 'If Shakespeare had no hand in the play he was at least intimately acquainted with it, more

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<sup>40</sup> Brooke, cited in Albert C. Baugh, and others, *A Literary History of England* (New York: Appleton-Century-Croft, 1948), p. 426.

<sup>41</sup> Kenneth Muir, *Shakespeare as Collaborator* (London: Methuen, 1960), p. 31.

intimately than with any known Elizabethan play' (p. 30), and concluded that Shakespeare had rewritten another dramatist's play.

Towards the end of the twentieth century, support for the play reached new heights, with individual editions published by Cambridge and the RSC, a planned edition for Arden and inclusion in the second edition of the Oxford Complete works. An independent edition first appearing in 1996 by Eric Sams championed the piece as wholly Shakespeare's. Sams had already edited a text of *Edmund Ironside* which he had claimed as being written by Shakespeare, which 'found favour with few specialist Shakespeareans' and therefore offered his edition of *Edward III* in the hope that 'This time, however, the profession may prove more persuadable.'<sup>42</sup> Sams' decision to present an argument on the grounds that it had more chance of succeeding is a concerning admission to make, furthermore his involvement with *Edmund Ironside* suggests that his enthusiasm for *Edward III* arose from its genre (his last work before his death was a contribution to a new book arguing Shakespeare's authorship of *Woodstock*).<sup>43</sup>

An awareness of the play's historical nature also informed Giorgio Melchiori's edition. Although his argument offers a more cautious hypothesis than Sams, suggesting Shakespeare as partial author, Melchiori had already included both this play and *Sir Thomas More* in his Italian translation of Shakespeare's complete works, and had offered an argument focusing on *Edward III* in relation to other histories in *Shakespeare's Garter Plays*, arguing that '*Edward III* prefigures the structure not only of *Henry V*, but also of the

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<sup>42</sup> Sams, p. 1.

<sup>43</sup> Michael Egan, ed., *Shakespeare's The Tragedy of Richard II, Part One*, 4 vols (New York: Mellun Press, 2005).



whole Henriad.’<sup>44</sup> Melchiori stated quite simply that ‘The fact is that *Edward III* is the natural prelude to the second Shakespearean historical cycle, from *Richard II* to *Henry V*’ which, along with growing support for the play, prompted Melchiori to claim that ‘*Edward III* has as much right to “canonic rank” as the earliest Folio histories.’<sup>45</sup> Allocation of authorship is an imprecise science, where the lack of external evidence means that at best we can make educated assumptions based on use of language and our knowledge of the author. E. A. J. Honigmann has looked at the how similarity in character and plot can be looked upon as a means of connecting Shakespeare’s plays together, suggesting that ‘such self-repetitions, when of sufficient quality and quantity, can serve as an authorial fingerprint’.<sup>46</sup> Similarly both Sams and Melchiori explored the text in relation to the cycle: the narrative connection became one of the arguments in support of *Edward III*’s place in the canon.

The editors of the Oxford Complete Works were less certain. Whilst the first edition provided many innovations, such as the chronological ordering of Shakespeare’s plays, and the restoration of Oldcastle’s name in *Henry IV*, the work did not include the text of *Edward III*. The editors did however claim that ‘if we had attempted a thorough reinvestigation of candidates for inclusion in the early dramatic canon, it would have begun with *Edward III*.’<sup>47</sup> However, seventeen years later when the second edition was published, the Oxford editors obviously felt a greater confidence in the play’s claim to Shakespeare,

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<sup>44</sup> Giorgio Melchiori, *Shakespeare’s Garter Plays: Edward III to Merry Wives of Windsor* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1994), p. 127.

<sup>45</sup> Melchiori, *King Edward III*, p. 3.

<sup>46</sup> Honigmann, ‘Shakespeare’s Self-repetitions and *King John*’, p. 175.

<sup>47</sup> Stanley Wells, Gary Taylor, John Jowett and William Montgomery, *William Shakespeare: A Textual Companion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), p. 137.

and both *Edward III* and the full text of *Sir Thomas More* were included. The editors offered the following explanation for their change of heart since the first edition:

Since then intensive application of stylometric and other tests of authorship, along with an increased willingness to acknowledge that Shakespeare collaborated with other writers especially early and late in his career, has strengthened the case for including it among the collected works.<sup>48</sup>

The phrase ‘increased willingness’, used here in reference to Shakespeare as collaborator, highlights the effect which popular opinion has had on critical thought in accepting *Edward III* in the Oxford complete works; certainly the idea of *Edward III* as Shakespeare’s has not met any strong resistance in the present age. After seeing a performance of the play, Lois Potter claimed that ‘I don’t feel strongly about the authorship question, but it would not distress me to find [*Edward III*] included in the Shakespeare canon.’<sup>49</sup>

John Julius Norwich was particularly grateful for the growing critical acceptance of the play when he came to write his work on the cycle, *Shakespeare’s Kings*. As a historian Norwich deliberately did not involve himself in a literary discussion of the plays, but instead presented a comparison of them to the historical events they claimed to depict. As such he did not question the views of literary scholars who had accepted the play as Shakespeare’s, remarking that its acceptance by New Cambridge and Arden ‘is good

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<sup>48</sup> Stanley Wells, Gary Taylor, John Jowett and William Montgomery, *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 257.

<sup>49</sup> Lois Potter, cited in Sams, p. 158.

enough for me.’<sup>50</sup> Norwich was less concerned with questioning the authorship and more concerned with the positive implications this authentication had for the cycle:

The authentication of *Edward III* [...] came to me as a godsend. For Edward was the royal patriarch, from whose loins all the subsequent rulers in our story directly or indirectly sprang. Virtually nothing in Shakespeare’s mighty epic – not the Hundred Years War nor the Wars of the Roses, not the deposition of Edward’s grandson Richard II nor the murderous ambition of his great-great-grandson Richard III – can be properly understood without going back to him. His story had somehow to be told; now, through Shakespeare, I could tell it (p. 3).

Norwich’s statement highlights how swiftly the play was accepted, with the questionable belief that ‘virtually nothing’ in the cycle can be understood without it; equally his comments indicate the necessity of Shakespeare’s involvement in the historical origins of the cycle: it is only ‘through Shakespeare’ that Norwich feels he can be permitted to tell the story. When the play was performed by the RSC in 2002, the accompanying text edited by Roger Warren announced on the cover that the play ‘vividly depicts the beginning of the Hundred Years’ War and, through its chronicling of the exploits of Edward, the Black Prince, acts as a “prequel” to *Richard II*.’<sup>51</sup>

Just as Norwich suggested a sense of authority in telling history ‘through Shakespeare’, so the 2002 *Edward III* was viewed, on the whole, in reference to Shakespeare. One reviewer noted of the production that ‘what makes this such an unusual outing to the theatre is that for some of the audience the intriguing issue is not so much the actual performance of the play itself but the unsolvable mystery of who wrote it.’<sup>52</sup> The majority

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<sup>50</sup> John Julius Norwich, *Shakespeare’s Kings* (London: Viking, 1999), p. 3.

<sup>51</sup> Roger Warren, ed., William Shakespeare, *Edward III* (London: Nick Hern, 2002).

<sup>52</sup> Dale Le Vack, *Stratford-upon-Avon Herald*, 2 May 2002.

of reviews focused on the potential unveiling of a new Shakespeare play; to take one as an example, Michael Billington's article for *The Guardian* spanned eighty-four lines, of which fifty-eight discussed the authorship of the play, rather than the production under review.<sup>53</sup>

Consequently the RSC's production was reviewed in context of Shakespeare's other histories, as the critics searched for indications of a common author. Susannah Clapp saw 'overlaps' with *Henry VI* and Benedict Nightingale remarked that 'The worst of *Edward III* is no worse than the worst of *Henry VI*'.<sup>54</sup> Elsewhere one reviewer considered *Edward III* to be 'a very dry run for *Henry V*'; Nightingale also felt the play 'contains pre-echoes of *Henry V*', while Paul Taylor of *The Independent* decided the play was 'Like *Henry V*' and Billington wrote that Edward's 'claim to France strikes me as even shakier than that of Henry V'.<sup>55</sup> The cross-referencing in the reviews between productions ensured that the cycle was very much in the foreground of this production, which Clapp summarised as 'a precursor of the histories': in the theatre, *Edward III* was becoming connected to the cycle.

In considering the plays which are now becoming grafted on to the history cycle, we have come full circle; when the cycle was first formed in critical writings, Samuel Taylor Coleridge suggested a dangerous precedent when he allowed his enthusiasm for a historical saga to stretch beyond the plays in the Shakespeare canon:

It would be desirable that some man of dramatic genius, to which I  
have no pretensions, should dramatise all those omitted by

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<sup>53</sup> Michael Billington, *The Guardian*, 27 April 2002.

<sup>54</sup> Susannah Clapp, *The Observer*, 28 April 2002; Benedict Nightingale, *The Times*, 27 April 2002.

<sup>55</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 4 May 2002; Nightingale, 27 April 2002; Paul Taylor, *The Independent*, 1 May 2002; Billington, 27 April 2002.

Shakespeare, as far down as Henry VII. inclusive [...]. It would be a fine national custom to act such a series of dramatic histories in orderly succession every Christmas holiday.<sup>56</sup>

Towards the end of the twentieth century this challenge has been unconsciously taken up; the RSC has consistently commemorated anniversaries and occasions with a history cycle, and the recent reactions to *Edward III* suggests its inclusion in a future cycle production is not unlikely. Ironically, this embracement of the cycle may be the factor which forces both critics and audiences to reassess precisely what Shakespeare's history series consists of. By considering collaborative works as part of the cycle, be it *Henry VI Part One* or, eventually, *Edward III*, Shakespeare's claim on the cycle is being loosened, whilst the reliance on narrative links remains. Now that plays with only partial contributions by Shakespeare are included, the natural progression of that idea might allow plays with no contributions by Shakespeare, so that histories by other writers can justifiably be incorporated into the cycle: Coleridge's vision of a sprawling epic which covers all the monarchs of England may prove to be the culmination of the twentieth century's attitude towards the histories. Gone unchecked, the unthinking addition to the cycle can lead to more of the same, but if we acknowledge this process now, we can embrace new cycles with new links that explore the plays in different and innovative ways.

### Disrupting the Cycle

While I hope we can affect such changes to the cycle, there are elements that suggest a resistance to such innovative series. For while *Edward III*'s inclusion to the cycle could be a positive step, the fact that it is being included based on narrative links, when other plays

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<sup>56</sup> Edward Burns, ed., *Henry VI Part I*, p. 68.

are not, is less encouraging. To fully understand our grasp on the cycle at present, it is appropriate to look at two other plays which refuse to fit with the current concept of Shakespeare's history saga: *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *Sir Thomas More*. The first of these is a comedy that appears to share characters with three of the histories; the second is a play which challenges our definition of a Shakespearean history.

As has been noted in chapters two and five, Falstaff has become a dominant figure in our appreciation of the *Henry IV* plays, often eclipsing the historical elements. One would think, then, that a play entirely devoted to the fat knight without the interruption of historical events would be warmly embraced, yet the same critics who have applauded the character of Falstaff through the two plays of *Henry IV* have in turn attacked the character in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* for being, in A. C. Bradley's words, an 'impostor.'<sup>57</sup> Bradley felt strongly that 'The original character is to be found alive in the two parts of *Henry IV*, dead in *Henry V*, and nowhere else' (p. 247), and that the Falstaff of *Merry Wives* must remain distinct, as part of a play written 'in haste' (p. 248). Conversely, Melchiori included *Merry Wives* alongside *Edward III*, *Henry IV Parts One and Two* and *Henry V* in what he had identified as Shakespeare's garter cycle, 'a five-part dramatic cycle on the Honour of the Garter' in which 'The result was the emergence of Sir John Falstaff as the anti-heroic hero'.<sup>58</sup> Even in Melchiori's constructed thematic cycle, Falstaff remained in opposition to the predominant structure of the unit.

Despite the opposition to the character, attempts have been made to incorporate the Falstaff of *Merry Wives* into a historical, or dramatic, sequence of Shakespeare plays. Of

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<sup>57</sup> A. C. Bradley, 'The Rejection of Falstaff', p. 248.

<sup>58</sup> Melchiori, *Shakespeare's Garter Plays*, p. 129.

the three Stratford festivals in which Frank Benson offered a history cycle, two included *Merry Wives*. The first cycle in 1901 maintained a distance between *Merry Wives* and the histories; the season lasted a fortnight, the first week of which comprised of comedies, including *Merry Wives*, and the second of which was devoted to the histories. Benson's remaining cycle, of 1905, presented an interesting ensemble of plays, for as well as *Merry Wives* the company also presented Marlowe's *Edward II*; it is possible that Benson's company were exploring the parameters of the cycle this year, determining which plays might be used to supplement the core body of Shakespeare's histories. The comments in the review seem to have provided a negative answer to this exploration; both *Edward II* and *Merry Wives* were distinguished by critics as separate to the main cycle; the former was marked out as 'The only production not Shakespearian', while the Falstaff of *Merry Wives* was ill compared with the Falstaff of *Henry IV*.<sup>59</sup> Bradley's views were echoed as one reviewer felt that 'the fat knight of Windsor is not nearly so humorous a personage as the Falstaff who goes a-roistering with wild Prince Hal'.<sup>60</sup> Tellingly Benson's last cycle in 1906 did not include *Merry Wives*.

Despite this, other productions chose to connect the comedy to the history cycle. After Barry Jackson's Birmingham Rep presented the two parts of *Henry IV* in 1921, Osmund Wilson's Falstaff returned later that season to play the character again in *Merry Wives*. One review remarked that 'After his excellent Falstaff in "Henry IV." it was a natural progression for Mr Osmund Wilson to play the part here.'<sup>61</sup> Still, the production did take place eight months after the production of *Henry IV*, and Wilson aside there was no further

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<sup>59</sup> J. H. B., *Stratford-upon Avon Herald*, 5 May 1905.

<sup>60</sup> *Birmingham Express*, 4 May 1905.

<sup>61</sup> Unmarked review, 1921.

continuity of casting. It appears to have been more of an opportunistic connection rather than a deliberate attempt to link *Merry Wives* to *Henry IV*.

In 1975, Terry Hands took the process a step further when he chose to present *Merry Wives* in a cycle with *Henry IV Part One*, *Henry IV Part Two* and *Henry V*. Falstaff now became the connecting figure through the four plays, but critics queried the unity of the character that the inclusion of *Merry Wives* appeared to challenge: 'it's best not to reflect too deeply on the changed character of the fat villain depicted in Henry the Fourth.'<sup>62</sup> Even the artistic director seemed uncertain, Nunn calling that year's season 'a cycle of Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Parts One and Two*, *Henry V* and his other Falstaff play, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*': *Merry Wives* remained 'other'.<sup>63</sup> Many critics dismissed the play in their reviews; Sheila Bannock of the Stratford Herald ignored *Merry Wives* and instead devoted an article to discussing 'Mr Hands's aims and intentions in directing the three histories for this year's centenary season'.<sup>64</sup> Scott McMillin, who remained critical of the 1975 cycle, recalls the RSC's attempt to explain the presence of *Merry Wives* in the cycle:

The programme note in 1975 tried to justify this by calling upon Shakespeare's intentions: 'it is arguable that the comedy grew out of the histories because, in Shakespeare's mind at least, the Elizabethan merchant class of *The Merry Wives* were the children of Henry V's achievement at Agincourt' [...]. But no-one took the programme note seriously.<sup>65</sup>

Ultimately *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is not a historical play; the 1975 programme acknowledged that 'Shakespeare had no major source for *The Merry Wives*, though many

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<sup>62</sup> Denis Downes, *Leicester Mercury*, 13 August 1975.

<sup>63</sup> Trevor Nunn, 'The Centenary Season', in *Henry V for the Centenary Season at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre* (see Beaumann, above), p. 5.

<sup>64</sup> Sheila Bannock, *Stratford-Upon-Avon Herald*, 26 August 1975.

<sup>65</sup> Scott McMillin, pp. 84-5.



elements of its plot are shared with other works then current', and herein lies the conundrum for supporters of the cycle.<sup>66</sup> The play has direct character links with *Henry IV*, yet has no historical element: there is only one reference in the drama to Hal, and that neither comes from Falstaff nor relates to him; George Page says of Fenton that 'The gentleman is of no having. He kept company with the wild Prince and Poin's' (3.2.65-7). In order to argue that the history plays are a planned series, it must be shown that the narrative links are by the author's design, rather than a by-product of using history as a source. So, following that argument, a play with no historical source but fictional connections should have a stronger claim than any to be part of Shakespeare's cycle, for any links are purely of the writer's choosing. Yet to include it would be to prioritise the cycle over history, to transform it from a history series into a dramatic series, and this appears to be a direction which supporters of the cycle are unwilling to take. At present *Merry Wives* remains an outsider.

In the twentieth century, *Sir Thomas More*, like *Edward III*, has been appended to the histories included in the First Folio, following the identification of Shakespeare's hand in it. Until now, the histories have been defined as plays which relate to English history dating from the reign of *King John*. It is a tenuous definition used to explain the absence of *Cymbeline*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth* and the Roman plays, but by this definition *Sir Thomas More* is indeed a history play, and comparisons have been drawn between the riot scenes in both *Sir Thomas More* and *Henry VI Part Two* as a means of identifying Shakespeare's hand. R. W. Chambers, writing in 1923, noted the irony that 'The likeness between the "147" lines and the Jack Cade scenes in 2 *Henry VI* has become a commonplace of

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<sup>66</sup> Programme for *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, directed by Terry Hands at the Royal Shakespeare Theatres, 1975.

criticism', feeling himself that it was 'the less conclusive' because 'much of the *Contention* is pretty clearly not Shakespeare's work.'<sup>67</sup> The comparison relies upon a similarity of events and structure as an indication of shared authorship, in much the same way as Melchiori and Sams connected *Edward III* to the cycle; one would assume that now that Shakespeare's hand in *Sir Thomas More* has become widely recognised, the similar structure and events, coupled with the play's source in English history would be drawn upon to place it too amongst Shakespeare's other histories.

But *Sir Thomas More* also challenges the popular definition of a history play. The only edition to have credited it as a history play is *The London Shakespeare*. The editor arranged Shakespeare's works in the recognised genres of comedy, history and tragedy, and accordingly included *Sir Thomas More* after *Henry VIII*.<sup>68</sup> In contrast when the RSC produced the play, the reviews referred to it simply as 'this play', 'this 1592 curio', or 'a hagiography of the Lord Chancellor', but not one of them called the play a history.<sup>69</sup> This greatly contrasts their eager reception of the RSC's *Edward III* as a play closely related to the history cycle, so what makes the critics so hesitant about acknowledging *Sir Thomas More* as history?

Gervinus defines a history play as one in which Shakespeare 'enters the wide outward sphere of public life; he is occupied with states and histories, and is stirred by thoughts

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<sup>67</sup> R. W. Chambers, 'The Expression of Ideas – Particularly Political Ideas - in the Three Pages, and in Shakespeare', in *Shakespeare's Hand in The Play of Sir Thomas More*, ed. by A. W. Pollard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1923), pp. 142-187 (p. 144).

<sup>68</sup> John Munro, ed., *The London Shakespeare* (London: Eyre and Spottiswode, 1958).

<sup>69</sup> *Metro*, 29 March 2005; Fiona Mountford, *Evening Standard*, 30 March 2005; Benedict Nightingale, *The Times*, 28 March 2005.

political and national, and not merely by moral ideas and psychological truths.’<sup>70</sup> A history is a play of national importance, but the majority of events depicted in this play are more involved with More’s own life, and those moments which do involve a larger significance stretch only so far as London: this is not a drama of national and international events. Moreover, *Sir Thomas More*, like *Merry Wives*, lacks a vital historical figure: the King. The conspicuous absence of Henry VIII may of course be explained by the constraints which the writers of *Sir Thomas More* were under. The portrayal of the present Queen’s father in such a tale, no matter how sympathetic, would not be allowed; Tilney’s notes on the manuscript give a clear warning against controversy:

Leave out ye insurrection wholly and the cause thereof, and begin with Sir Tho. Moore at ye mayors sessions, with a report afterwards off his good service don, being shrive off London, upon a mutiny agaynst ye Lumbardes, only by a shortt reportt, and nott otherwise, att your own perrilles.<sup>71</sup>

The censorship of the play highlights that the work was written quite conspicuously under the influence of external factors, and this, along with the collaborative element of the play, for which Shakespeare appears to offer only a minor contribution, suggests that the play was not written with that same grand design under which critics have suggested the other histories may have been conceived. Similarly, *Merry Wives*, is popularly reported to have been written at the request of the Queen, and though this anecdote remains to be proven, the idea continues to be reproduced and, I would argue, has influenced our perception of the play: like *Sir Thomas More*, the conception of *Merry Wives* has become entangled with the idea of royal pressure, and this in turn offers an excuse for not including

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<sup>70</sup> G. G. Gervinus, *Shakespeare Commentaries* (London: Smith, Elder and Co, 1903; first published 1849; first translated 1862), p. 248.

<sup>71</sup> Edmond Tilney cited in C. F. Tucker Brooke, *The Shakespeare Apocrypha*, pp. xlvii-xlviii.

them in a cycle assumed to have been designed by Shakespeare; for if Shakespeare did not choose to write them as they appear, but was restricted in his artistic freedom, it may be argued that the plays do not present the same artistic flair and marks of genius which the history cycle suggests. But the reservation felt over the constrictions on these two plays may easily be countered with those signs of external influence we can see in the other histories: the censorship of Richard II's deposition, the comparison of Henry V's return to that of Essex, or Cranmer's prediction of Elizabeth's reign.

But other difficulties persist in including these two plays in the cycle, namely determining where they should go: should *Merry Wives* be set before, during or after the two parts of *Henry IV*? Internally, *Merry Wives* appears to follow the events of *Henry IV Part Two*; Shallow and Pistol both appear without the introductions they receive in *Part Two*. Indeed Shallow's opening lines of complaint against Sir John appear to follow his pleas at the end of *Henry IV Part Two*:

Shallow: I beseech you, good Sir John, let me have five hundred of my thousand.  
(*2HIV*, 5.4.81-2)

Shallow: Sir Hugh, persuade me not. I will make a Star Chamber matter of it. If he were twenty Sir John Falstaffs, he shall not abuse Robert Shallow, Esquire.  
(*MW*, 1.1.1-3)

Though the complaint turns out to be regarding the killing of one of Shallow's deer, the character's tone of complaint appears to be a continuation; certainly these ill-feelings do not precede the warm welcome he offers Falstaff in *Henry IV Part Two*. Moreover, in *Merry Wives* Shallow knows both Bardolph and Pistol, whom Slender in his presence calls

‘cony-catching rascals’ (*MW* 1.1.117), while in *Henry IV Part Two* Shallow has to be introduced to them, as he ‘does not know [their] breeding’ (*2HIV*, 5.3.108). The presentation of *Merry Wives* after *Henry IV Part Two*, raises difficulties in the characterisation of Falstaff, who now appears as a cheerful figure apparently unaffected by Hal’s rejection of him, and quite at odds with the knight in *Henry V* whose ‘heart is fractured and corroborate’ (*HV* 1.3.119).

In terms of composition, the editors of the Oxford Shakespeare suggested that Shakespeare may have started to write *Henry IV Part Two* ‘late in 1596, or in 1597, directly after *1 Henry IV*, but have laid it aside while he composed *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.’<sup>72</sup> In a separate essay John Jowett remarked that ‘It may be most satisfactory to suppose that Shakespeare worked intermittently on the middle scenes of *2 Henry IV* while composing *Merry Wives*.’<sup>73</sup> Such a composition suggests that the two plays have a parallel, rather than linear, relationship to one another. The play seems to fit best as an alternative to *Henry IV Part Two*; an alternative tale that can be seen in relation to the history, but should not be used to inform the events in the cycle.

*Sir Thomas More* encounters similar, if not greater, difficulties, as many of the events depicted in the play seem to occur around the same time as events in *Henry VIII*. The riots of *Thomas More* occurred in 1517, the arrest of Buckingham in *Henry VIII* in 1521; More became Lord Chancellor in 1529, one year before the death of Wolsey that’s depicted in *Henry VIII*; Elizabeth was born in 1533 and More died in 1535: which play should an

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<sup>72</sup> Stanley Wells, Gary Taylor, John Jowett and William Montgomery, eds, *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 509.

<sup>73</sup> John Jowett, ‘Cuts and Casting: Author and Book-keeper in the Folio Text of “2 Henry IV”’, p. 281.

audience see first? Again, these two plays might well benefit from parallel productions, where audiences choose themselves which to see first and appreciate them as plays containing events which inform our understanding of the other. This is the same approach which I have also suggested might be beneficial for the two parts of *Henry IV*; to present either pair as a parallel production requires a reconsideration of the linear approach which cycle productions have favoured thus far. By presenting the plays in tandem as two aspects of the same historical period, rather than a play in two halves, it encourages a focus on character and themes rather than narrative and events which has thus far been used to connect the histories. History suggests order and chronology, cause and effect, but in drama there is room for less constricting views, of parallels and comparison of themes

This is one way in which appreciation of *Sir Thomas More* among Shakespeare's histories may encourage us to reconsider the structure and format of a history series. Yet all of the histories which I have discussed in this chapter challenge the cycle by their very presence; if these dramas can have been drawn from the same historical source and yet remain independent of the tetralogies, or octology, which critics have found in the histories, then it provokes the reader to reconsider whether the links between the central eight histories are intentional; whether Shakespeare's cycle is one of author's intent or critical perception. And yet rather than pursue this challenge as a means of informing our attitude to the history plays, the critical and theatrical approach to these plays in the twentieth century has been dominated by neglect and ignorance. It is my ardent hope that the growing enthusiasm for *Edward III* will be tempered by an equal appreciation for *Sir Thomas More*, so that the former will not be blindly added into a theatrical cycle without first considering the implications and the reasoning for not including the other four plays

discussed here. It is precisely through the challenges which these plays offer that directors and academics can strengthen their own argument, by a more thorough investigation of what they believe to be a true definition of a history cycle.

## Conclusion: The Countess' Contrarities

The questions which I asked at the beginning of this chapter remain unanswered: where does the cycle begin and end, and who decides which plays are in or out? What I hope has become apparent throughout my thesis is that what at first seemed to be a generic concept of a unified octology is in actual fact the latest result in an ever-changing construct. At different times, and in the views of different critics, the history cycle has contained anything from two to ten parts. As well as the central eight, there have been other cycles, both theoretical and theatrical, which incorporate *King John*, *Henry VIII*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Macbeth*, *Edward III*, *Edward II* and *Thomas of Woodstock*. Each cycle has been shaped by the critic's opinion of genre, or the director's choice of theme and structure. The decision of which plays do or do not belong in a cycle ultimately rests on each one of us: it is we as individuals in the study or the theatre who must decide to what extent we believe the cycle to be appropriate. There are no distinctive, universally recognised rules in defining the boundaries, which therefore suggests that we should readdress our confidence in one cycle as the definitive approach to the histories.

This reappraisal is vital, as we need to recognise that the cycle can detract from the plays, as well as expand upon them. The remarkable fall in productions of *Henry VIII* and *King John* in the last century stands as an undeniable comment on the negative effect of the

history cycle, and this effect needs to be acknowledged if we are to reverse the decline of two previously popular plays. The continued presentation of *Richard II*, *Henry V* and *Richard III* as individual productions shows the folly of those who argue that the histories cannot stand alone, and I hope that we may cease to discriminate against those plays which the First Folio defined as *Part One*, *Two* or *Three*, or which subsequent critics have decided do not belong in the cycle. The key to appreciating these texts is to reconsider the conceptions we have of Shakespeare's drama: the tragedies have taught us to expect the death of a protagonist to mark the narrative's close, but the histories embrace a new approach to tragic actions. The *Henry VI* plays, within their own structures, show the deterioration of generations, family and the nation, and we should be exploring these as themes rather than trying to outline the rise and fall of any one particular character.

What proves most aggravating is the inescapable sense of laziness which permeates and perpetuates the idea of a history series. Now that the groundwork for a cycle has been done by our predecessors, many take this theory for granted without having questioned it first. Very few critics or theatre practitioners justify their belief in a history cycle as a result of balanced, open-minded research, and the majority of supporters of the cycle endorse it only because they are not aware of an alternative: the histories continue to be presented as a cycle at the RSC simply because that is how they have been done throughout the twentieth century. Consequently, as has been shown, particular interpretations made in the mid-twentieth century to promote a serial perspective have become locked onto the plays regardless of their context; it would be delightfully unexpected to see a performance of *Henry IV Part One* where the play extempore remains a play and not a sinister prediction of events to follow.



I have therefore tried to demonstrate the individuality of the histories, not to suggest that this in turn is the one true way to explore these plays, but simply to show that there is an alternative. Equally, there are other approaches open to the critic or director within the boundaries of a cycle. I have already mentioned the possibility of parallel, rather than linear productions; plays which can inform each other equally as alternative viewpoints, rather than as a first and second part, the latter reliant upon the former. It might be interesting to see a shared production of *Henry VIII*, *Sir Thomas More* and *Thomas Cromwell*, for example, and in having actors playing continuous roles in different dramas, explore the opportunity of dynamic contrasts in how that character is perceived by an audience. It would be equally viable to present a Roman cycle as the RSC once did but never repeated, or, should the company choose to present another season of Shakespeare's contemporaries, it would be quite possible to present a coherent pageant of kings from Marlowe, Heywood, and others. Ultimately, the cycle format does not need to be restricting, but can be an exciting opportunity for development and experimentation. If we challenge the unquestioned validity of the cycle, it might prompt the necessary innovation to reinvigorate the concept and achieve the same success as Quayle's, or Barton's and Hall's, productions did in the mid-twentieth century.

At present we seem unable to appreciate the multiple interpretations which these plays can offer us. In *Henry VI Part One* Talbot scoffs at the countess when she assumes that she has captured him. Talbot knows that his strength lies in the multitude of his army, and that alone he is merely a man:

No, no, I am but shadow of myself.  
You are deceived; my substance is not here.  
For what you see is but the smallest part  
And least proportion of humanity.  
I tell you, madam, were the whole frame here,  
It is of such a spacious lofty pitch  
Your roof were not sufficient to contain't (2.3.50-56).

To what extent is Talbot's dismissal of his own importance true of each individual history? Once we have seen the 'whole frame' of the cycle, does each play appear, by itself, to be 'but the smallest part'? I fear that our embracement of the cycle has left us subsequently disappointed with each individual history. As a cycle, the histories are epic, 'a spacious lofty pitch': a remarkable feat of drama spanning many ages, many parts, and accounting for an entire season at the theatre. Alone, they are no different to any of Shakespeare's other plays, but this is hardly poor company. The countess may have the right perspective after all; she does not look at Talbot and see a mere shadow, but a man, and we can understand her confusion that 'He will be here, and yet he is not here/How can these contrarities agree?' (2.3.58-9)

The twentieth century saw a growing obsession with the whole frame, just as previous centuries had failed to see anything but the man; perhaps now, in the twenty-first century, we should look to adopt a compromise. By acknowledging the potency of the plays as a cycle, but also encouraging their individuality, the histories can continue to provide epic drama should any theatre wish to produce it, but simultaneously, as individuals they can become available to a greater number of theatres, both professional and amateur. Critically, the recognition of the two perspectives can broaden our appreciation of these plays and the vast interpretive options they offer; we can acknowledge a play's part within a larger framework, whilst still appreciating the individual qualities and structure of that one play. I

have argued that an individual perspective of the histories should be acknowledged; the next stage is to appreciate and investigate the effects and implications of both individual and serial perspectives as equally valid routes of enjoying these plays: that is how the countess' contrarities can agree at last.

# Appendices

## Appendix 1.

Table 1

Scene	Appearance		Talked about
1.1			Hal and Hotspur
1.2	Hal		
1.3		Hotspur	Hal
2.1			
2.2	Hal		
2.3		Hotspur	
2.4	Hal		Hotspur
3.1		Hotspur	
3.2	Hal		Hal and Hotspur
3.3	Hal		
4.1		Hotspur	Hal
4.2	Hal		
4.3		Hotspur	
4.4			Hal and Hotspur
5.1	Hal		Hal and Hotspur
5.2		Hotspur	Hal
5.3	Hal	Hotspur	
5.4	Hal	Hotspur	
5.5	Hal		

Appearances of Hal and Hotspur in *Henry IV Part One*

## Appendix 2.

Table 2

Scene	<i>Part One</i>	<i>Part Two</i>
Introduction	Not applicable	Rumour speaks
1.1	The King and court	Northumberland and rebels
1.2	Hal and Falstaff	Falstaff and Chief Justice
1.3	Hotspur	The rebels plot
2.1	The carriers	Hal and Poins
2.2	Gadshill	Falstaff, Mistress Quickly
2.3	Hotspur and Lady Percy	Northumberland and Lacy Percy
2.4	Tavern scene	Tavern scene
3.1	Hotspur and Glendower	Henry IV
3.2	Hal and Henry	Falstaff and Shallow
3.3	Hal and Falstaff	Not applicable
4.1	Hotspur and Douglas	Gaultree Forest
4.2	Hal and Falstaff	Falstaff and Coleville
4.3	Hotspur and rebels	Hal and Henry
5.1	Henry IV and Worcester	Falstaff and Shallow
5.2	Worcester and Hotspur	Henry V and Justice
5.3	Douglas slays Blunt	Falstaff and Shallow
5.4	Hal and Hotspur fight	Quickly and Tearsheet
5.5	Henry's side victorious	Falstaff rejected
Epilogue	Not applicable	Epilogue

Structural Comparison of *Henry IV Part One* and *Two*

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