

A PERFORMANCE HISTORY OF *SIR THOMAS MORE*

by

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the history of *Sir Thomas More* in performance through an engagement, by correspondence and personal interview, with those theatrical practitioners most closely involved with the production of the play text as a theatrical event. This is allied to a close examination of those records of performance that remain accessible to the scholar. The relationship between the roles of the modern editor as an authorial collaborator and the modern director as a textual editor also informs the author's approach to the subject. The limitations inherent in any records closely concerned with the production of an essentially ephemeral theatrical event are assessed in relation to the necessary subjectivity of critical responses to unique performances.

**To Mike – with all my love, always.**

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## INTRODUCTION

‘In the British Library, writing is held for posterity. In an Elizabethan playhouse, speech was used for the moment.’<sup>1</sup> Thus Scott McMillin, approaching *Sir Thomas More* from a theatrical perspective rather than a textual one, encounters few of the perceived problems of cohesion usually associated with the manuscript, but instead sees the play immediately as ‘coherent and purposeful.’<sup>2</sup> He challenges the prevailing academic opinion that the play is unfinished and unstructured, demonstrating rather its fitness for purpose as the only extant example of a ‘prompt book prepared for the copying of the actors’ parts.’<sup>3</sup>

It is from this starting point that I intend to examine the history of the play in performance; to assess the extent to which the academic world most centrally is concerned with the manuscript as a damaged artefact to be reconstructed as accurately as possible, and how theatrical professionals may consider such textual accuracy simply as a starting point in order to construct an engaging, and necessarily ephemeral, dramatic performance. Informed by Lukas Erne’s work, I will consider to what extent the modern director can also be considered one of ‘Shakespeare’s Modern Collaborators.’<sup>4</sup> In light of Peter Reynolds’s assertion that ‘the modern theatre director ... exercises considerable

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<sup>1</sup> Scott McMillin, *The Elizabethan Theatre and the Book of Sir Thomas More* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1987) p. 16.

<sup>2</sup> McMillin, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Lukas Erne, *Shakespeare’s Modern Collaborators* (London: Continuum, 2008).



power and influence over the theatre product eventually consumed by audiences’, I will also consider how and why such performance choices are made.<sup>5</sup>

The initial intention, however, is to set down in as much detail as possible the performance history of the play, concentrating most on the three professional productions presented so far. An analysis of the accuracy of the research material encountered, together with the necessary subjectivity involved in interpreting this evidence will be examined in light of Alan Dessen’s work in this area and his acknowledgement of the difficulties inherent in reconstituting productions which have not been seen personally, ‘even when photographs, print reviews, and interviews with participants are available.’<sup>6</sup> Jonathan Bate describes theatre as ‘a makeshift, evanescent, oral form’ and how theatrical record-keeping reflects this will also be examined.<sup>7</sup>

*The Booke of Sir Thomas Moore*, as the play is entitled on its vellum cover, exists only as a manuscript now preserved in the British Library as Harley 7368. This manuscript is made up of twenty-two leaves, of which the first two are the vellum wrapper, and some 16 or 17 comprise an original play text, in the hand of Anthony Munday, designated in W.W. Greg’s 1911 edition as Hand S.<sup>8</sup> The remaining leaves comprise a number of additions or amendments in a variety of hands, now generally accepted, with slightly varying degrees of academic consensus, as being those of fellow playwrights Henry Chettle (Hand A), Thomas Dekker (Hand E), Thomas Heywood

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<sup>5</sup> Peter Reynolds, *Shakespeare: Text into Performance* (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 29

<sup>6</sup> Alan C. Dessen, *Recovering Shakespeare’s Theatrical Vocabulary* (Cambridge: CUP, 1995), p. 6.

<sup>7</sup> Jonathan Bate, *Soul of the Age: The Life, Mind and World of William Shakespeare* (London: Viking, 2008), p. 174.

<sup>8</sup> W.W. Greg, ed., *The Book of Sir Thomas More* (Oxford: Malone Society Reprints, 1911), p. xxxii.

(Hand B) and William Shakespeare (Hand D).<sup>9</sup> Another major contribution to the manuscript is the admonitory marginalia of Edmund Tilney, the Master of the Revels. In addition, some passages and amendments have been attributed to the hand of the playhouse scribe or book-keeper (Hand C). It is the increasing acceptance that three leaves of the manuscript, in which Sir Thomas More quells a potential riot of disaffected Londoners against the aliens in their midst, are almost certainly the only extant example of Shakespeare's creative holograph that has provoked much of the academic and theatrical interest in the play.

The manuscript itself is in a very poor condition, with early attempts at remedying this situation appearing, according to W.W. Greg, 'to suggest that more importance was attached to the preservation of a particular piece of paper than of the text of which it was the medium.'<sup>10</sup> This is, perhaps, indicative of yet another approach to the discovery of the manuscript; one in which the age and provenance of the physical entity itself bears a cultural value, devoid of any judgement as to content or purpose. Despite the damage caused by such an approach, the preservation and reconstruction of the text rather than the medium has been the focus of the editorial and textual analysis undertaken on the manuscript ever since. It was first edited in 1844, prior to these damaging attempts at the preservation of the manuscript, by the Reverend Alexander Dyce.<sup>11</sup> Since then, both its content and its authorship have been at the centre of much critical debate.

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<sup>9</sup> See 'Appendix 3: Authorship and Dates' in John Jowett, ed., *Sir Thomas More* (Arden edition) (forthcoming) for a succinct summary of current scholarship on this issue.

<sup>10</sup> Greg, Introduction, p. vi..

<sup>11</sup> Alexander Dyce, Rev., ed., *Sir Thomas More: A Play* (London: Shakespeare Society, 1844).

Its theatrical history, however, has a much more recent origin, with the first known professional UK production taking place at the Nottingham Playhouse in 1964, starring a young Ian McKellen. Although staged again in 1990 at the Shaw Theatre, London, the Nottingham production remained, according to Stanley Wells, the ‘most notable.’<sup>12</sup> Since that statement, however, the Royal Shakespeare Company’s 2005 production has almost certainly wrested this title from the Nottingham Playhouse. It is certainly the most well-documented and longest-running staging, taking in not only the Swan Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon, but also visits to Newcastle-upon-Tyne and the Trafalgar Studios, London. It is, therefore, with the quality and quantity of performance evidence, as well as the attempt to record in as much detail as possible how these professional performances were presented, that I am most concerned.

Editors of *Sir Thomas More* have naturally been most closely concerned with reconstructing, presenting and examining in as much detail as possible, the contents of the manuscript, to provide readers with an accurate representation of the original text, the additions and their meanings. Dyce’s original edition of 1844 was followed by an appearance in *The Shakespeare Apocrypha* edited by C.F. Tucker Brooke and published in 1908<sup>13</sup> and by Greg’s 1911 edition, originally published by the Malone Society, and supplemented in its 1961 reprint with a summary of research carried out since 1911. Following its publication in 1990, however, the most commonly used academic edition has been that of Vittorio Gabrieli and Giorgio Melchiori for the Revels series. It is from

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<sup>12</sup> Stanley Wells, *Shakespeare: The Poet and his Plays*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London: Methuen, 1997), p. 398.

<sup>13</sup> C.F. Tucker Brooke, ed., ‘Sir Thomas More’ in *The Shakespeare Apocrypha* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1908) pp. 383-437.

this edition, unless otherwise stated, that all references to the text are taken.<sup>14</sup> Since that date the entire play has also appeared for the first time in an edition of the Complete Works of William Shakespeare, edited by John Jowett for the second edition of *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works* in 2005.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, the Royal Shakespeare Company produced a performance play text, recording the textual choices made for their first production of the play in that year.<sup>16</sup> The accuracy and, therefore, the research value of this play text will be considered later in this thesis.

Academic interest has been greatly concerned with the attribution of authorship, particularly that of Hand D - now generally accepted as that of Shakespeare. As John Jowett's introduction summarises 'The basic manuscript is a fair copy made by the dramatist Anthony Munday (1560-1633) of a text in which he may have collaborated with Henry Chettle', with alterations and additions being attributed to Chettle, Thomas Dekker, 'very probably William Shakespeare, and probably Thomas Heywood' and, as previously stated, with the remaining hands being identified as those of the playhouse scribe and of Edmund Tilney, Master of the Revels.<sup>17</sup> Tilney's marginalia help to explain why, in all probability, the text has no contemporary performance history. It has been generally accepted that Munday's original text was written during the early 1590s, with an assumption that the additions post-date this by a number of years, perhaps as great as 11. The most recent single edition, that edited by Gabrieli and Melchiori, argues

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<sup>14</sup> Vittorio Gabrieli and Giorgio Melchiori, eds., *Sir Thomas More: A Play by Anthony Munday, and Others, Revised by Henry Chettle, Thomas Dekker, Thomas Heywood and William Shakespeare* (The Revels Edition, Manchester: MUP, 1990).

<sup>15</sup> John Jowett, ed., 'Sir Thomas More', in *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, ed. by Stanley Wells, Gary Taylor and others, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005).

<sup>16</sup> *Thomas More*, for the Royal Shakespeare Company (London: Nick Hern Books, 2005).

<sup>17</sup> Jowett, *Complete Works*, p. 813.

‘that the original version of the play was written in Munday’s hand not later than 1593’ and supports this view with a reference to the relevance of the Ill May Day scenes to that period.<sup>18</sup> Scott McMillin had earlier narrowed this putative dating of the original by speculating that ‘*Sir Thomas More* was originally written for Lord Strange’s Men between the summer of 1592 and the summer of 1593.’<sup>19</sup> Again, the relevance of the play text to the contemporary political situation in London is cited as a positive indicator as to its dating. The general consensus, therefore, had also acknowledged a hiatus, perhaps even as great as 11 years between original text and additions, more securely dated around 1603-4.

More recent work on the dating of the original text, however, suggests a timing much closer to that accepted for the additions. In John Jowett’s forthcoming edition of the play for the Arden series (the first single edition since the Revels edition of 1990), he reviews this work, outlining cogent linguistic, stylometric and statistical arguments for accepting a date of around 1600.<sup>20</sup> In addition, he too links passages of the play with contemporary events, alongside an overview of the theatrical careers of the co-authors. Such a dating would reduce the hiatus between original and additions to approximately three years – a period which spans the death of the last Tudor monarch and the beginnings of the Stuart dynasty – and would address, at least in part, questions about why such a potentially contentious topic could ever have been contemplated by dramatists operating within the Elizabethan period.

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<sup>18</sup>Revels, p. 11.

<sup>19</sup>McMillin, p. 72.

<sup>20</sup>John Jowett, ed., *Sir Thomas More* (Arden edition: forthcoming).

Tilney's contributions, the authorship of which is established by his signature in the left-hand margin of the first page of the manuscript itself (fol. 3<sup>v</sup>), clearly indicate his central concern. It was not, as might reasonably have been assumed, that this play presents in a favourable light a Catholic martyr executed for opposing the will of the current monarch's father. Instead, his objection was to the more contemporary and contentious portrayal of anti-immigrant riots on the streets of London. His first reaction was to instruct 'Leaue out .../ y<sup>e</sup> insurrection / wholly w<sup>i</sup>/ y<sup>e</sup> Cause ther off & / begin w<sup>i</sup> S<sup>r</sup> Th: / Moore att y<sup>e</sup> mayors sessions / w<sup>i</sup> a report / afterwards / off his good servic' / don being' Shriue off Londõ / vppõ a mutiny Agaynst y<sup>e</sup> / Lũbards only by A short / report & nott otherwise / att your own perilles / E Tyllney.'<sup>21</sup> In addition, he registered his disquiet at the sympathetic portrayal of More and Fisher's reaction to the King's summons (IV.i) by with the words 'All alter' in the margin. This editorial input, rather than an outright refusal to allow the play, would seem to indicate, not only a clear concern about the staging of public unrest but also a willingness on Tilney's part to aid in the bringing of this play to the stage. Such evidence, along with further autograph notes within the manuscript, requesting that the playwrights 'Mend y<sup>is</sup>' (I.iii) and replacing the words 'straunger' and 'ffrencheman' with 'lombard', adds weight to Richard Dutton's argument that the Master of the Revels was concerned chiefly with avoiding depictions of civil unrest and 'with playing down national rivalries.'<sup>22</sup> Certainly his willingness even to consider the authorisation of a play dealing so sympathetically with a man later to become a Catholic saint, as well as with a civil uprising on the streets of London,

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<sup>21</sup> Revels, p. 17.

<sup>22</sup> Richard Dutton, *Mastering the Revels: The Regulations and Censorship of English Renaissance Drama*, (London: Macmillan, 1991) p. 83.

indicates an element of co-operation with the dramatists. As William B. Long concludes 'His notations are intended to avoid problems, not to forbid production.'<sup>23</sup>

Authorial responses to such clear encouragement to amend rather than forbid, appear to be more problematic. As Tilney's hand appears only on Munday's original manuscript, it seems a reasonable assumption that the additions and revisions post-date the playbook's submission to the Revels Office. Scott McMillin, however, argues that at least Hand D's contribution may well have pre-dated submission.<sup>24</sup> Clearly though, following Tilney's instructions would have rendered the play unperformable, yet no coherent attempt was made at the time to address the censor's central concerns, nor is there any extant evidence that the manuscript was ever re-submitted for approval. Instead, driven by dramatic rather than political imperatives, the additions and amendments appear rather to be intended to improve the play for performance.

It is how subsequent directors have chosen to utilise both the original text and these additions and alterations, whatever their dates and sequence, that is of most interest here. Tilney's major censorial impetus is of no immediate concern to modern audiences, nor do those audiences necessarily understand the forces behind the play's inability to address openly the central question of the Articles, which led to More's execution. Instead, a modern director's approach to the text operates antithetically to that of the authors. Rather than to obfuscate, the intention must be to explicate the text in such a

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<sup>23</sup> William B. Long, 'The Occasion of *The Book of Sir Thomas More*', in *Shakespeare and Sir Thomas More: Essays on the Play and its Shakespearian Interest*, ed. by T.H. Howard-Hill (Cambridge: CUP, 1989), pp. 45-56, p. 54.

<sup>24</sup> McMillin, pp. 137-145.

way as to create a piece of theatre that can be both understood and appreciated by a modern audience.

An initial examination of those productions, both here and overseas, that precede the three UK professional productions which form the basis of this thesis will indicate areas of similarity and difference that warrant further investigation. It is hoped that such choices will demonstrate a reflection of the cultural conditions driving the selection of the play itself at a specific period of time, as well as the textual choices that follow that initial staging decision. Such close examination may also highlight those often antithetical imperatives that inform the variations of approach to the text demonstrated by academics and theatre professionals. The availability and reliability of the wide range of performance evidence, along with the problems inherent in interpreting such records of performances one has not oneself witnessed will also be subjected to interrogation.

Research has revealed that the earliest known performances of the text were clearly undertaken out of scholarly rather than theatrical interest. The first of these was in 1922, when the students of Birkbeck College, University of London, presented three performances, on 8 and 9 December of that year. This was billed as the first ever performance of *Sir Thomas More*; a play which, according to the programme's 'Notes on the Play', comprised part of 'Shakespeare's Apocrypha.'<sup>25</sup> There is no reference anywhere in that programme to the authorship of Anthony Munday. The 1923 Spring Term issue of the student newsletter, *The Lodestone* contains a humorous *Prologue* in

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<sup>25</sup> Birkbeck College, University of London, *Sir Thomas More* [Programme] (London: 8-9 December 1922).



verse, which is attributed simply to J.H.L. and dates the play as ‘c.1595.’<sup>26</sup> Although lighthearted, this Prologue nevertheless clearly illustrates the production’s academic intentions. It addresses the text’s history, with a footnote referring to the Harleian Manuscript and, anecdotally, to ‘the antiquary, John Warburton, whose cook, Betsy Baker, is reputed to have destroyed a large number of Elizabethan plays.’<sup>27</sup> It also offers an explanation for the lack of a performance history with reference to ‘Tilney’s feeble nerve’ when confronted with the text’s ‘scenes of civil tumult.’<sup>28</sup> These indications of the text’s undoubted Elizabethan provenance are enhanced by intimations of a Shakespearean authorial connection. Whilst acknowledging that this is a ‘new play from an unknown pen’, there is reference to only one specific contributor – Shakespeare’s ‘magic skill in patching plays and making good of ill.’<sup>29</sup> There is a clear implication here that Shakespeare’s contribution was in the revision, rather than the construction of the text; but, once more, without authorial reference to the original that required such ‘patching.’ This Shakespearean claim is enhanced by an inter-textual parody of the Prologue to *Henry V*. Similar demands are made on the imaginations of the audience as the play’s depiction of More as ‘scholar, statesman, patriot, and sage’ is outlined.<sup>30</sup> There is a final example of this inter-textuality in the closing line, as a pun which could have graced the play text itself demands the verdict that ‘They’ve done their best to make the most of More.’<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> J.H.L., *The Lodestone* (London: Birkbeck College, Spring Term 1923), pp. 51-52, p.51.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* p. 52.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

This Prologue is followed, in the newsletter, by a review from Professor R.W. Chambers, which again offers an academic response to the dramatic production but also clearly draws attention to a symbiotic relationship between performance and scholarship.<sup>32</sup> Chambers himself contributed much to academic work both on the life of Sir Thomas More and on the play text itself. In 1923, his chapter entitled ‘The Expression of Ideas – particularly Political Ideas – in the Three Pages and in Shakespeare’ drew textual and ideological parallels between Shakespeare’s *Richard II*, *Henry VI Part 2*, *Troilus and Cressida*, and *Coriolanus*, and the Hand D contribution to *Sir Thomas More*.<sup>33</sup> Amongst other publications on both the historical and dramatic subject, his monograph *The Saga and the Myth of Sir Thomas More* was published in 1927<sup>34</sup> and he contributed an Introduction to the Early English Text Society’s edition of Nicholas Harpsfield’s *The Life and Death of Sir Thomas Moore*.<sup>35</sup> Not surprisingly, therefore, his review acknowledges first that the performance is for the benefit of ‘All students of the Elizabethan drama’ whose ‘appreciation and understanding’ can only be enhanced by seeing such plays acted.<sup>36</sup> Describing *Sir Thomas More* as ‘one of the best extant specimens of the History play’, he goes on to state that ‘it contains one scene which even the most cautious feel increasing certainty in attributing to Shakespeare himself.’<sup>37</sup> It is also interesting to note that, despite this early reference to the Shakespearean

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<sup>32</sup> R.W. Chambers, ‘Sir Thomas More’, *The Lodestone* (London: Birkbeck College, Spring Term 1923), pp. 53-55.

<sup>33</sup> R.W. Chambers, ‘The Expression of Ideas – particularly Political Ideals – in the Three Pages and in Shakespeare’ in *Shakespeare’s Hand in the Play of Sir Thomas More*, ed. by W W Greg, (Cambridge: The University Press, 1923) pp. 142-187.

<sup>34</sup> R.W. Chambers, *The Saga and the Myth of Sir Thomas More*, (London: published for the British Academy by H Milford, OUP, 1927).

<sup>35</sup> Nicholas Harpsfield, *The Life and Death of Sir Thomas Moore, knight, sometimes Lord High Chancellor of England, written in the tyme of Queene Marie by Nicholas Harpsfield*, ed. by Elsie Vaughan Hitchcock (London: OUP, 1935).

<sup>36</sup> Chambers, *Lodestone*, p. 53.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

contribution, Chambers continues his review by stressing the role of the amateur ‘College dramatic societies’ in presenting ‘plays that are not produced elsewhere’ and drawing a clear distinction between the ‘charm and freshness’ of the student actor and the ‘triumphant technical skill’ of the professional.<sup>38</sup> There is, therefore, an implicit indication that the production was designed to serve academic, rather than theatrical, ends. Indeed, any performative criticisms he expresses are, he concludes, compensated for by the ‘strongest reason why forgotten plays should be acted in the Universities’ - that ‘if the Universities do not undertake the task, there are few other bodies that will.’<sup>39</sup>

The Birkbeck College programme gives further detail of the performance and its purpose. This four-page document suggests a dating of ‘c. 1590-1595’ for this ‘Anonymous Play of the Sixteenth Century, Ascribed in part to SHAKESPEARE’, ‘now performed for the first time.’<sup>40</sup> This description follows exactly that used on the title page which introduces the edition of the play contained in Tucker Brooke’s *The Shakespeare Apocrypha*, perhaps indicating that this was the text used,<sup>41</sup> although the only printed text referred to in programme is that of ‘Dr Dyce for the Shakespeare Society in 1844.’<sup>42</sup> The ‘Notes on the Play’ establish the production’s scholarly credentials by comprising an outline of the play’s textual history, and its authorship, here mainly ascribed to ‘Lodge or Munday’ (not attributed on the title page), together with brief references to the life of its protagonist. Once again, it is billed as never ‘acted until

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<sup>38</sup> Chambers, *Lodestone*, p. 53.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* p.54.

<sup>40</sup> Birkbeck, [Programme].

<sup>41</sup> C.F.Tucker Brooke p. 383.

<sup>42</sup> Birkbeck, [Programme].

this night.’<sup>43</sup> Beneath the heading ‘Argument’ the play is divided into five acts, with a brief narrative note for each of these acts. Some of these narrative descriptions are more detailed than others. Without further information, therefore, it is impossible accurately to deduce the textual choices made, although the descriptions of these five acts do not indicate any major omissions from either Tucker Brooke or from Dyce. The Birkbeck cast list gives no guidance as to which text was used, as it differs greatly from either published text, which follow the conventional listing by status, whereas Birkbeck’s cast is ‘arranged in order of entrance.’<sup>44</sup> Some names also differ from Brooke and Dyce, with the programme’s *Dramatis Personae* including ‘Young Betts, “a clown”’ and ‘Fawkner, a ruffian’, as well as a player referred to here as ‘Wit Waits.’ In contrast, Brooke and Dyce refer to these characters as ‘His [George Betts’s] brother (the ‘Clown’), ‘Faulkner, his [Morris’s] servant’ and those presenting the play-within-a-play simply as ‘players.’<sup>45</sup> Confirmed by this cast list, however, it is evident that the gulling of Erasmus, at least the first Falkner scene and that in which More’s servants discuss his fate were presented, but, as neither Morris nor the ‘Prentice Boys are listed, it would seem that neither the second Falkner scene nor the existing fragment of the ‘Prentice Boys scene were performed. The former is explained by the fact that most of this scene does not appear in Dyce’s edition because the lines were originally obscured by fol. 13 of the manuscript, and ‘consequently not printed by Dyce.’<sup>46</sup> Although the Dyce edition does incorporate the ‘Prentice Boys scene in full, Tucker Brooke includes both these truncated scenes within the body of his edition of the play. These textual choices, along with the reference to

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<sup>43</sup> Birkbeck, [Programme].

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> Tucker Brooke, p. 385 and Dyce, *Dramatis Personae*.

<sup>46</sup> Greg, p. 29.

Dyce in the 'Notes on the Play' may indeed indicate that Dyce was the chosen base text, but there is no documentary corroboration of this. The play closed, in keeping with its attempts at accurate reconstruction, with 'An Elizabethan jig' by 'the English Folk-Dance Society' to the sounds of 'a pipe and tabor'.<sup>47</sup>

Such textual evidence, together with the lack of any reference to either director or textual advisor, may perhaps be seen as an indication that the play was presented without major emendations from the original Dyce edition. This is an understandable decision given the academic imperative behind this first performance, and may be seen as a paradigm of the interdependence of academia and the theatre when researching and re-presenting lesser-known dramatic texts, despite the differing imperatives driving these two disciplines.

An interesting red herring exists in that, only four years later, an amateur company staged a production of a play called *Sir Thomas More* at Crosby Hall, London, in 1926. William Hindle's MA Dissertation also refers to Munday's *Sir Thomas More* having been revived by an amateur company 'at Crosby Hall in March 1962.'<sup>48</sup> The congruence of the fact that Crosby Hall had once been in the ownership of Richard III before being removed from its original Bishopsgate site in 1910 and re-assembled on the site of Sir Thomas More's own orchard in Cheyne Walk, Chelsea, proved sadly

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<sup>47</sup> Birkbeck College [Programme].

<sup>48</sup> William Hindle, 'Shakespeare's Contemporaries in the Theatre, 1890-1968' (unpublished master's dissertation, University of Birmingham, Shakespeare Institute, 1969).

misleading.<sup>49</sup> From an anonymous, contemporaneous review in *The Times*, it is clear that this was in fact a newly written play by Ruth Bray, and performed by a largely female cast.<sup>50</sup> Interestingly, although presenting Henry VIII on stage, Miss Bray is upbraided by the reviewer because ‘in treating of a theme and of a period that had religion as their key, she has taken the polite modern way of avoiding religious controversy’ thus, as in Munday’s original, robbing the play of its ‘historical context.’<sup>51</sup>

In 1938, however, Canon John Shirley produced what was described an acting text which was published in Canterbury, presumably in the same year.<sup>52</sup> Echoing Chambers, Shirley too was clearly aware of the important interdependence of performance to the work of the textual editor. In the foreword, he explains the rationale behind his editorial choices when preparing the text for performance. He modernised the spelling, punctuated the text and divided it into five acts, leaving the stage directions ‘much as they appear in the original’, but explaining that the ‘*lacunae* in the MS. have been conjecturally filled.’<sup>53</sup> Such emendations were clearly intended to assist performance without necessitating major excisions, and Shirley’s explanation for presenting the text in an unexpurgated form expressed this interdependence of the academic and the theatrical practitioners most clearly. He states simply that ‘producers cannot possibly “cut” for the stage until they have seen the whole.’<sup>54</sup> This uncut text was

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<sup>49</sup> This is listed in *The Renaissance Drama Newsletter Supplement Seven – Professional Productions in the British Isles since 1880 of Plays by Tudor and Stuart Dramatists (excluding Shakespeare) – a Checklist* by Lisa Cronin, ed. J.R.Mulryne and Margaret Shewring (Graduate School of Renaissance Studies, University of Warwick: Summer 1989) pp. 6-7, and attributed to Anthony Munday.

<sup>50</sup> *The Times*, ‘*Sir Thomas More*, by Ruth Bray’, [unsigned theatre review], 26 March 1926.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> John Shirley, ed., *Sir Thomas More*, (Canterbury: H.J. Goulden, [1938 (?)]).

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.* p. iii.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

then presented by the Dramatic Society at The King's School, Canterbury, of which he was Headmaster at the time, on 3, 4 and 5 November of that year.

These performances took place in the Chapter House of Canterbury Cathedral, and comprised an all-male production, in period costume, with Elizabethan music arranged by Mr R.P. Tong. This information, together with a cast list and critical comment on the performances themselves, is contained in a review by the author Sir Hugh Walpole, a King's School old boy, that originally appeared in *The Times* on 5 November 1938. It was later reproduced in full by *The Cantuarian*, the school's magazine. National press interest may have been stimulated by Sir Hugh's connection with King's School, but his article was also keenly concerned with the Shakespearean link. Under the heading "“Sir Thomas More” at Canterbury: A Shakespeare Play?" Walpole refers to the production as an 'apocryphal Shakespeare play' and to the only previous known production, that of 1922.<sup>55</sup> In his appreciation of the 'delightful' qualities of the play itself, as well as the actors, he states that the mind was left 'free to speculate on Shakespeare's own presence' - he finds hints of 'the Players in *Hamlet*, the crowds of *Julius Caesar* and the loving wife of Brutus's Portia.' Although referring to the play's authorship as 'having the intriguing guesswork of a detective story,' Walpole offers no conjectures of his own as to other possible collaborators.

From the *Dramatis Personae* it can be seen that the school encountered no problems in casting such an unusually large number of roles, 55 in this production, and

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<sup>55</sup> Sir Hugh Walpole, 'Sir Thomas More at Canterbury: A Shakespeare Play?', *The Cantuarian*, 11.

very little doubling was required.<sup>56</sup> The roles of the 'Prentice Boys are not listed; as Shirley's insertions of the additions into the main body of text, like Chambers, omitted this fragment of a scene. Only eight actors took on additional roles, with no-one undertaking more than two. These seem merely to have been pragmatic choices, avoiding any requirement for quick costume changes, and with the More's younger daughter doubling as Lady Vanity in the Interlude. Photographs of the production show scenes described as 'The Trial of the Cutpurse' and 'Thomas More and his Family.'<sup>57</sup> The former depicts a large number of cast members on a stage surrounded by heavy hangings, with a central table around which sit five men, all of whom wear Elizabethan robes and chains of office. One is writing with a quill pen, whilst a number of large scrolls lie on the table itself. Lifter stands sheepishly in a raised dock down-stage left, dressed in an unadorned doublet and hose, whilst three helmeted guards are in attendance around the court.

There was clearly no expense spared in bringing this production to the stage. The latter, familial, scene emphasises this point. Although presenting an intimate family grouping comprising More, his wife, two daughters and son-in-law Roper, there are echoes in costuming and positioning of Rowland Lockey's More family portrait.<sup>58</sup> In this production photograph, More is seated beside his wife, with both his daughters on their knees before him. He clutches the hand of one daughter, whilst leaning attentively

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<sup>56</sup> *The Cantuarian*, [Canterbury: King's School, 1939(?)], pp.11-12.

<sup>57</sup> Copy photographs of the production were kindly provided by Peter Henderson, the School's Archivist

<sup>58</sup> Rowland Lockey, *Sir Thomas More, his father, his household and his descendants*, after Hans Holbein the Younger (oil on canvas, 1593) held in the National Portrait Gallery, London.



towards the other. George Roper, his son-in-law, stands behind Lady More. All are richly attired in costumes reflecting the clothing in the Lockey portrait.

The programme gives little additional detail, other than a synopsis which, naturally, follows almost exactly Shirley's division into five Acts comprising a total of 17 scenes; with the interval situated between the conflated Erasmus/Falkner scene and the Banquet scene, incorporating the play-within-the-play. There is no explanatory note concerning Fisher and More's refusal to sign the 'Articles', with the only additional information contained in the programme being concerned with the historical context of the Ill May Day riots as an explanation for the refusal of a licence by the Master of the Revels. This may be indicative of the close scholarly link between actors, audience and editor of the play text, copies of which were advertised as 'being the first complete edition for the Stage ever published' and were offered for sale 'in the Chapter House'.<sup>59</sup> There was an assumption, perhaps, that the intended audience would be aware of the 'back story.' This placing of the play within its contemporary and historical context was neatly echoed in the final note of the programme, which situated the performances clearly within their own turbulent times. Here it was noted that 'Owing to the European crisis the Company has had little more than two weeks for the production, and the indulgence of the audience is craved.'<sup>60</sup> One may only speculate on the resonances the play's portrayal of the impact of foreign refugees, and More's poetic plea for tolerance and empathy, might have held for an audience less than a year away from the Declaration of World War II.

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<sup>59</sup> King's School, Canterbury, *Sir Thomas More* [Programme] (Canterbury: 3-5 November 1938).

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.* p. 6.

That this production lived long in at least one cast member's memory is indicated by a *Diary* entry in *The Times* of 27 August 1990, and the response it generated on the *Letters* page of 5 September that year. A.D. Wilson, the respondent, played George Roper in 1938 and queried the diary entry which quoted Michael Walling (director of the 1990 professional production at the Shaw Theatre) as stating 'ours is the London premiere.' Wilson not only gave details of the King's School production but also made reference to Walpole's contemporaneous newspaper review, in which he 'mentioned a production in 1922, without further particulars.'<sup>61</sup> That such detailed information on this production is available is due, not to commercial or theatrical imperatives, but rather to the academic and scholarly concerns of the King's School, Canterbury, itself. The only references in the national press seem to have been generated by 'the old boys' network', with one ex-Cantuarian writing the only major review, and another challenging a newspaper interview that did not acknowledge the school's role in the play's performance history.

Shirley's acting edition of the text also formed the basis of a rehearsed reading of the play by graduates from the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School on 11 March 2001. Directed by Chris Garner, and presented mainly by students in the final year of Bristol's two-year acting course, this reading took place at the Ustinov Studio, Bath, as part of that year's Bath Literary Festival. Advertised in the Festival's brochure as 'a collaboration between six different authors, one of whom is regarded by many scholars to have been

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<sup>61</sup> A.D. Wilson, 'Play's Premiere', *The Times*, 5 September 1990, Letters section.

Shakespeare,'<sup>62</sup> the programme also refers to this 'anonymous play of the 16<sup>th</sup> century ascribed in part to Shakespeare' as well to Sir Edmund Tilney's concerns about the depiction of riot.<sup>63</sup> In addition it makes reference to an inferred Shakespearean intention to reflect Tudor concerns with order and the dramatists' tendency to conform 'to the establishment line.'<sup>64</sup> Its debt to the Shirley edition is clear, as the synopsis contained within the programme follows exactly that of Shirley. The prompt book (originally a photocopy of the Shirley text itself), perhaps reflects the limitations imposed by a staged reading with only 13 actors, and indicates a large number of textual excisions. From the photocopied *Dramatis Personæ*, it can be noted that neither 'Morris' nor 'A Poor Woman' were cast, although the role of Falkner was allocated to Darren Holmes. The prompt book itself, however, is somewhat contradictory, retaining the opening exchange between More, Morris and Falkner (III.i.208-24) with only the discussion between Morris and Falkner following More's exit being excised. More coherently recorded, however, is the excision of the 'Poor Woman.' The whole of V.i, 'The Gateway to the Tower', along with its entry in the Synopsis is scored through in the prompt book. This, in addition to the omission of the role in the cast list, would indicate that such textual excision was followed through in performance.

The latter half of V.iii was also edited to remove the characters of Roper, More's daughters, and the Lieutenant, creating a much more intimate farewell between More and his wife, whilst the opening lines of V.iv, were also cut, speeding More from the Tower

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<sup>62</sup> Bath Literature Festival 2001, 3-11 March 2001, *Performance Schedule*, (3-11 March 2001), p.23.

<sup>63</sup> Bristol Old Vic Theatre School, *Sir Thomas More*, a rehearsed reading by graduates [Programme] (Bath Literary Festival: 11 March 2001) [p. 1].

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

to his execution. The opening 30 lines of IV.iii have also been scored through, with the scene now beginning at More's "I will not hear thee, wife!" (IV.iii.31) although it would seem that such an excision means that she had not yet had an opportunity to speak. It may, of course, be that, during the reading, this was presented as a pre-emptive strike.

Both these performances were, therefore, based on a scholarly text, the Preface to which establishes a clear link between the academic and the theatrical, a relationship which can be seen to develop during the course of the play's performance history. The edition speaks of an intention to assist the play in reaching a wider audience, whilst the *Introduction* places a strong emphasis on the historical, textual and authorial, rather than the dramatic. No cuts were made in the earlier performance, although lacunae were conjecturally filled in order to assist comprehension. However, no attempt was made to translate the Latin contained within the manuscript. In contrast, the staged reading, constrained by time and casting limitations, demonstrates a number of substantial excisions, although the prompt book cannot necessarily be taken as an absolutely accurate record of such textual amendments.

In 1954 the play was once again presented in London - for the first time by a professional company, and in front of an invited audience - at The Theatre Centre, Loudoun Road, NW8, and directed by Brian Way. The programme reveals a cast of 30 playing a total of 53 roles, with doubling choices appearing to be made on a pragmatic basis. Michael Beint took the title role and this production was 'Sponsored by Donald

Wolfit on behalf of Advance Players Association Limited.<sup>65</sup> Wolfit was then the most famous actor/manager of the time, and received a knighthood in the 1957 Birthday Honours List. In a personal interview, Beint revealed that Wolfit's contribution was not merely financial but that he also visited the rehearsal room on occasion and insisted on giving notes, particularly to Beint himself.<sup>66</sup> Beint also recalled Brian Way's belief that Wolfit was keen to see the play staged in order to judge whether or not the role of the protagonist was a suitable one for himself. It would appear that he decided it was not, as there is no record of him ever having played the role. For this reason, however, the play was presented virtually uncut from the Jenkins edited text, which was to be incorporated in full into a *Complete Works of Shakespeare* edition for the first time.<sup>67</sup> No reviews have been traced regarding this performance, although it is listed in contemporary issues of both *Shakespeare Quarterly* and *Shakespeare Survey*. Both publications give only basic details of performance dates, venue and producer, with *Survey* including the fact of Donald Wolfit's sponsorship. In addition, *Shakespeare Quarterly* adds that, from June 22-25 the production was presented in Elizabethan dress, and from 26-29 June in modern dress.<sup>68</sup> Unfortunately, Michael Beint cannot recall this being the case, stating that the company had full use of Wolfit's theatrical wardrobe for the duration of the run and that he, in fact, wore Wolfit's Hamlet costume.

During the same interview, Beint revealed that he had himself directed a professional production of the play at the Hoxton Hall Theatre, London, in 1972, and was

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<sup>65</sup> 'Shakespeare Productions in the United Kingdom: 1954', *Shakespeare Survey* 9 (1956), 119-121, p. 120.

<sup>66</sup> Michael Beint, personal interview with the author, (Cheltenham: 25 August 2007).

<sup>67</sup> Harold Jenkins, ed., 'Sir Thomas More' in C.J. Sisson, ed., *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works* (London: Odhams Press, [1953 (?)], pp.1235-1266.

<sup>68</sup> 'Current Theater Notes' in *Shakespeare Quarterly*, VI (1955), 67-88 (p. 84).

forced to take on the title role himself after his original leading actor quit. Using the same text as in 1954, he did, however, make one notable directorial choice. He placed the person of Henry VIII on stage, probably at the point when More is visited at Chertsey by Surrey and Shrewsbury in an attempt to persuade him to recant and to sign the unnamed Articles. In order to clarify for the audience the contents of these Articles, as More moved away through the audience he was halted by the figure of the King reading (Beint believes) an extract from the Act of Succession of 1564. Unfortunately, no further evidence of this production has been traced.

In 1979, however, *Shakespeare Quarterly* did publish a brief review of a production of *Sir Thomas More*. This took place at the Mayfair Theatre, Dunedin, from 2 to 6 May 1978 as part of Otago University's Sir Thomas More quincentenary celebrations, and would appear to be the play's international debut. This was, once more, an amateur production using a script edited by an academic, 'Otago University's Dr Alistair Fox' and directed by another academic, Jane Oakshott 'a lecturer in drama attached to Otago's English department.'<sup>69</sup> *Shakespeare Quarterly* erroneously describes this as the 'world premiere' of a play that it had already referenced some 23 years earlier and the reviewer is generally critical of both play and production. A cast of 55, dressed in 'colorful and authentic Holbein-inspired costumes', presented 'a game but not altogether successful attempt at extracting an entertaining performance of this prosy and intractable play.'<sup>70</sup> With a running time given as '3 hours, with two intervals' it may be possible to infer that few cuts were made, but with a cast list indicating only the principal

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<sup>69</sup> Robert-H. Leek, 'A Year of Shakespeare in Kiwiland', 'Theatre Reviews' in *Shakespeare Quarterly*, XXX (1979), 151-320 (p. 276).

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

roles this cannot be confirmed with any degree of confidence. This reviewer's assessment of the play as both 'poorly structured and long-winded' is indicative of the type of response Scott McMillin attempts to redress when describing the original manuscript as 'a coherent theatrical document.'<sup>71</sup>

The Revels edition cites a further overseas production; the June 1984 'American premiere' at the Globe Playhouse in Los Angeles. Revels records that this was produced by Thad Taylor and Jay Uhley, directed by Phoebe Wray, and promoted as 'a lost play by William Shakespeare.'<sup>72</sup> Correspondence with the Shakespeare Society of America has revealed further details from their theatre archives. The production ran, in repertory with *Anthony and Cleopatra*, from 27 June to 26 August of that year. In what would appear to be an early press release, the play is described as a 'comedy-drama' depicting 'the rise and fall of the famous author-statesman-martyr', with authorship attributed to 'Anthony Munday, with four scenes ascribed to William Shakespeare.'<sup>73</sup> There is not, however, any indication as to which scenes are being referred to here. This release also indicates the inclusion of the role of Falkner, described here as 'the 16<sup>th</sup> Century's favorite clown: the man with long hair.'<sup>74</sup> The text was based again on the Jenkins edition, and the production incorporated an acting company of 26 playing some 49 roles.

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<sup>71</sup> Scott McMillin, 'The Book of Sir Thomas More: Dates and Acting Companies', in *Shakespeare and Sir Thomas More: Essays on the play and its Shakespearian Interest*, ed. by T.H. Howard-Hill (Cambridge: CUP, 1989), pp. 57-76 (p.57).

<sup>72</sup> Revels, p. 34.

<sup>73</sup> Shakespeare Society of America, [Press Release] [June 1984 (?)].

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

The programme cast list reveals that the characters of Falkner, Morris, the Poor Woman and More's servants, Butler, Brewer and Horsekeeper, were all retained, indicating that any cuts made were unlikely to have been substantial. A surviving theatre review was convinced neither by the play nor by the leading man, commenting that the production 'offers no glimmer of the majestic language and poetic lyricism ..... so characteristic of the Bard' whilst Thom Koutsoukas's performance as More was 'devoid of charisma, sensitivity and depth.'<sup>75</sup> Approval was, however, given to the 'excellent' costumes which, from a photograph accompanying this review, would appear to have been based on the 1966 film of Robert Bolt's *A Man for All Seasons*.

The only other overseas production would seem to be that so accurately detailed in Roberta Mullini's essay *The Book of Sir Thomas More and its Performance*.<sup>76</sup> Alongside a review of Stage One Theatre Company's 1990 professional production in London's West End, Mullini provides a detailed descriptive and analytical review of the play's European debut, which took place originally in July 1993 in the Cloister of San Zeno, Verona under the title *Tommaso Moro* and was credited as 'after Shakespeare.' Performed in Italian by the 'Teatro Scientifico, Teatro Laboratorio' and directed by Enzo Maria Caserta, this production later toured to Parma, Roma and Bari in the Spring of 1994. The most striking change made for a European audience was the re-worked More/Erasmus scenes, in which the director allowed Raf Vallone (who played More) to interpolate text culled from letters between Erasmus and More, along with their works,

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<sup>75</sup> Polly Warfield, 'Sir Thomas More', in *Theatre Reviews June 28-July 4, 1984* [July 1984].

<sup>76</sup> Roberta Mullini, 'The Book of Sir Thomas More and its Performance', in "*Divers toyes mengled*": essays on medieval and Renaissance culture in honour of André Lascombes, ed. by Michel Bitot and others, (Tours: l'Université François Rabelais, 1996) 212-221.



which ‘explained why Erasmus and More were friends and touched points relevant to a modern public.’<sup>77</sup> It must also have removed the play from its clearly English metropolitan milieu and, perhaps, provided an antidote to the anti-Lombard portrayals of the early scenes. The international appeal of Shakespeare’s name was evidenced when, on 14 April 1960, the Austrian public broadcasting station ORF ‘transmitted a 30-minute radio adaptation of the scene by Shakespeare,’ adapted and translated in German by Richard Flatter and directed by Brunar Herbert.’<sup>78</sup>

A 1981 production was reviewed in sufficient detail to allow a clearer assessment of the textual choices made. The Poor Players, with a cast of just 13 under the direction of Greg Doran, presented *The Book of Sir Thomas More* from 23-25 April at the Vandyck Theatre, Bristol, and from 29 April to 2 May at the Young Vic, London, with a review appearing in *Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama* as part of the ‘Census of Renaissance Drama Productions 1981.’<sup>79</sup> This full title given to what was promoted as ‘A New Shakespeare Play’ is perhaps indicative of a scholarly approach to the text by these Bristol drama students and their director. There were also both academic and commercial imperatives behind the choice of this text.

At a time when support for the arts was moving away from government and into the commercial world, Doran felt that a manuscript in Shakespeare’s autograph might prove an incentive to a commercial backer, particularly as he had previously obtained

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<sup>77</sup> Mullini, p. 220.

<sup>78</sup> Eve-Marie Oesterlen, British Universities Film and Video Council, personal correspondence (24 September 2007)

<sup>79</sup> Tony Howard, compiler, ‘Census of Renaissance Drama Productions (1981)’, in *Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama*, XXV (1982), 115-130 (pp.115-6).

financial support from a computer company.<sup>80</sup> Unfortunately, however, despite a contemporary TV discussion in which Thomas Merriam attempted to explain his 1982 article setting out his computer-based ‘stylometric analysis’ of the manuscript, this was not forthcoming.<sup>81</sup>

The production went ahead despite this lack of sponsorship, as Doran was fascinated by this attempt at a ‘scientific’ methodology for attribution. In addition, he found the play to have an ‘extraordinary relevance’ to the Bristol in which he was currently living. He walked through the St Paul’s area of Bristol each morning – the scene of intense rioting and racial turmoil only a year before – and such riots had spread to London, Liverpool and Birmingham during 1981. From the review, and from Doran’s personal view that the text of a rarely performed play should not be edited unduly by a director but presented to the audience without excision, it is clear that the play was presented almost in its entirety. The relevance of its opening scenes of anti-immigrant social unrest is not, however, referred to in the review. Reference is made to ‘a wild, lion-maned giant’ and a ‘boyish Erasmus in a stringy grey wig.’<sup>82</sup> Described as ‘an entertaining piece of popular theatre’ critical comments seem most concerned with the difficulties for such a young cast of creating a ‘frisson to the spectacle of great men switching clothes with servants and philosophers finding themselves set up as gulls.’<sup>83</sup> The director was praised for the scaffold used ‘for the elaborate executions that provided strong climaxes to the two halves of the evening’ and for his ingenuity when handling the

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<sup>80</sup> Greg Doran, personal interview with the author (Stratford-upon-Avon: 14 November 2007).

<sup>81</sup> Thomas Merriam, ‘The Authorship of Sir Thomas More’, *ALLC Bulletin*, 10 (1982), No. 1, 1-7.

<sup>82</sup> Howard, *RORD*, p. 115.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

Players' Interlude.<sup>84</sup> In conversation, Doran revealed that this 'ingenuity' comprised the use of puppetry to enact an explicatory dumb show of Henry VIII, Catherine of Aragon and their divorce during the play within the play. Following this scene, in which More takes on the role of Good Counsel in jest, the Players were transformed into 'a silent chorus of ironic, quasi-allegorical figures' who remained in the background during the play's presentation of More's last days.<sup>85</sup> To further 'raise the stakes', both for More and for a 20<sup>th</sup> century audience, Doran also set the Fisher scene in a torture chamber.<sup>86</sup> In summary, the reviewer, Tony Howard, considered this 'an illuminating revival.' It was certainly 'illuminating' enough for Frank Dunlop, who had much earlier directed the first major production of the play, at the Nottingham Playhouse in 1964, to invite Doran to bring it to the Young Vic later that month.

Doran also co-ordinated the first of two staged readings involving the text of *Sir Thomas More*, which took place under the auspices of the Education Department of Shakespeare's Globe in London. This reading conflated elements of both *Sir Thomas More* and *Henry VIII*, into one play which seems to have been labelled *All is True* and credited to William Shakespeare and others. The programme described this reading, on Sunday, 23 June 1996, as the last in a series of five, 'the first four of which were first acted at one of the four Bankside playhouses.'<sup>87</sup> Maggy William, of the Globe's Education Department, drew strong parallels between the two plays: her programme notes stating that both 'show the rise and fall of great men; both rely heavily on the

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<sup>84</sup> Howard, pps. 115-116.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.* p. 116.

<sup>86</sup> Doran, interview.

<sup>87</sup> The Globe Education Centre, *All is True*, a staged reading, co-ordinated by Greg Doran, [Programme], (The Globe Education Theatre: 23 June 1996).

chronicles of Raphael Holinshed in their accounts of events in the reign of Henry VIII.<sup>88</sup> In the same programme, Doran, having criticised elements of both plays, justified his conflation of the two texts as the outcome of an ‘heretical thought .... to weave together the excellent parts of both to form a new play.’<sup>89</sup> It is difficult from the programme to analyse exactly which elements were retained from each text, but the cast list reveals that More, his wife and elder daughter, Surrey, Betts, Doll Williams, Suffolk, Lincoln, Caveler, de Barde, Rafe, Justice Suresby and Williams appeared, alongside Katherine of Aragon, Cardinal Wolsey, the Duke of Norfolk and Henry VIII. It would, therefore, appear that the insurrection episode of *Sir Thomas More* was included, but not the arrest of either More or Fisher and their consequences. In a personal interview, Doran revealed that a further impetus behind this conflation was in the contrast between Wolsey’s statement ‘Had I but served God as diligently as I have served the King, He would not have given me over in my grey hairs’ and More’s last words ‘I die the King’s good servant, but God’s first.’<sup>90</sup>

The Globe’s interest in *Sir Thomas More* led to a further staged reading, this time co-ordinated by James Wallace, which took place once more at The Globe Education Centre on Sunday, 25 November 2001. On this occasion, the cast list would seem to indicate that the play was presented in its entirety, with Erasmus, Morris, Falkner, Robin Brewer, etc., all included. Once again, Maggy Williams introduced the play to programme readers, examining its textual history in some detail, alongside a brief

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<sup>88</sup> Maggy Williams, ‘*All is True* by William Shakespeare and others’, staged reading, [Programme], (The Globe Education Theatre: 23 June 1996)

<sup>89</sup> Greg Doran, co-ordinator, ‘*All is True*’, *ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> Doran, personal interview with the author (Stratford-upon-Avon: 1 May 2009).

overview of its lack of a stage history.<sup>91</sup> Interestingly, this stage history did not make reference to the 1990 Stage One production, commonly accepted as the first time the play had been produced in London. Nor did it refer to the Globe's earlier reading of the conflated text in 1996. The programme notes of the co-ordinator, James Wallace, comprise a brief biography of the protagonist, placing him firmly at the centre of the Humanist movement, alongside a description of the social unrest which permeates the play text.<sup>92</sup> As befitting a production with the Globe's Education Centre, there was an emphasis on More 'as a person instrumental in the promotion of education and the new learning that was, by the 1590s, blossoming as the English Renaissance [sic].'<sup>93</sup>

In addition to the three professional productions that will be examined in the forthcoming chapters, one further major production deserves mention. On Christmas night of 1983, BBC Radio 3 presented the play with Ian McKellen reprising the title role 20 years after the Nottingham Playhouse production. A further connection with the earlier professional production was that the radio director, Martin Jenkins, played both Lifter and Gough in Nottingham. As the production is still accessible both in its entirety and in the form it was originally transmitted, I have not addressed in detail the directorial choices made. In addition, M.J. Steadman's 1989 MA dissertation contains an admirable and detailed analysis of this production, among others.<sup>94</sup> It is, however, worth noting that it did not include the conflated Erasmus/Falkner scene, possibly in an attempt to reduce

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<sup>91</sup> Maggy Williams, *Sir Thomas More* by Anthony Munday and others: Revised by Henry Chettle, Thomas Dekker, Thomas Heywood and William Shakespeare', staged reading, [Programme], (The Globe Education Theatre: 25 November 2001).

<sup>92</sup> James Wallace, co-ordinator, *Sir Thomas More*, [Programme], *ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> Wallace, *ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> Maire Jean Steadman, '*Sir Thomas More* in Performance in the Twentieth Century' (unpublished master's dissertation, University of Birmingham, Shakespeare Institute, 1989), pp.35-48.

the length of the play for broadcast. The BBC Sound Archive tapes show a total length of only two hours.<sup>95</sup> This omission of what appears to be a problematic scene from a performance perspective, both from this production and from other professional productions, will be examined in detail as part of the conclusion to this thesis.

Such omissions are clearly indicative of differing imperatives between the academic and theatrical productions of the play. The earliest of the productions referenced above would appear, as far as is possible to ascertain, to have attempted a full reconstruction, highlighting the academic intention behind them, and to have retained records illustrating this. A close examination of the later, more theatrical, productions, however, reveals the impact commercial and dramatic requirements have both on the textual choices made and on the recording of such choices. As Scott McMillin states ‘the theatre presents ephemera, and it employs authored documents only as necessary devices in rehearsal and backstage management.’<sup>96</sup> The impact of such an approach on the current availability of relevant research material will, naturally, be of great interest.

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<sup>95</sup> British Library National Sound Archive, *Sir Thomas More*, presumed to be by William Shakespeare and others, directed by Martin Jenkins, (1983) Recordings T11651Y-T11652Y.

<sup>96</sup> McMillin, *Elizabethan Theatre*, p. 17.

## THE NOTTINGHAM PLAYHOUSE PRODUCTION – 1964

The newly completed Nottingham Playhouse opened in December 1963 with a season comprising *Coriolanus*, *The Life in my Hands*, *The Bashful Genius*, *The Mayor of Zalamea*, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* and *Sir Thomas More*, which closed this inaugural season and ran from 10 June until 4 July 1964. One of three theatre directors at the time (alongside John Neville and Peter Ustinov) Frank Dunlop, who also selected and directed *More*, recalls that this programme was assembled to provide a ‘good theatrical balance of National Theatre standards.’<sup>1</sup> Such a programme, and the implicit metrocentricity of such a statement, reflected much of what was happening in British theatre at the time.

The Nottingham Playhouse was one of a number of new repertory theatres erected following the publication of the Arts Council’s advisory document *Housing the Arts in Great Britain* (published in 1959 and 1961), which was ‘primarily concerned with the development of locally based companies, not touring ones.’<sup>2</sup> The design of this theatre, a new home for the already established Playhouse Company, attempted to combine ‘two seemingly incompatible forms of theatre; open and proscenium stage’<sup>3</sup> and the inaugural season reflected the range of productions that such a flexible performance space allowed. Just as the National Theatre had done a year earlier with its inaugural production of *Hamlet*, the season opened with a traditionally dressed, and indubitably Shakespearean,

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<sup>1</sup> Frank Dunlop, personal correspondence with the author (6 February 2007).

<sup>2</sup> John Elsom, *Post-War British Theatre* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976), p. 132.

<sup>3</sup> Ronnie Mulryne and Margaret Shewring, *Making Space for Theatre: British Architecture and Theatre since 1958* (Stratford-upon-Avon: Mulryne and Shewring [Ltd], 1999), p. 130.

tragedy, following this with a world premiere for Peter Ustinov's 'anti-capital punishment treatise'<sup>4</sup> and a new American play (*The Bashful Genius*) loosely based on the life of George Bernard Shaw. In addition, there was Calderon de la Barca giving a European dimension, whilst *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* was a local contribution from Nottingham's own 'Angry Young Man', Alan Sillitoe. This eclectic season culminated in a production which neatly combined the traditional and the modern – the first professional production of a new 'Shakespeare' play in front of a paying audience. Any reference to Anthony Munday's authorial contribution was obscured. Indeed, advertising posters apparently spoke of a play by 'Shakespeare, Dekker and others.'<sup>5</sup> There was, therefore, an acknowledgement of the centrality of Shakespeare to the cultural life of the country, together perhaps with an acceptance of his importance from a commercial perspective. In addition, however, funding from the Arts Council had, as Dominic Shellard puts it, conferred 'greater freedom on producers to experiment with the programme, since the commercial imperative to stage safe and money-spinning work had to some extent been alleviated.'<sup>6</sup>

According to an interview given to Ronald Parr in *Plays and Player* in July 1964, Dunlop's choice of *Sir Thomas More* was partly 'triggered off by the [Shakespeare] quatercentenary'<sup>7</sup> but also because he felt it to be 'entertaining and theatrical and unperformed.'<sup>8</sup> The *Plays and Players* interview was a contribution to a more wide-

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<sup>4</sup> Ian McKellen, *Ian McKellen: Stage*: <http://www.mckellen.com/stage/> [accessed 19 March 2007].

<sup>5</sup> Kenneth Pearson, 'The Mark of Shakespeare?', *The Sunday Times*, 7 June 1964.

<sup>6</sup> Dominic Shellard, *British Theatre since the War* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999) p. 6.

<sup>7</sup> Frank Dunlop interviewed by Ronald Parr in 'Dwarfed by Shakespeare', in *Plays and Players*, July 1964, pp. 8-13, 11-12.

<sup>8</sup> Dunlop, personal correspondence.



ranging article entitled ‘Dwarfed by Shakespeare?’ which comprised interviews with directors of a number of non-Shakespearean Renaissance plays appearing on the professional stage during the same period, positioning this production in a theatrical environment that was keen to explore such works. This substantial (seven-page) piece, introduced under the sub-heading ‘In Search of an Elizabethan Heritage’, was itself indicative of a growing connection between the generally text-based academic world and the world of the stage. Ronald Parr’s piece was introduced by J.L.Styan, one of a small number of academics involved in ‘pioneering the notion of performance criticism’ at that time and this introduction linked closely text and performance.<sup>9</sup> The article, despite Styan’s undoubted academic credentials, completely disregarded any attempt to address accurately the question of authorial attribution, just as the commercially-driven theatrical advertising did. Munday was not only ‘dwarfed’ by Shakespeare, but rendered invisible. At no point in this article is Munday credited with any authorial contribution. Styan’s general introduction makes no mention of the play at all, whilst even Parr’s interview of Dunlop, makes reference to its multi-authorship only in a discussion of Shakespeare’s contribution and the belief that ‘Chettle and Dekker .... have drawn the scenes of city life much better than Shakespeare could have done’.<sup>10</sup> Although William Gaskill, director of Marston’s *The Dutch Courtesan*, did not consider that there was a ‘particular revival’ of plays by Shakespeare’s contemporaries at that time, productions of *The Maid’s Tragedy*, *The Shoemaker’s Holiday*, *The Jew of Malta* as well as *Sir Thomas More*, would seem to indicate that ‘the search for forgotten masterpieces goes on.’<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Hauptfleisch, Temple, ‘Obituary of Professor J.L. Styan’, *Independent*, 2 August 2002, p. 18.

<sup>10</sup> Dunlop, *Plays and Players*, p. 12.

<sup>11</sup> J.L. Styan ‘In Search of an Elizabethan Heritage’ in *Plays and Players*, July 1964, p. 8.

In response to a challenge by Parr that *Sir Thomas More*'s lack of a performance history indicated 'a lack of dramatic merit', Dunlop sprang to the play's defence. He explained this lack rather as an effect of two, closely linked, historical causes, that the play had no tradition of performance because 'it was immediately banned for political reasons by Tilney' and also that the text had not 'been available in an acting text – only in a facsimile of the original manuscript.'<sup>12</sup>

The phrase 'acting text' is in itself problematic, with its inherent assumption of a close correlation between the page and the stage, a correlation challenged even by a cursory comparison between a play text edited for publication, and the theatrical prompt book maintained as a record of any given performance. This is clearly demonstrated by an examination of the two prompt books recording performative choices for this production. Having studied under Charles Sisson at University College, London, Dunlop was keenly aware of the work being done at that time on the manuscript, and also of the inclusion of an edited text in the 1954 *Complete Works* of which Sisson was general editor.<sup>13</sup> Although this edition was not in itself the required 'acting text' it would appear to have provided him with the basis upon which he constructed the performance script for the Nottingham production, thus making his own contribution to how the play's manuscript is transformed in production. This close link to Sisson and to the research being carried out on the manuscript during this post-war period did not lead Dunlop to limit his contribution in order to accept either the text or its authorial attributions as sacrosanct.

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* p. 11.

<sup>13</sup> Jenkins.

Jenkins himself avoids the need for a clear attribution at the beginning of the play which, in his edition for Sisson's *Complete Works*, follows *Pericles*, and precedes *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece*. The attribution implied by the play's inclusion in a *Complete Works* of William Shakespeare is instead restricted to an introductory discussion, in terms of the academic work on the hands within the manuscript. The Nottingham Playhouse prompt books based on this edition, however, credit only 'William Shakespeare and others', whereas the programme lists the contributing hands strictly in alphabetical order.<sup>14</sup> Having described it as certainly not 'a 'well-made' play – rather a vaudeville about Sir Thomas More'<sup>15</sup> – Dunlop appears to have had no compunction in adapting the text to support his assertion that it is both 'entertaining and theatrical' even if, as yet, 'unperformed'.<sup>16</sup> Perhaps with a professional's dismissive attitude towards the amateur, at no point did he refer to the previous, non-professional, performances referred to in the Jenkins introduction. Here it is recorded that 'Birkbeck College, London ... gave three performances of *Sir Thomas More* in 1922' and that 'The King's School, Canterbury, did it three times in 1938.' Nor is any reference at all made to the professional production which took place in London in 1954, due perhaps to its performance in front of an invited audience, and the lack of public records concerning this production. There is, however, also mention of the fact that 'The Ill May Day scenes were broadcast in the Third Programme in 1948'.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, Ian McKellen repeated the role of Thomas More when the play was broadcast on Radio 3 in 1983.

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<sup>14</sup> Nottingham Playhouse, *Sir Thomas More*, directed by Frank Dunlop, prompt books and [Programme] (1964).

<sup>15</sup> Dunlop, *Plays and Players*, *ibid.* p. 11.

<sup>16</sup> Dunlop, personal correspondence.

<sup>17</sup> Jenkins, p. 1236.

When questioned about specific textual choices made, Dunlop acknowledged that, some 40 years on, he could not remember the rationale in any detail. He did, however, state that he felt the need to ‘mess about with a text for performance only when a playwright made an obvious error’; with examples of such errors being ‘fogging with too much detail, irrelevant detail, [or] excessive length for performance’.<sup>18</sup> In addition, Dunlop felt, if only ‘rarely’, the need to add text in order to ‘elucidate’. It would seem that, like Styan, the director drew a clear distinction between ‘text’ and ‘script’; the latter contributing to the triumvirate of acting script, actor and spectator, in order to ‘generate a play’s dramatic energy.’<sup>19</sup>

An examination of the two prompt books held at the Nottingham Archive Office indicated that Dunlop felt the need both to cut and to elucidate when producing his own performance text and generating his own vision of that ‘dramatic energy.’ These prompt books appear to comprise one which acted as a ‘control’ for performances, into which are incorporated set and staging diagrams, lighting references, etc., with the other being the personal copy of the assistant director, Richard Digby-Day. For clarification in this thesis, these will be referenced as ‘prompt book no. 1’ and ‘no. 2’ respectively.<sup>20</sup> Within this latter, Digby-Day entered limited rehearsal notes for the actors, as well as recording some textual changes. Major excisions are registered in both, as are references to the additions Dunlop incorporated. It is not, however, possible to demonstrate to what extent these are indicative of actual performance choices, as there is no detailed performance evidence such as video or voice recordings with which to compare them. Though this

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<sup>18</sup> Dunlop, personal correspondence.

<sup>19</sup> Styan, *Perspectives on Shakespeare in Performance*, (New York: Peter Lang, 2000), p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> Nottingham Playhouse, prompt books Nos. 1 and 2.

lack of evidence is frustrating for the researcher, it may be considered helpful to a director. With no knowledge of a previous professional performance history for the play, it may well have proved liberating not to be influenced by other directorial choices, nor by academic or critical responses to them.

Certainly, Dunlop did not treat the Jenkins text with excessive reverence. The major excision was the conflated Erasmus/Falkner scene, and this is clearly crossed through or omitted entirely in both prompt books. This excision would appear to have led to a conflation of Scenes 8 and 9, with More's soliloquy now being followed immediately by a messenger bringing news of the visit of 'The Mayor of London/Accompanied with his lady and her train.' As this news is itself immediately followed by More's reflection on the fact that 'Reverend Erasmus ..... newly took sad leave of us,' additional, unrecorded, adjustments may well have been made to aid clarity and continuity. Although the handwritten stage direction 'off D.R.' has been added after '*Exeunt*' this brief speech, too, may have been excised in order to maintain continuity. A further indication that such inaccuracy in prompt book record-keeping is possible, appears in Steadman's dissertation when she comments that 'according to Digby-Day, the many replacements of archaic words Dunlop made for comprehensibility and contemporaneity are not recorded.'<sup>21</sup> Neither Digby-Day nor Dunlop himself can, however, recall which words may have been deemed 'archaic' given the number of performances of plays of the period where it is considered unnecessary to adjust Renaissance language in this way. It is, however, clear from the cast listing in the programme that Randall, Erasmus, Falkner and Morris did not make an appearance in

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<sup>21</sup> Steadman, p. 10.

this production, and such cuts would obviously meet Dunlop's aim to reduce excessive length of performance.<sup>22</sup> These major excisions, although certainly increasing the pace of the play and reducing some textual complexities for the audience, have the effect of limiting the opportunity to see More as anything other than a somewhat lighthearted, and two-dimensional, figure. The Erasmus scene places him as a respected figure with an influential circle of European intellectuals, whilst the scenes with Falkner and Morris raise questions of authority and conscience which are more fully examined in the progress towards More's fate demonstrated in the second half of the text; contributing to a sense of thematic coherence.

From both cast list and prompt books, however, it is clear that another, potentially problematic, scene was retained in some form. The remaining fragment of the 'Prentice Boys scene appears to have been incorporated as a kind of 'dumb show' with three named actors being listed in the programme as playing 'Apprentices' but, in defiance of theatrical convention, having no lines allocated in the prompt books. Instead, the prompt book has an additional, handwritten, stage direction alongside the original instructions at the opening of Scene 4. The detailed typewritten stage directions (unaltered from those appearing in the original manuscript) are 'Enter LINCOLN, GEORGE BETTS, CLOWN, WILLIAMSON, SHERWIN and others armed; DOLL in a shirt of mail, a head-piece, sword and buckler; a CREW attending'.<sup>23</sup> Added in the margin alongside this, are the words 'apprentices fight D.S. from drum only + D.R. rostrum.' If the Jenkins edition was, as is acknowledged by Dunlop, the base text for these prompt books, a positive

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<sup>22</sup> Nottingham Playhouse, [Programme].

<sup>23</sup> Nottingham Playhouse, prompt book No. 2 (p.12).

decision would have to have been made to incorporate this fragment as it appears only in the form of a footnote in that edition.

Another reason for cutting the text and staging this fragment as a ‘dumb show’ may have been the complexity of the discourse, which Jenkins does not attempt to clarify, and the interpretive difficulties this would present a modern audience. Retaining the violence implied in the episode, and staging the fight so close to the audience, however, would seem to have maintained the vitality of the first half. Richard Digby-Day recalled that ‘Frank Dunlop was driven by a desire to promote a sense of action in the first half, with the second half having much more solemnity and grandeur.’<sup>24</sup> The impetus clearly was to produce an entertaining and accessible piece of theatre rather than an accurate presentation of an historical document. In addition, retaining some element of this scene may have drawn a clear link between the violence of the ‘Prentice Boys and the martial garb of the Londoners described in the stage directions. This can clearly be seen in production photographs showing Doll wearing a metal helmet and breastplate whilst wielding both shield and sword. In accordance with the internal stage direction contained within the following scene, Sir John Munday may also have been presented as the victim of an assault by these ‘Prentices, whom he fears ‘are gone to join/With Lincoln, Sherwin, and their dangerous train’.<sup>25</sup> Inferring such a staging decision is, however, always fraught with the risk of imposing such subjectivity as scholars seek to avoid and is, in this case, further complicated by the fact that, whilst Sir John Munday’s lines appear in the ‘control’ prompt book [no. 1], his character is not listed in the programme. Indeed, the

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<sup>24</sup> Digby-Day, personal interview with the author (London: 22 January 2007).

<sup>25</sup> Prompt book No. 2 (p.14).

second prompt book, that which is attributed as Richard Digby Day's copy and is amended in his own handwriting, would seem to confirm that John Munday's character does not in fact appear. Instead, the name is altered to that of Sir Roger Cholmley in stage directions, text and speech prefix; detailed amendments which would lead one to assume that this records an actual performance choice. Any thought that Sir Roger was also presented as the 'Prentice Boys' victim must, without corroborative evidence, remain merely an assumption.

Further, minor, changes must be subject to similar assumptions. Digby-Day's prompt book [no. 2] clearly amends the speech prefix 'Servant' to 'Housekeeper' in IV.iv, whilst 'Butler' is deleted throughout Scene 16, and replaced with the word 'Housekeeper', a gendered alteration which presumably led to the Brewer's use of the name 'Ned Butler' becoming 'Nell Butler' in the same scene. These changes do not appear in prompt book no. 1, however. As there is no listing for an anonymous 'Servant' in the programme's cast list, it would seem reasonable though to assume that these roles were doubled by Marielaine Douglas, merely as a matter of pragmatism. Digby-Day's prompt book clearly deletes some five lines of Scene 17 in which More requests a urinal and examines his water for 'gravel', although this change is not recorded in the other prompt book.<sup>26</sup> The argument for this amendment as indicative of performance is, however, strengthened because the character of 'Servant in the Tower' is also missing from the programme cast list. Here, then, it would appear a reasonable assumption that, even based on the detailed amendments to only one of the two available prompt books, there would appear to be supporting evidence that these changes were retained in

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<sup>26</sup> Revels edition, V.iii.22-26.



performance. Steadman's dissertation, however, records Digby-Day as stating that 'Dunlop would have retained it [the urinal joke] for its "earthy" quality.'<sup>27</sup> Such contradictions are further indications of the difficulty of recording or reconstructing performance choices for posterity.

In addition, Dunlop added text to meet that further personal criterion - to 'elucidate' the text for a modern audience.<sup>28</sup> Both prompt books have a handwritten addition to the head of page 41 (the opening of Scene 11) 'TO THIS SCENE ADD: The Reading of the Articles and More's comments from Roper's "Life".' These additions were marked, again in both prompt books, to be inserted between Sir Thomas Palmer's line 'I tender them/In that due reference which befits this place' and More's response 'Subscribe these Articles?'<sup>29</sup> Unfortunately, no evidence remains of exactly what was added here, although Digby-Day recalls having visited Nottingham's Reference Library in order to access details of the original 'Articles' More refused to sign. Having traced and forwarded to him the text of the Oath required by the Act of Succession 1534, I received the response that Digby-Day felt the wording below was almost certainly the basis for the Articles read to More in this production, but that 'the oath was cut down from the original.'<sup>30</sup> As he was unable to recall how such cuts were made, however, the oath is here reproduced in full in an attempt to give a flavour of the use made in this production of original historical texts:-

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<sup>27</sup> Steadman, p. 23.

<sup>28</sup> Dunlop, correspondence.

<sup>29</sup> Revels, IV.i.71-73.

<sup>30</sup> Richard Digby-Day, personal correspondence with the author, (5 March 2007).

Ye shall swear to bear faith, truth, and obedience alonely to the king's majesty, and to his heirs of his body of his most dear and entirely beloved lawful wife Queen Anne, begotten and to be begotten, and further to the heirs of our said sovereign lord according to the limitation in the statute made for surety of his succession in the crown of this realm, mentioned and contained, and not to any other within this realm, for foreign authority or potentate: and in case any oath be made, or has been made, by you, to any person or persons, that then ye [are] to repute the same as vain and annihilate; and that, to your cunning, wit, and uttermost of your power, without guile, fraud, or other undue means, you shall observe, keep, maintain, and defend the said Act of Accession, and all the whole effects and contents thereof, and all other Acts and statutes made in confirmation, or for the execution of the same, or of anything therein contained; and this ye shall do against all manner of persons, of what estate, dignity, degree, or condition soever they be, and in no wise do or attempt, nor to your power suffer to be done or attempted, directly or indirectly, any thing or things privily or apartly to the let, hindrance, damage, or derogation thereof, or of any part of the same, by any manner of means, or for any manner of pretence; so help you God and all saints.<sup>31</sup>

Digby-Day had a clearer recollection of the staging of More's response. Having e-mailed to him the following extract from William Roper's *Life of Saint Thomas More*

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<sup>31</sup> Oath of Allegiance to Henry VIII and his Successors, 1534, in translation from the Latin. <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/> [accessed 3 March 2007].

his reply was ‘I think [that] with the exception of a few words [this was] spoken by Ian [McKellen] in full’.<sup>32</sup>

No man living is there, my lords, that would with better will do the thing that should be acceptable to the King’s Highness than I, which must needs confess his manifold goodness and bountiful benefits most benignly bestowed on me. Howbeit, I verily hoped that I should never have heard of this matter more, considering that I have, from time to time, always from the beginning, so plainly and truly declared my mind unto His Grace, which His Highness to me ever seemed, like a most gracious Prince, very well to accept, never minding, as he said, to molest me more herewith; since which time any further thing that was able to move me to any change could I never find, and if I could, there is none in all the world that would have been gladder of it than I.<sup>33</sup>

Such interpolations would, of course, have required further adjustments to an original scene in which the Articles are presented, rather than read aloud, to both More and the Bishop of Rochester. There is, however, no record in either prompt book as to the detail of any such amendments. In keeping, perhaps, with the insertion of such historical detail into a dramatic text, Dunlop also chose to add an historically appropriate figure. In this production, the Oath was read by the Duke of Norfolk, whereas textually the Articles are presented by Sir Thomas Palmer. This was an historically appropriate emendation, as Norfolk (then, as now, England’s leading Catholic aristocrat) acted as one

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<sup>32</sup> Digby-Day, correspondence.

<sup>33</sup> William Roper and Nicholas Harpsfield, *Lies of Saint Thomas More*, (London: Dent, 1963) p.33.

of Henry VIII's chief negotiators with Sir Thomas More in the matter of the Act of Succession.

Steadman argues that this interpolation of such historical detail bears 'comparison with Brechtian methods in the use of historical and biographical data to allow an interlude in the flow of dramatic illusionary discourse'.<sup>34</sup> Certainly, at the time of the production, Dunlop himself commented that '[t]he total effect is strikingly Brechtian' but attributes this merely to the fact that 'the scenes by different hands gain enormously in juxtaposition'.<sup>35</sup> However, in this case, it could well be argued that the more immediate rationale behind the insertion of such authentic textual material was to elucidate a situation no longer easily understood by a modern audience, whilst still retaining an appropriately 'historical' flavour. When asked, some 43 years later, Richard Digby-Day did not agree that either the play or the production were specifically Brechtian but did feel that British theatre generally 'was still very influenced by the Berliner Ensemble's visit in the late 1950s.'<sup>36</sup> Such explanatory interpolations would have drawn close parallels between the Renaissance dramatic text and the relatively recent history it was, however obliquely, chronicling. This is, after all, a play which has been variously categorised as both a History and a Chronicle.<sup>37</sup> Specific references would have been dangerous at the time of writing, but also less necessary for an audience living through the immediate consequences of the Reformation. The self-censorship of the dramatists in respect of this issue was clearly no longer necessary in the 1960s and the Playhouse

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<sup>34</sup> Steadman, p. 13.

<sup>35</sup> Dunlop, *Plays and Players* (July 1954), p. 12.

<sup>36</sup> Digby-Day, personal interview.

<sup>37</sup> John Munro, ed., 'Sir Thomas More', in *The London Shakespeare*, 6 vols. (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1958), VI, (*The Histories* (2), *The Poems*), 1255-1278, and Jenkins, p. 1235, respectively.

audience may well have required such explication. These additions also helped to emphasise the religious nature of More's struggle between King and conscience, assisted perhaps, as Digby-Day recalls, by the fact that Robert Bolt's *A Man for All Seasons* had played in Nottingham 'recently.' (Unfortunately, only a brief reference to a production at the Playhouse in November 1961 has been found, without any corroborative evidence).<sup>38</sup>

Although textual changes have been made to elucidate the text in performance, the prompt books remain sources of much frustration as research tools. In Digby-Day's copy only, there is an insertion between pages 44 and 45 which comprises a much smaller piece of paper containing 11 typewritten lines which form part of the original text marked for deletion and replaced by a passage attributed to Chettle:-

Close them not then with tears, for that ostent  
Gives a wet signal of your discontent  
If you will share my fortunes, comfort then:  
An hundred smiles for one sign. What, we are men!  
Resign wet passion to these weaker eyes,  
Which proves their sex, but grants them ne'er more wise,  
Let's now survey our state. Here sits my wife,  
And dear esteemed issue; yonder stand  
My loving servants:  
Now you shall hear me speak  
Like More in melancholy.

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<sup>38</sup> Michael Napier, unpublished paper, *Pro Bono for All Seasons – Clinical Legal Education and the Motivation of Lawyers*, presented at the Cardiff University Law School's Ewan Davies Memorial Lecture 2006, <http://probonouk.net/> [accessed 1 March 2007].

There is, however, no indication as to whether these lines were ever interpolated into the acting text and, if so, where. They would not seem appropriate at any point within the two pages between which this additional piece is sited, nor is there any sign that they may have been inserted into the scene elsewhere. Jenkins's footnote incorporating all 71 lines described as 'an addition in Hand A (Chettle's)' is not included in either prompt book.

Other than these textual choices, however, Dunlop remained largely true to Jenkins's edition, including his approach to the lacunae in the manuscript. Neither prompt book shows deviation from the Jenkins base text as far as the lacunae are concerned. Although in general Jenkins is content to leave incomplete those areas of the text where the manuscript has been damaged or is illegible, using no speculative conjecture in order to replace missing lines, there is one noticeable exception. In his introduction to the play, he does state that 'when there is authority for part of a word the rest can usually be inferred' and in I.i, he footnotes Hall's *Chronicles* as his authority for inferring much more than one word.<sup>39</sup> Here, the two lines obliterated from the manuscript are conjecturally supplied as 'Master Doctor Standish [hath answered that it becomes not him to move any such thing in a sermon, but Master Doctor Beale hath promised that he will do in this matter as much as a priest may do to [re]form it.' The Nottingham prompt books both incorporate this interpolation into the text without any further emendation, although the Revels edition later comments that such 'conjectures do not fit the space available in MS.'<sup>40</sup> Elsewhere, however, the handling of the lacunae in performance is very unclear from the prompt books. Where there are sufficient words available to make sense, only these are retained, with no attempt to maintain the rhythm.

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<sup>39</sup> Jenkins, p. 1239.

<sup>40</sup> Revels, p. 65.

A clear example is found in II.iv.158 when the manuscript has been transcribed as ‘Praise More whose [ ] falls [ ]’. Neither prompt book, however, shows anything other than a reduction simply to ‘Praise More’ even though the preceding three lines of Doll’s speech are all in perfect iambic pentameter.

Digby-Day’s prompt book (no. 2) does reveal a number of hand-written interpolations that may be construed as attempts to fill lacunae, but only one of these may be interpreted as convincing evidence of a fully realised performance text. I.ii,200 has been completed by the insertion of the words ‘for him stands gaurd’ [sic]. As this is a crucial line which closes the scene, the assumption must be that this decision to fill the lacuna was a performative one. At I.ii.39-41, however, a similar handwritten amendment is difficult to interpret. This would appear to insert the words ‘Good Master Sheriff More then Smart [is]’ immediately prior to the final words of the Jenkins edition ‘rightly served’. In the following line, the original text reads ‘Good my lord, soothe a (.....) for once’ and, again, a handwritten amendment seems to insert the words ‘contain yourself’ into this gap, without a corresponding deletion of ‘soothe a’ leaving a seemingly tautological line. Elsewhere, the general approach seems to have been simply not to record how the lacunae were filled, or, on occasion, merely to delete odd words or phrases, leaving sufficient remnants to give some sense of coherence.

One example of this approach can be seen in III.ii.96-97. where Jenkins, and the prompt books taken from his edition, note ‘One and a half lines wanting’ followed by the words ‘naught but pride’. In Digby-Day’s prompt book, however, these lines are simply scored through, along with the ‘but’ that starts the next line of More’s speech.

Unfortunately, however, any attempt to read the majority of amendments within the prompt book as indicators of the text in performance must remain conjectural. A further textual choice is, however, more clearly indicated in the prompt books. All the Latin is retained, with no attempt to ‘elucidate’ for a modern audience. Digby-Day explained that the rationale behind this choice was that the intended Renaissance audience itself would have heard those lines, with many of them being unable to understand them. They were not cut, he continued, ‘as they were considered to be an integral element in More’s presentation as a man of intellect.’<sup>41</sup> These textual adjustments do not appear to follow a coherent directorial approach to either the play or its audience, with the Latin being retained in order to present More as an intellectual, whilst cutting the Erasmus scene removes the piece’s attempt to present him as a valued member of a humanistic, scholarly and Europe-wide group. Instead the emphasis is clearly on producing an accessible and exciting piece of drama within a Renaissance setting rather than an attempt faithfully to reconstruct an historical manuscript.

Such emphases are apparent in the major excisions and the interpolated text which are somewhat more substantively evidenced, as they are clearly marked up in both prompt books. They have also been confirmed, in conversation and by fax, by the assistant director and director respectively. These major changes should, perhaps, have led to the text having to be submitted to the Lord Chamberlain’s Office as, in 1964, it was still required that play scripts for theatre productions be licensed by that office. E-mail correspondence with the British Library’s Curator of Modern Theatre Collections has confirmed, however, that exceptions were made, under the Theatres Act of 1834, for

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<sup>41</sup> Digby-Day, interview.



plays written prior to that date, ‘unless they were very extensively rewritten or had substantial modern additions made.’ There does not appear to be any definitive clarification of such terms for exemption, which were apparently designed ‘to allow productions of Shakespeare to go ahead without interference.’<sup>42</sup> This statement itself is indicative of the status of the National Bard at the time of the drawing up of the Act. Even though some major textual amendments may have brought this production within the scope of the Act, there are no records within the Lord Chamberlain’s Office papers suggesting that the script was submitted for licensing, and certainly Frank Digby-Day could not recall that this had ever been a consideration for the company. Neither of the other two major stage productions considered in this thesis would have been subject to any such consideration, with the censorial role of the Lord Chamberlain’s Office disappearing under the Theatres Act of 1968.

The large number of characters required in any production of *Sir Thomas More* does not appear to have created a problem for the Nottingham Playhouse, although the casting of the title role briefly became a thorny issue. John Neville was due to play *More*, under the direction of his co-director of the theatre, Frank Dunlop. Before this last play of the season reached the stage, however, there was a major disagreement between them, which led to the young Ian McKellen, a member of the company for the entire season, being drafted in as a late replacement. Richard Digby-Day recalls that Neville had been selected to play *More* ‘having toured Africa with *A Man for All Seasons* but ‘felt he could not work with Dunlop’s style.’<sup>43</sup> This late change, and a rehearsal period of only three weeks, meant that Dunlop asked Digby-Day to take on the Assistant

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<sup>42</sup> Kathryn Johnson, British Library, personal correspondence with the author (6 February 2007).

<sup>43</sup> Digby-Day, interview.

Director role, leaving him with ‘much of the responsibility for about half the rehearsal period.’<sup>44</sup> An examination of the programme, a copy of which was kindly provided from Richard Digby-Day’s own archive at the University of Bristol Theatre Collection, reveals a total of 47 roles, played by 30 actors.<sup>45</sup> In general, the 17 roles which were doubled appear to be merely pragmatic choices, with characters such as de Bard, Caveler, Sherwin, and George Betts who appear only in the first half of the play, reappearing to play minor roles such as warders and players in the second half. Digby-Day attributed the relatively large size of the acting company in a new provincial theatre as due to the fact that ‘in those days [we could] use extras for speaking parts for very little cost,’ an economic situation that no longer exists, and *Sir Thomas More* could draw on the large acting company available throughout the season.<sup>46</sup>

There were, however, a number of doubling choices that require further consideration. The actors who appeared as Lifter, Smart and the Court Reporter in the courtroom scene in the first half of the production, reappeared in the second half as Porter, Gough and Brewer. As these three characters are presented discussing the outcome of More’s own trial, the textual parallels between More’s jesting avoidance of the death penalty for Lifter in the first half of the play and the mortal sentence passed upon himself in the second half were emphasised for the audience. The textual balance between such parallel scenes played out lightheartedly in the first half and much more ominously in the second, was diminished in this production by the cutting of the Falkner scene, which will be discussed in more detail in the conclusion of this thesis. One point

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<sup>44</sup> Digby-Day, interview.

<sup>45</sup> Nottingham Playhouse, [Programme].

<sup>46</sup> Digby-Day, *ibid.*

at which it was sharply highlighted, however, was in the casting of John Golightly both as Lincoln, who hangs in the first half despite More's intercession on behalf of the rioters, and as More's own executioner. Although Frank Dunlop denied any such directorial intention other than mere pragmatism, such choices should not be so lightly dismissed. A director's pragmatic choice may validly be read as something more meaningful in the mind of an audience member. After all, as Styan stresses, the audience forms a third part of the creative triumvirate of playwright[s], performing company, and spectator.<sup>47</sup>

As previously mentioned, there were a number of amendments to the original cast list, with the Duke of Norfolk (Anthony Brown) replacing Sir Thomas Palmer for the delivery of the Articles. In addition, the anonymous 'Servant' became 'Housekeeper' to introduce the Earls of Surrey and Shrewsbury in the household scene following More's resignation, and his second daughter was given her historical name, Cicely Heron. Although this alteration hints at the Brechtian interpolation of historical veracity, when asked why this choice was made, Frank Dunlop's response was simply that it was 'probably to humanise the daughter and make the actress happy and inspired.'<sup>48</sup> Such an impetus for textual emendations is, of course, purely theatrical and is not necessarily something with which a textual editor would need to be concerned.

There is one startling omission from the programme's cast list, and from the *dramatis personae* included in the Jenkins edition. John Fisher, Bishop of Rochester, does not appear in either, although his is a crucial role in the scenes surrounding the

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<sup>47</sup> J.L. Styan, *Perspectives on Shakespeare in Performance* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000), p. 2.

<sup>48</sup> Dunlop, correspondence.

presentation of the Articles and More's later imprisonment. In both prompt books his character and lines remain uncut from this scene, and from the later scene in which Rochester is presented on his own way to the Tower. Lines in which More and his gaolers discuss the Bishop's fate are also retained in both prompt books; and the cumulative effect of this evidence leads to the assumption that the role was indeed retained in performance. This must have been extremely frustrating for the actor concerned, Christopher Hancock. His name is only available through the cast list that appears on Ian McKellen's own website, and even here it is the last name listed in what is otherwise a 'Cast in Order of Appearance.'<sup>49</sup>

Most interesting, perhaps, is another amendment which appears only in Digby-Day's prompt book. More's arrest is undertaken by the Duke of Norfolk, rather than by Downes, an officer who, as the dialogue indicates, is the same officer rescued by More from the mob in the first half of the play. Again, these changes are made to speech prefixes in only one prompt book, along with amendments to Shrewsbury's original announcement that 'here is an officer ready for to arrest you of high treason' and More's greeting 'Ay Downes, is't thou? I once did save thy life.' In both, Downes becomes 'The Duke of Norfolk.' However, this amendment reduces the opportunity to present a direct link between More's sudden rise in the first half of the play, and his equally rapid descent in the second. Downes has, in both the later productions, been present at both these moments, demonstrating physically an event which leads to More's recognition of the arresting officer as one whose life he had saved 'When else by cruel riotous

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<sup>49</sup> *McKellen: Stage.*

assault/Thou hadst been torn to pieces.’<sup>50</sup> This emendation, if carried through in performance, would have undercut the narrative cohesion demonstrated in the two more recent productions. Unfortunately, however, once again it has not been possible to ascertain with certainty whether Digby-Day’s notes refer only to an amendment that was perhaps tried in rehearsal. Given the omission of the Bishop of Rochester from the cast list, it is not sufficient evidence to assume the lack of Downes’s name to be confirmation of this choice in performance. However, as these amendments are more thorough than many in the prompt book, it may seem not unreasonable to accept that they were intended to apply to the play in performance.

Certain handwritten elements within the prompt book do, however, give an indication of how this performance was staged, as do photographs available from the Nottingham Archives. Press reviews can, sometimes obliquely, also assist in the reconstruction of a specific production. These contemporary interpolations, by either the Stage Manager, or Digby-Day himself, must, however, give some indication of intent as well as revealing elements of the rehearsal process unseen by a theatrical audience.

From the records available, it would appear that the staging itself, as did the textual choices made, combine modern theatrical techniques and movements whilst retaining clear visual references to the text’s Renaissance roots. From discussions with Rosemary Vercoe, credited (rather condescendingly) in the programme notes with the design of the ‘Ladies’ and crowd costumes’, it would appear that the costumes were essentially Renaissance-inspired, but economic constraints meant that they had to be drawn mainly from what was already available in stock, in order to produce a rather

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<sup>50</sup> Revels, IV.iv.

sombre ‘image of a Tudor style.’<sup>51</sup> Ian McKellen’s costuming was clearly based on the portrait of Sir Thomas More by Hans Holbein the Younger, reproduced in the programme ‘by kind permission of the Trustees of the British Museum.’<sup>52</sup> The men’s costumes would appear generally to have been hired from the London theatrical outfitter, Morris Angel, who, unfortunately, no longer holds records for that period. Photographs currently held at the Nottingham Archives do, however, offer some insight into both costuming and staging.<sup>53</sup> These comprise mainly production photographs depicting a number of untitled scenes, some of which can be clearly identified as showing the play-within-the-play, which Vercoe recalls as being costumed as a deliberate contrast to the generally sombre costuming, the Privy Council Chamber scene, and the quelling of the riot. Another depicts More in a familial setting, showing his wife and daughters about him, one kneeling at his feet, and which, both in dress and positioning, again calls to mind Lockey’s portrait of the More family.<sup>54</sup> Others are less clearly distinguishable, although all show a consistency in costume style, and demonstrate power through apparel. In the Privy Council, More is shown seated at the centre of a large table which is covered by a richly embroidered cloth and upon which folio-sized documents are strewn. He is himself wearing rich robes and a heavy chain of office, whilst to his right, at the end of the table, is a senior cleric dressed in an elaborately decorated alb and cope. It may be reasonably assumed that this is John Fisher, Bishop of Rochester, although as discussed earlier, confirmation of this character’s presence in the production is itself slightly problematic.

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<sup>51</sup> Steadman, p. 19.

<sup>52</sup> Nottingham Playhouse, [Programme], pp. 9 and 11 respectively.

<sup>53</sup> Nottingham Playhouse [Production photographs] [1964].

<sup>54</sup> Lockey.

Other photographs showing More seated at a much less ornate table would seem to illustrate Lifter's trial and, as befitting More's status prior to his elevation, he is much less richly dressed. Here it would seem that only chain of office visible is that worn by an older, bearded man to More's right; presumably the Lord Mayor. Lifter's indigent status is emphasised here by his footwear. His feet appear merely to be wrapped in rags. He is heavily bearded and generally much more hirsute than other characters – perhaps he was originally intended to double as Falkner 'the hairy ruffian.' Photographs of the play-within-the-play confirm Digby-Day's recollection that this too was staged 'very much in Elizabethan dress' and, in keeping with its Renaissance feel, with the youngest actor in the troupe playing Lady Vanity 'in drag.' A banner proclaiming 'Wit and Wisdom' in white on a dark background was erected upstage of the action and the Prologue was dressed in a heavily-slashed doublet and hose, with a large feather in his hat. More and his guests were seated as audience on either side of an improvised stage.

The staging of the riot and its aftermath appears to have made full use of the large stage, and the revolve which had been incorporated into the design of this new theatrical space. Here attempts to combine 'modern' and 'traditional' approaches to the staging of an historical text are clearly demonstrated. Costuming is still generally evocative of the Renaissance period, with More in a long, belted tunic and onlookers in doublet and hose. The rioters are more simply dressed in jerkins or waistcoats over shirts, with lightweight tights or trousers tucked into boots. One man is shown leaning on a simple crutch. The revolve can be clearly seen below a wooden structure approached by two open stairways. It would seem that this background to the riot became the gallows used for the execution of John Lincoln, and also that of More himself. Among the photographs stored in the

archives is one which is not a production still but appears to be a copy of a woodcut signed 'Bertrand,' depicting a scene of mass public executions in the Early Modern period. Although the photographs are not in a scenically chronological order, the positioning of the illustration and its similarity to the construction of the gallows in the production, would seem to indicate that it formed the basis for this element of the design.

Although, some 40 years later, neither Frank Dunlop nor Richard Digby-Day could remember in detail the uses made of the revolve, M.J. Steadman's 1989 MA dissertation records Digby-Day's belief at that time that the design was modern and influenced by 'the previous decade's heritage from Sean Kenny' whom Steadman notes was 'famous for his architecturally sparse sets and as a manipulator of stage mechanics.'<sup>55</sup> This revolve dominated the stage and held the permanent set, which comprised a large wooden platform approached on either side by a set of steps at right angles to it. Each of these stairways had a landing at its mid-point. The height this created on the revolve, as Steadman records, may have acted as 'a signifier of the omnipresent outside world in which authority ruled.'<sup>56</sup> It would certainly appear from the prompt book notes that crowd scenes, and the disruptive dumb show which replaced the 'Prentice Boys scene, together with More's domestic and prison life, were all placed on the apron rather than on the revolve itself. On this apron, however, the prompt book records that carts were brought onto the stage. Steadman notes that these were used to create further levels of power, with Lincoln leaping onto a cart downstage left in order to proclaim his '[bill] of our wrongs' from an elevated position of authority over both the onstage crowd and the offstage audience. Bridget Escolme's analysis of the impact on an

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<sup>55</sup>Steadman, p. 14.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, p. 15



audience of this stage convention of direct address, reveals that this may well have created a connection with the character that could be exploited to heighten emotional tension at his execution.<sup>57</sup> This would have been particularly powerful as this would seem to be the only point in the production where such a technique was adopted.

The back wall of the stage curved to create a cyclorama upon which the starkness of the set was augmented by what the *Evening Post and News* describes as ‘contemporary engravings projected onto the set.’<sup>58</sup> These projections, described by Digby-Day as being ‘all of Elizabethan outdoor London except for a half-timbered hall picture used for the interior scenes in More’s house at Chelsea.’<sup>59</sup> This illusory reference to the period in which the play was written, rather than that in which it is set, was augmented by an immediacy generated by what the *Weekly Guardian* referred to as the ‘reality’ of ‘live doves, chickens and a load of parsnips.’<sup>60</sup> Such attention to the creation of a sense of ‘reality’ for the audience was challenged by Brechtian alienation effects such as that produced by the re-positioning of the revolve at key scene changes. The mechanism was clearly visible to the audience who, as Steadman points out, would become ‘aware of their complicity in accepting the same wooden structure’s change of function with its change of angle.’<sup>61</sup>

In contrast to these elements of ‘alienation’ and Ian McKellen’s assertion that ‘Since the episodes [within the play text] do not encourage audience emotional involvement with the characters, story-telling was emphasised to engage them mentally,

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<sup>57</sup> Bridget Escolme, *Talking to the Audience: Shakespeare, Performance, Self* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005)

<sup>58</sup> *Evening News and Post*, [unsigned theatre review], 10 June 1964.

<sup>59</sup> Steadman, p. 15.

<sup>60</sup> *Weekly Guardian*, [unsigned theatre review], 6 June 1964.

<sup>61</sup> Steadman, p. 17.

disguising the lack of richness in the text,' there is evidence of attempts to engage the audience emotionally.<sup>62</sup> Music was used successfully to evoke 'the period with accuracy,' and to enhance, rather than interrupt, illusion.<sup>63</sup> As Steadman records, it was incorporated into the opening scene 'to summon and concentrate the audience's attention.'<sup>64</sup> It is unclear whether the lyrics used for this opening song were taken from the play itself, or whether these were a further textual interpolation.

Press reviews do, however, indicate that the two executions were staged in a manner designed to engage with the audience emotionally. Tension was built by having both condemned men mount slowly up the revolve steps and along the platform towards death. Lincoln was faced with a gibbet and hangman which were 'silhouetted against a projection on the cyclorama'<sup>65</sup> before bringing 'a gasp' from the audience at his 'very genuine looking hanging.'<sup>66</sup> A similar technique was used for More's own death at the hands of an executioner played by the same actor (John Golightly) who played Lincoln. Like Lincoln's appeal to the crowd during the reading of his 'Bill of Rights,' More stood above both stage crowd and audience before kneeling at a block placed at the end of the platform. Steadman records that Digby-Day remembered a 'roll of drums and the sight of the silhouetted uplifted axe and the sound of its impact.'<sup>67</sup> The production, therefore, ended on a decidedly unBrechtian note, with a direct appeal to the emotions of the audience.

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<sup>62</sup> Steadman, p. 21.

<sup>63</sup> *Guardian Journal*, [unsigned theatre review], 10 June 1964.

<sup>64</sup> Steadman, p. 19.

<sup>65</sup> Steadman, p. 18.

<sup>66</sup> *Guardian Journal*, *ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> Steadman, p. 18.

There does not appear to have been any cohesive attempt at a 'Brechtian' presentation, and although it would not be possible to ignore those influences which were incorporated into the production, they were not allowed to overshadow other elements designed to be both 'entertaining' and 'theatrical.' Instead, it is possible to conclude that Dunlop was influenced by contemporary theatrical performance theories and stage design fashion, whilst making full use of the staging opportunities presented by a newly built theatrical space. Economic factors operated both to enhance and restrict his vision of the play. Although he was able to present a large crowd of unruly citizenry, the budget for costumes was somewhat limited, meaning that appropriate garments were often taken from stock or hired, rather than being designed specifically for this production. These costumes, together with the specially composed music, did seem to combine in creating a naturalistic impression which the *Guardian Journal* described as having 'evoked the period with accuracy.'<sup>68</sup>

Although audience figures are no longer available, Richard Digby-Day recalls that this production, although expensive to stage, was part of an extremely successful opening season for the new Nottingham Playhouse. By melding elements of epic drama, described by Dr Edward Eisser as 'music, singing, technology and inventive staging techniques'<sup>69</sup> with the naturalistic approach challenged by Brecht, Dunlop attempted to avoid an appropriation intended simply to 'convey social meaning to a contemporary audience.'<sup>70</sup> Instead, he wished to stress the universality of the play rather than address contemporary issues of race, immigration and social unrest. To this end, the programme

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<sup>68</sup> *Guardian Journal*, *ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> Edward Eisser, 'A Brechtian Approach to Shakespearean Performance', <http://www.holycross.edu/> [accessed 19 April 2007].

<sup>70</sup> Eisser, *ibid.*

notes comprised an unattributed ‘Note on the Historical Background’ which described More’s dying ‘as a victim, as he had been an exponent, of the “stubborn illusion that any human institution possesses a monopoly of the truth or the power to impose its dogmas upon all who are subject to its man-made authority” ’ – thus emphasizing the latter half of the play, rather than the former.<sup>71</sup>

It is clear from this first recorded professional production of the play that Jenkins’s scholarly edition of the text was freely amended for theatrical purposes, but also that these emendations are difficult to trace. Two prompt books, both initially comprising the Jenkins text, are annotated for differing purposes. The stage manager’s copy records much technical information as to how the production was presented, and it must be assumed that such details as set design and staging diagrams are reflective of actual performance, given the time and cost involved in any changes here. The textual choices and brief rehearsal notes in the assistant director’s prompt book, however, may be mere ghostly echoes of the rehearsal process and the thinking which went into the final performance decisions. Such public documents as cast lists, play texts and programmes, whilst prepared some time before the production enters the preview stage, are published to inform a paying audiences and the intention, at least, is to reflect as accurately as possible the final production. The unreliability of even such evidence as these will be analysed more thoroughly during the examination of the Royal Shakespeare Company’s production of *Sir Thomas More* in 2005.

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<sup>71</sup> *Sir Thomas More*, Nottingham Playhouse [Programme].

## THE STAGE ONE PRODUCTION, SHAW THEATRE, LONDON - 1990

This was the first production for a newly-established company whose stated aim was ‘to find and promote forgotten plays in the English language’ and, as far as can be ascertained, the first performance of the play in front of a paying London audience – a modern equivalent of those for whom it was originally intended.<sup>1</sup> In private conversation, the director, Michael Walling, stressed that the Shakespearean link was not the major impetus behind the decision to stage the play but that, indeed, the idea of assessing and performing non-Shakespearean drama ‘was in the wind at the time’<sup>2</sup> – particularly in light of the opening of the Swan Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon, some four years earlier. This 450-seater auditorium was established with the aim of becoming the Royal Shakespeare Company’s space ‘dedicated to playing the works of Shakespeare’s contemporaries, the works of European writers and the occasional work of Shakespeare’.<sup>3</sup> Both Stage One and the Royal Shakespeare Company, however, approached the achievement of these stated intentions by staging, as their first productions, plays with a Shakespearean connection. The Swan opened on 26 April 1986 with a production of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, another collaborative work, to which Shakespeare contributed more than 146 lines. Thus, two apocryphal plays enhanced the impact of their presence within the theatrical repertoire; one by being presented in the metropolis, albeit by a small, newly-formed company in an unwelcoming space,

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<sup>1</sup> Stage One Theatre Company, *Sir Thomas More*, directed by Michael Walling, Souvenir Programme (September 1990), [p.26].

<sup>2</sup> Michael Walling, director, *Sir Thomas More*, Stage One Theatre Company, personal interview with the author (London: 1 August 2006).

<sup>3</sup> Royal Shakespeare Company, <http://www.rsc.org.uk/> [accessed 10 August 2006].

described in one review as ‘the rather bleak Shaw Theatre’ and the other, in contrast, by opening a much-heralded new theatre with a world-renowned company.<sup>4</sup> Both these choices, and their promotional material, together with the amount and depth of critical response, reflect the sometimes overwhelming commercial and cultural influence Shakespeare’s presence has had on the stage history of Renaissance drama.

Although acknowledging that ‘the initial impetus is, of course, the whole idea of Shakespeare’s lost play’ the director of the 1990 Stage One production felt strongly that ‘what is really interesting is the play as a whole.’<sup>5</sup> The production’s souvenir programme, however, reflected the dichotomy inherent in handling any collaborative work with which the name of Shakespeare is associated. In support of their intention to promote non-Shakespearean Renaissance drama, and in order to publicise both their formation and this, their first production, the company forged links with the British Library and The Rose Theatre Trust, presenting a Gala Benefit Night on behalf of the latter. The programme, possibly in an attempt to construct a form of cultural authority for this newly found company, drew specific parallels between its own aims and those of The Rose Theatre Trust by printing a quotation from its founding patron, Lord Olivier: ‘We can only look forward to a rich cultural future if we are prepared to preserve our cultural past.’<sup>6</sup> In addition, they ran ‘a regular series of workshops on forgotten plays’ during the summer of 1990, culminating in the performances of *Sir Thomas More*, which ran from 6 to 29 September of that year.<sup>7</sup> A further cultural link was forged when,

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<sup>4</sup> Malcolm Rutherford, *Financial Times*, Reviews, 10 September 1990.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Walling, interview.

<sup>6</sup> Stage One [Programme], [p. 22].

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* [p.26].

according to the programme, the British Library held an exhibition ‘based around the play’ in order to ‘complement Stage One’s rediscovery of the play for the London stage’ and incorporating ‘the original manuscript’, ‘the first edition of More’s *Utopia* and ‘other fascinating exhibits related to the historical and theatrical context of the piece.’<sup>8</sup>

The temptation to invoke Shakespeare’s name and highlight his connection seems, however, to have proved irresistible. Perhaps naturally, therefore, this advertisement used, as a centrepiece, a facsimile of Shakespeare’s hand from that original manuscript; the same page of manuscript that formed the background of the programme’s front cover. This selective use of the British Library’s Harleian Manuscript 7368 undercut the scrupulous avoidance of over-emphasising Shakespeare’s authorial contribution elsewhere in the programme, the only form of promotional material which appears still to be extant. Here, the authorship attribution that, rightly, listed Anthony Munday, Henry Chettle, Thomas Dekker, Thomas Heywood and William Shakespeare as co-authors gave appropriate weight to the contribution each made to the manuscript. Michael Walling’s edited acting script, however, could not resist using a larger typeface for the names of Munday and Shakespeare than for those of the other collaborators, as did the title credits for a video made of the first half of the production.<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, the director recalls that it was probably financial constraints that limited this revealing performance record to only some 50% of the production itself.

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<sup>8</sup> Programme, [p. 7].

<sup>9</sup> Stage One Theatre Company *Sir Thomas More*, directed by Michael Walling, Video-recording [first half only] (Director’s personal records: London: Shaw Theatre, 1990).

An article headed ‘The Book of Sir Thomas More’ written by Giorgio Melchiori was incorporated as a major element within the programme, and yet again was illustrated with an example of the manuscript’s Hand D. This article was written at a time when Melchiori had just co-edited, along with Vittorio Gabrieli, the Revels Edition of *Sir Thomas More*.<sup>10</sup> Reflecting the play’s sometimes uneasy positioning with the canon, this is the only drama with a Shakespearean authorial contribution in a series of editions established in 1958 by Clifford Leech, with the intention of applying to ‘Shakespeare’s predecessors, contemporaries and successors the methods that are now used in Shakespeare editing’, a publication choice which mirrors the performance choices made by both the RSC and the Stage One Company. The emphasis during the selection process for this series is placed on plays that ‘deserve and indeed *demand* performance.’<sup>11</sup> By including the play in the series, therefore, the General Editors were acknowledging the quality of the dramatic text as well as the limited contribution made by Shakespeare to the manuscript as a whole - a point stressed by Walling when discussing his decision to stage the play. There was, therefore, a coalescence of intent between the company producing the play, and the academics whose edition and programme notes were intended to extend and enhance understanding for both performers and audience.

As always, however, there was a commercial imperative running alongside, and occasionally colliding with, the artistic and the scholarly aims. This Souvenir Programme in some ways, therefore, met those criteria which Margreta de Grazia attributed to the First Folio itself, in that it was ‘organised to publicise the functions on

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<sup>10</sup> Revels.

<sup>11</sup> Revels, General Editors’ Preface, p. vii.



which the Folio depends: publishing, patronage, purchase, performance, and acclaim.’<sup>12</sup> The importance of patronage to this newly-established company was demonstrated when advertising on the front cover of the programme was devoted to those commercial organisations upon whose support the Stage One Company was reliant. This patronage was provided in the form of practical support by D & C Contractors Limited, who helped ‘sponsor the production .... by providing materials & labour to make staging & scenery’ and by the Chelsea Building Society who ‘printed all promotional material for production.’<sup>13</sup> The latter drew explicit connections between business and the arts by stating that their support of such ‘worthwhile projects in the communities within which it works’ was in this case influenced by ‘the public and media interest it [the production] is likely to provoke.’<sup>14</sup> In all, almost 50% of the 36-page programme was devoted to overt advertising, whilst articles on the manuscript, the Rose Theatre and the text could perhaps be seen not only as informative but as subtle advertising for exhibitions and publications.

Melchiori’s contribution to the programme drew together the educational, theatrical and commercial interests in this production, siting the theatrical performance within an academic, historiographical and textual framework. Aimed at providing an introduction to the textual background for a theatrical audience, it outlined the history of the manuscript, the increasing interest generated by the Shakespearean link, the hands involved in its creation, and the arguments surrounding any accurate dating of both the

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<sup>12</sup> Margareta de Grazia, *Shakespeare Verbatim: The Reproduction of Authenticity and the 1790 Apparatus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991) p. 22.

<sup>13</sup> Programme, [p. 4].

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

‘original’ and the ‘additional – and essential – parts of the play.’<sup>15</sup> Whilst accepting a ‘general consensus of the date of the original’ as 1592-93, no major debate took place here as to the dates of the revisions and additions. Instead, Melchiori promoted his co-edited version as providing an account of the ‘different stages through which the script passed before reaching its final form.’ This final form, despite his conviction that the additions are ‘essential’ elements, was truncated for performance in the three major professional productions under discussion in this thesis – in 1964, 1990 and 2005 – illustrating once more the differing imperatives which inform academic and theatrical approaches to the text. Although driven by similar commercial imperatives to those behind the acting companies who have staged this co-authored play, Melchiori acknowledged an awareness of the interest generated by Hand D, whilst placing no greater emphasis on Shakespeare’s contribution than on that of any other contributor. Instead, it was on the play’s overall merits that Melchiori reflected as he recommended it to its newest audience.

Alongside this textual and historical exposition, the programme-buying members of this audience were presented with five pages of selected quotations, revealing the central themes of both text and production.<sup>16</sup> Ranging from More’s own writings, through such diverse figures as Niccolo Machiavelli and Mahatma Ghandi, these quotations also helped illuminate the continuing relevance of such themes. The first two of these were printed facing one another and reflected opposing views of More’s

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Mary Butlin, RSC Marketing Department, informed me that, although no exact sales figures are available, it is generally accepted in all theatres that approximately 30% of any given audience will buy a programme. (25 January 2006).

character, examining the dichotomy implicit in their headings ‘Humanist and Saint?’ and ‘Obsessive and Vituperative?’ Neither text nor production, however, leaves an audience in any doubt about which aspects of More’s character are foregrounded; a perspective which was challenged by at least one theatre critic. Petronella Wyatt, writing in *The Daily Telegraph*, seems to have missed the point that drama should not be expected to adhere strictly to a specific concept of historical accuracy; accusing Ken Bones of portraying More ‘as a sort of amiable uncle’ rather than a ‘vituperative character who ..... jeered at the execution of Protestants.’<sup>17</sup> She was gently rebuked for this by Roberta Mullini, who pointed out that ‘it may be that the Stage One Theatre Company did not want to modify the dramatic text’ – a not unreasonable assumption given their earlier stated aims.<sup>18</sup>

A further two pages of quotations considered ‘Politics as Theatre,’ emphasizing the meta-theatricality of power and of the text. Particularly pertinent was a selected extract from More’s own *History of King Richard III*: ‘and so (the common people) said that these matters be king’s games, as it were stage plays, and for the most part played upon scaffolds.’<sup>19</sup> The impact that such ‘king’s games’ had on the common people was here demonstrated graphically in a production that left John Lincoln’s body hanging high above stage and audience at the close of the first half.

The final selection of quotations headed ‘Rebellion and Obedience,’ examined the relationship between the authority of the State and the individual conscience, and drew a

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<sup>17</sup> Petronella Wyatt, *Daily Telegraph* (7.9.90), in *London Theatre Record* 27 August – 9 September 1990, p.1166.

<sup>18</sup> Mullini, p. 218.

<sup>19</sup> Programme, [p. 19].

clear correlation with the previous section by quoting More's own words on the scaffold, that he was to die 'The King's good servant, but God's first.' Thus, those reading the programme notes before the performance would have had highlighted for them a succinct summary of the play's central themes. In addition, the range of quotations gave an indication of the breadth of political, social and religious interpretations that the flexibility of the text suggests.

Although now an important element in any study of *Sir Thomas More*, the Revels edition of the play was unavailable until after the company's decision to perform it, and the director, Michael Walling, therefore, spent a great deal of time in the British Library constructing a performance text from the editions available at that time, thus challenging Alan Dessen's assertion that 'The starting point for today's director is the received text, almost always a modern edition of the play in question.'<sup>20</sup> *Sir Thomas More* is, however, somewhat of a special case as far as a standard 'received text' is concerned. Unfortunately, given the passage of years, Walling was unable to recall exactly which editions assisted most in his own compilation of a performable script. A search of the online British Library integrated catalogue of Printed Books pre 1975<sup>21</sup> would seem to indicate that, prior to their acquisition of the Revels edition in 1990, they held copies of all the editions referred to in Gabrieli and Melchiori's List of Abbreviations, with the exception of the privately printed Hopkinson edition of 1902.<sup>22</sup> Although the MARC tags detailing the dates of acquisition were unhelpful in this respect, an e-mail from the

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<sup>20</sup> Alan C. Dessen, *Rescripting Shakespeare: The Text, the Director and Modern Productions* (Cambridge: CUP, 2002) p. 3.

<sup>21</sup> British Library, <http://catalogue.bl.uk/> [accessed 17 November 2006].

<sup>22</sup> Revels, pp.xi-xii.

British Library, Humanities Reference Service confirmed that all ‘the editions of *Sir Thomas More* listed in the Integrated Catalogue would have been available to a researcher in 1989-1990’ with the exception of the Revels edition itself.<sup>23</sup>

An analysis of the way in which the acting script filled the lacunae in the manuscript confirmed that a number of editions had contributed to the final working script. The majority of Walling’s choices (ten) were to be found in the Tucker Brooke, the Hopkinson, and the Nonesuch, with Shirley concurring with some or all of these editions only twice. Given that the Library does not appear to have held the Hopkinson edition, this must surely be discounted as a source and any coalescence may be considered coincidental. Shirley alone, however, was used to fill the lacuna at I.ii.200. Here, although the Revels footnote states that ‘no suggested reconstruction of the missing line sounds convincing’ (p.78) Walling’s original acting script accepted Shirley’s suggestion of ‘Wisdom still doth bid ye lock the door.’ ‘Lock’ was, however, altered in Ken Bones’s handwriting in his acting script, being replaced by the word ‘shut’ and this amendment was carried through to performance.<sup>24</sup> This small directorial emendation, therefore, would appear to have arisen during rehearsal, possibly with the intention to emphasise Bones’s delivery of the lines in an authoritative tone, in mocking imitation of Suresby’s own arrogance towards the plaintiff, Smart. This commanding delivery may also have anticipated More’s rapid change of status by the end of the Guildhall scene, and the authority such an elevation conferred upon him. Two other choices were made without reference to a specific text. Walling’s script does not fill the lacuna at II.iv.158,

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<sup>23</sup> P. Koumi, British Library, Humanities Reference Service, personal correspondence with the author (20 November 2006).

<sup>24</sup> Stage One, video-recording.

disrupting the iambic rhythm to end Doll's brief speech on the simple invocation 'Praise More.' At IV.iv.167 the Revels editors state that 'Three syllables are unrecoverable due to damage to the bottom of MS page' (p. 184). Here the director opts to fill this lacuna by incorporating his own choice of words - 'I'll say farewell' - whilst amending the word 'daughters' to 'daughter' simply to reflect his casting decision to cut the role of More's second daughter on pragmatic grounds.<sup>25</sup> Although it would appear that Hopkinson's edition was unavailable to the director, Walling certainly reached the same conclusion in the construction of his acting script on at least two occasions. At I.iii.78, as the Revels collation points out, this lacuna appears to be missing a speech prefix as well as a word or words from the speech itself. Arguing that 'It looks unlikely that this is a continuation of the Messenger's speech' the Revels editors concur with Hopkinson that the tone 'agrees with Cholmley's attitude' (p.82) and Walling too allocates the lines 78-80 accordingly. However, Walling also follows Hopkinson's suggestion of a single syllable 'We' when it may be argued that the metre demands three syllables such as the suggested "'Twas to be' that the Revels collation attributes to Shirley's edition.

Such a close involvement with the text by the director when producing his acting script led to a positive view of the play as a whole, assessing it not merely as a vehicle to support the Shakespearean elements. Interestingly, Melchiori not only contributed lengthy programme notes, but also attended some rehearsals with the Stage One Company. In conversation, however, Walling revealed that Melchiori made no significant contribution to the final textual choices but that, during the rehearsal process,

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<sup>25</sup> These decisions were compared to the details contained in the Revels Edition collation, and full details of the editions referred to appear in that publication, on pages xi and xxi.

the company did have access to an early copy of the Revels edition, relying heavily on the notes for explanation and clarification of any textual difficulties they encountered. This availability may also have influenced some of the minor emendations made by Walling. That Melchiori makes no reference to this involvement in his Introduction to the edition is due simply to the fact that the publication date is confirmed as having been prior to the end of July 1990 and proofs would, therefore, have been with the publisher well before the play went into rehearsal.<sup>26</sup>

Walling also recalled that the company's response to a first reading of the script echoed Melchiori's programme note that this 'is a stage-worthy and well-constructed play.'<sup>27</sup> In fact, even at audition, Vivienne Rochester (Doll Williamson, Lady Mayoress and Margaret Roper) exclaimed upon the richness of the Anthony Munday's language in the opening scene.<sup>28</sup> This sense of the text's inherent worth, allied to the company's stated intention to revive lost plays, led to what Roberta Mullini describes as a 'faithfulness to the text,' although, given that Walling produced his own acting script, it unclear as to which text is meant here.<sup>29</sup> Two major cuts for instance, those of the character Clown Betts, and of the 'Prentice Boys scene were, Walling recalls, made on dramatic and practical grounds respectively. Despite these theatrical imperatives, it is interesting to note that the loss of the role of Clown Betts reverted to Munday's original script, rejecting one of those amendments and additions described by Gabrieli and

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<sup>26</sup> Mathew Frost, Manchester University Press, personal correspondence with the author (18 September 2006) confirms that this edition is listed in their records as having been 'published between August 1989 and July 1990'.

<sup>27</sup> Programme, [p. 14].

<sup>28</sup> Walling, interview.

<sup>29</sup> Roberta Mullini, p. 219.

Melchiori as being ‘at least partly motivated by political reasons.’<sup>30</sup> Removing Clown Betts’s contribution to the riot scenes, a later addition attributed to Heywood in order to ‘create *ex novo* a role for the Clown’<sup>31</sup> but also ‘to discredit the rebels,’<sup>32</sup> restored those scenes to their original state. The dramatic, and political, rationale behind this was that the director too felt that this addition had been deliberately inserted in order to ‘denigrate the otherwise sympathetic plebeian character’ of the rioters.<sup>33</sup> Even with the casting problems that the play presents for such a small company, it would appear that this was a cut made to fit with the director’s view of the production, rather than for economic or practical reasons. Instead, in conversation, Walling revealed that it was made with the intention of maintaining that integrity and retaining a sense of dignity for these wronged Londoners, particularly as specific doubling choices drew close connections between the fates of More and their leader, John Lincoln.

The decision was also made to exclude the ‘Prentice Boys scene, another textual element which represents a challenge to that portrayal of integrity and dignity. This time, however, more pragmatic concerns took precedence. Working with a company of only 11, and with one company member playing ten parts, the director felt it necessary to reduce the number of more minor roles as far as possible. This fragment of a scene introduces three new characters and, given its brevity, the potential requirement for two rapid scene changes. Linguistically too this is a complex scene for a modern audience, with explanatory footnoting within the Revels edition extending to more lines than the

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<sup>30</sup> Revels, p. 4.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* p. 22.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* p. 30.

<sup>33</sup> Michael Walling ed., ‘Introduction to *Sir Thomas More: Acting Edition*’ (Stage One Theatre Company, 1989).



scene itself.<sup>34</sup> It is also incomplete in the manuscript. Its omission solved the staging difficulties in presenting such a short scene, reduced the number of roles, and diminished slightly the episodic nature of this first part of the play. It also met the stated directorial intention of maintaining the integrity of the rioters by avoiding any implication of their association with these uncontrolled young men; the probable political rationale behind the scene's insertion in the original manuscript. The directorial intent to avoid too much damage to the reputation of the rioting commons may, however, have been slightly undercut by the retention of the opening eight lines of II, ii, and originally marked for deletion, with their reference to an assault on Sir John Munday by a 'sort of prentices playing at cudgels' (1.3). Presumably to avoid unnecessary doubling, however, this production presented Sir Roger Cholmley as the victim, collapsing onto the stage in front of a shocked Lord Mayor. This brief report does, however, give a flavour of the dangers into which More will step when facing the rioters, whilst acknowledging that reportage and sight of the consequences of the assault do not have quite as potent an impact on an audience as would the presentation of the assault itself. This would also appear to have been the rationale behind Tilney's stricture that the play should open with 'A shortt reportt & not otherwise' of More's role as appeaser to the rebels.<sup>35</sup>

A further deletion in the script also enhanced this more positive depiction of the rioters. Their response to Surrey's announcement of a general pardon, coming of course too late to save Lincoln's life, was silence, rather than repeated cries of 'God Save the King' of the original text. As these lines were retained in the original acting script, and

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<sup>34</sup> Revels, pp. 211/2.

<sup>35</sup> Greg, W.W., ed., p. 1.

deleted in Ken Bones's handwriting, it would appear that changes were made during the rehearsal process. This omission of an easy shifting in attitude, bearing in mind the body of their hanged comrade was still visible on stage, may well have demonstrated a more consistent, unified and considered response than that of Jack Cade's followers in *The First Part of the Contention*, whose responses to authority were, feather-like, 'blown to and fro.'<sup>36</sup> Choosing a positive portrayal of the rebels does cohere with the opening scenes, and in the presentation of the rational and well-considered Bill to be read at the Spital meeting, but it then becomes more difficult to account for the transition from a coherent group to an anarchic rabble who hold a knife to the throat of a guard as More attempts to appease them. Inspired perhaps by an earlier textual warning – 'But if the English blood be once but up' (I.iii.57) - Walling chose to rationalise this descent into aggression and chaos by presenting the rebels as increasingly affected by alcohol as their behaviour deteriorated and their actions became more arbitrary.

This demonstration of the dehumanising realities of mob culture also emphasised the bravery of the play's protagonist, increasing the personal physical danger in which he placed himself when he stepped alone among the armed insurrectionists. In performance, it also drew a further parallel between John Lincoln and Thomas More. Both moved down the steps into the midst of the drunken, and potentially violent, group, using similar language to gain an audience. Doll and George Betts were indulging in a bout of mock stick fighting as Lincoln stepped between them, saying 'Peace, hear me' (II.iii.1), whilst More was faced with a similar, but much more dangerous situation. Walling took the

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<sup>36</sup> William Shakespeare, *The Complete Works*, ed. by Stanley Wells and others, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), p. 83.

decision here to have More threatened with a drawn weapon by Betts (Martin Head) and it is upon word 'Peace' that he builds his opening argument (II.iii.67). The sense of danger was sustained for a brief moment when Shrewsbury stepped closer with sword drawn in a threatening fashion before, smilingly, using it to ennoble More. From the King's representative on stage, this hint of threat physicalized for the audience More's own prophecy in the same scene that 'life and death hangs on our sovereign's eyes' (II.iii.229), strengthening the text's dramatic presentation of his rise and fall. These textual, and presentational links, challenge the perception that this text is too episodic, a perception that seems to have allowed critics to avoid detailed examination of the essential integrity of the play's structure.

The decision-making process behind such excisions, as with any directorial or editorial choices, becomes an additional element of the text as presented to the audience. Just as Tilney's hand in the manuscript operates as an important para-text illustrating both the workings of Renaissance theatre and the concerns of the Elizabethan State apparatus, so directorial cuts reveal both the dramatic and societal rationale behind them. In a similar fashion to the way in which a printed text hides from the reader the physical process of writing which is visible in a holographic manuscript such as this, so do a director's editorial choices hide from an audience elements of the original text. This is particularly the case when directing a rarely performed play such as *Sir Thomas More* and one in which the manuscript remains as an artefact demonstrating the relationship between both collaborators and censor. Tilney's role as Master of the Revels was known to Renaissance theatregoers but his impact on what was presented to them remained

hidden from them. Infuriatingly for modern scholars, perhaps, the actual impact of his intervention on performance could only be assessed if a contemporary printed play text were also extant. Although modern directors of the play may feel no ideological or political imperative to consider Tilney's excisions, any choices they make are similarly hidden from the intended audience, and may be reflective of other, more contemporary, political and social concerns.

If one accepts John Jowett's statement that 'A manuscript such as *Sir Thomas More* stands somewhere between the true palimpsest and the metaphoric' then directorial choices become another, often unseen, layer within that text.<sup>37</sup> Whilst not obscuring the narrative content of the manuscript, these choices do manipulate it to produce a particular reading of that text. Such cuts may also reflect the exigencies of producing a 400-year-old play text to a modern audience, together with the director's perception of what that audience will understand and appreciate. What may be inferred as the context of the dramatists' self-censorship of *Sir Thomas More* by the omission of any overt reference to the Articles More refused to sign, acknowledges (one assumes) that their intended audience would be well aware of the politically dangerous issue they addressed. No further explanation was required. The necessity of such complicity between playwright and audience is naturally lost over time, and understanding by the general public may even have differed during the comparatively short time period over which these three major productions were performed.

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<sup>37</sup> John Jowett 'Editing from a Manuscript: *Sir Thomas More*' (unpublished paper: Shakespeare Institute, 2005).

Generally, in this production directorial choices in doubling, tripling and, for some individuals many more roles, had a serious semiotic purpose and led to the retention of another scene that introduced a number of new characters; thereby creating casting problems for such a small acting company. V.ii is described in the Revels edition as ‘a theatrical device to avoid the staging of More’s trial’ a potentially dangerous dramatic topic in the reign of Henry VIII’s daughter, but also justified its inclusion here by supporting a clear directorial intention.<sup>38</sup> In conversation, Walling revealed that he hoped a central theme highlighted in this production would be the impact More’s personal journey had on the wider society he inhabited, with both staging and casting decisions being made to enhance this presentation. The close connection between More and the poor of London was particularly emphasised by the use of doubling, with casting choices following a coherent narrative intent, as well as more pragmatic, practical choices.

Given the number of roles, this is a play which demands an unusual amount of doubling, particularly when tackled by such a small, new company with limited funds. However, with one cast member (Tim Hudson) taking on ten roles, and with only Ken Bones and Anne White as Sir Thomas and Lady More respectively playing a single role each, Walling used these demands to advantage. Wilbert Johnson, in particular, was cast in a number of roles that illuminated More’s relationship with the people and the dramatic structure that drew these parallels. As John Lincoln he was engaged in dialogue with More during the quelling of the riot, and accepted his assurance of pardon from the king. He was also witness to More’s sudden ennoblement and the inherent undercurrent

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<sup>38</sup> Revels, p. 189.

of threatened violence which Walling inserted into that moment with Shrewsbury's briefly threatening behaviour. Graphically demonstrating the implicit truth of this regal threat to More, it was Lincoln's body that remained hanging above the audience in public view until the interval. There was, therefore, a clear textual and presentational link to More's own death in the same setting at the end of the second half. In addition, Johnson's casting as son-in-law Roper drew together the structural split between More's public and private lives which occurs at interval. An attentive audience member may also have found poignant echoes in the connection made between Johnson's role as the servant, who upon hearing of More's death sentence, expressed the hope that 'My Lord may come home again and all will be well' (V.ii.21-22) and the son-in-law's final visit to the condemned man. Here, Roper expresses the family's final loss of hope that 'We yet/although imprisoned, might have had your life' (V.iii.76-7).

This split between the public and private worlds More inhabited was clearly delineated by an interval that fell immediately following Lincoln's execution and More's subsequent knighthood. Opening the second half, therefore, was More's soliloquy expressing concern about his rapid elevation, allowing the audience to achieve some access to the interior life of the protagonist and helping inform the complexities of his character which become more apparent during this latter part of the play. Structurally, he is immediately placed in a series of positions reflecting his elevation in status, both personally and politically. The doubts expressed in the soliloquy were clearly demonstrated in this production, with Ken Bones's performance reflecting a man whose

decision are made 'in order to be ideally consistent with himself.'<sup>39</sup> The difficulties of achieving such consistency were first demonstrated by another meta-theatrical device centred around costume and power. Bones delivered More's soliloquy whilst fingering his robes of office displayed before him on a tailor's dummy, demonstrating an unwillingness actually to don them. This dichotomy between the trappings of office and the individual who wears them was emphasised by another role for Wilbert Johnson, who was cast as More's servant, Randall, in the Erasmus/Falkner scene. In undertaking a gentle gulling of Erasmus, Johnson as Randall wore these robes of office before More did. The audience was, therefore, presented with the same actor who had played the judicially murdered Lincoln now dressed in apparel which represented both the authority which had ordered his execution, and the rewards for a perceived loyalty to that power.

The impact of such authority was also highlighted by the decision to cast Vivienne Rochester in the roles of Doll Williamson, the Lady Mayoress, Margaret Roper and the Poor Woman. This combination placed the same actor in positions which once more linked More's public life with his personal, his accession to a position of authority and the arbitrary nature of his rise and fall. Again, the audience had the opportunity to draw connections between Doll's submission as a rebel leader to More's eloquence, and Margaret's dutiful submission as his daughter. Both were shown as pleading with him, and the textual links between Doll's 'keep thy promise now for the king's pardon' (II.iii.183) and Margaret's 'his majesty upon your meek submission/will yet, they say, receive you to his grace' were emphasised by this doubling of roles; particularly as Johnson was also present on both occasions in his roles as Lincoln and Roper. Further

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<sup>39</sup> Mullini, p. 219.

attention was drawn to the power of the unseen king by the casting of Rochester as the Poor Woman in Act V, Sc.i, and another plea that More was now unable to grant. His inability to act on her behalf represented a further indication of his fall from grace and the long reach of an invisible but omnipotent kingly authority as More excused himself with the explanation that ‘The King has ta’en the matter into his own hands’ (V.i.39).

By having the actor playing Lifter (Gerard O’Hare) double this role with that of More’s dishonest servant, among others, further light was shed on the impact of More’s sudden ennoblement. Having won the freedom of a recidivist pickpocket, More was faced with a similar offender in his own home. His reaction here was anything but jocular and by doubling the roles of Lifter and the erring servant this dichotomy was emphasised.<sup>40</sup> Ken Bones’s More here switched from jovial host to business-like statesman, to furious employer, with a speed reflecting the many, and sometimes contradictory, elements of More’s humanity, to which the text only subtly alludes. The intrusion into his own home of a dishonest man, with no apparent need for such dishonesty except personal greed, appears to have been presented as an attack on More’s personal integrity. His reaction too was of a man within, rather than on the fringes of, the State’s judicial apparatus. The consequences of the dangerous intransigence that led to his own downfall was physicalized on stage when, on his angry exclamation ‘Go one, and pull his coat over his ears’ (III.ii.340) the servant was stripped of both livery and security. An awareness of the fate of the unemployed in troubled times would have been hard to avoid, particularly following the players’ financial discussions. This fate too was recalled

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<sup>40</sup> This serving man is not shown on the Cast List, but the doubling choice was revealed in conversation with Michael Walling, along with the directorial rationale behind it.



when O'Hare later appeared as More's Secretary, Gough, bringing news of his master's sentence to other servants. Here, his reading of the terms of More's will not only have recalled Mark Anthony's use of such a device in *Julius Caesar* but also the irony that he had previously appeared as a servant who was no longer in a position to receive the benefits of 'him that was a kind lord to us all' (V.ii.33). O'Hare had also played Williamson, saved from death along with his fellow riotors by More's appeal to the king, and he was, therefore, present both to hear report of More's elevation and to bring news of his downfall. Throughout the doubling choices made there was a constant awareness that More's fall was not merely a matter of state, affecting only the King and those close to him, but that the arbitrary misuse of authority had implications for society as a whole.

As has been seen, some casting choices served a more dramatic purpose than the merely practical, and, by drawing parallels between More and the people of London, a number of decisions were clearly made to enhance the text's presentation of More as a folk hero rather than a Catholic saint. There were also choices that addressed more contemporary concerns about immigrants within urban society. In casting two young black actors as Doll Williamson and John Lincoln, the rebel leaders, the production emphasised the meta-theatricality of the text, presenting a society more representative of 20<sup>th</sup> century London than its Renaissance counterpart. It may also have been challenging to a contemporary audience to see, as one critic put it, 'the fine portrayal of racist rabble-rousers by black actors Wilbert Johnson and Vivienne Rochester' (as John Lincoln and Doll Williamson respectively).<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Sam Willetts, 'What's On' (12.9.90), in *London Theatre Review*, Issue No. 18 (1990), p.1165.

The amount of doubling required in staging *Sir Thomas More*, particularly with such a small company, may lead to confusion on the part of the audience and, naturally perhaps, seems to have encouraged productions that emphasised the play's inherent meta-theatricality. This may be one reason why both Michael Walling and Robert Delamere (Director, RSC, 2005) chose to stage the play in a presentational style which deliberately drew attention to its theatrical nature. Indeed, Walling stated his intention was 'to make it clearly a group of contemporary people who were telling the story' partly to avoid 'tell[ing] lies about Tim Hudson playing 400 parts' and also 'because the piece is so much about theatricality anyway.'<sup>42</sup> Much of the meta-theatricality of this production stemmed from a decision to have actors don and remove their robes of office in front of the audience – a decision which further emphasised the text's concern with the nature of power itself. The formal robes of office, ornate and Tudor in style, were clear indicators of the semiotics of power here. The Earls of Surrey and Shrewsbury were first presented in front of mirrors in a dressing room, only becoming figures of authority once they had robed for an official meeting at Court to discuss the uproar in the city. Similarly, and as already noted, More's only soliloquy was spoken as he fingered his new robes of office, and his unwillingness to don them clearly illuminated his concern that 'sure these things/Not physicked by respect, might turn our blood/To much corruption' (III.i.12-14).<sup>43</sup>

These robes of office were the most coeval in the production, and were, as in Nottingham, clearly based on Lockey's portrait. It would seem that the soldiers involved

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<sup>42</sup> Walling, personal interview.

<sup>43</sup> Revels, p. 121.

in the execution of John Lincoln were also dressed in uniforms after the Tudor style, with the trappings of power, therefore, most firmly rooted in the Renaissance period. Colour-coding too was used; with black and red, as Mullini reports, being ‘mainly used, to signify the protagonist’s misfortune and fortune respectively’.<sup>44</sup> Elsewhere, however, costume was not as clearly defined as ‘after the Tudor fashion.’<sup>45</sup> Instead, there were costuming choices delineated mainly along status lines. John Lincoln was hanged wearing an open-necked working man’s shirt of no particular vintage and Sherwin wore a long, brown storeman’s coat. Overall, costumes were deliberately ‘blended’ in order to create a sense of the production being ‘a modern view of the Renaissance.’<sup>46</sup> Generally the lower orders were dressed in shades of brown which blended with the rather stark, red-brick, set. In contrast, the ruling classes, Shrewsbury and Surrey particularly, were dressed in much brighter colours. As is visible in press photographs of Ken Bones as Thomas More, the original intention was to use a very ornate style of Renaissance dress in order to reflect his rise in status, but this was scaled back in performance.<sup>47</sup> More played the first half quite simply dressed, wore his more ornate and colourful robes for a short time, and appeared in the final scene in a simple open-necked shirt and trousers. He was, therefore, presented both textually and in performance, as a man most at home within the world of the common people of London.

The most fully realised Renaissance costumes were those worn by More’s household, and in particular by Anne White as Lady More, with the restrictive clothing

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<sup>44</sup> Mullini, p. 217.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Walling, personal interview.

<sup>47</sup> Stuart Morris [photographer], ‘Authority Problems’, *Independent*, (11 November 1990).

reflecting the restraints placed upon her as a Tudor wife and mother. There was, though, an indication of her domestic authority within those restrictions in the ornateness of her headdress. The play within the play too, seems to have been set very much in its period, when such a theatrical device was commonplace. This blend of costumes melded with the colour-blind casting and the obvious doubling of roles, to create a sense that this was a modern day view of the Renaissance, highlighting once more the meta-theatricality of the piece. Black was the predominant colour in More's household, with the family's costumes again strongly influenced by the Lockey portrait, and darkness was a feature of much of the production.

Walling revealed that, given the status of Stage One as a newly-established company lacking the resources of an organisation such as the RSC, staging and props were kept to a minimum. The basic set, comprising a bare rough-tiled stage with a high red-bricked wall as backdrop, did, however, incorporate different levels. A sketch of the set, helpfully included as part of a sponsor's advertisement in the programme, shows that the back wall had two entrances, one at the top and one mid-way down.<sup>48</sup> These were linked by a stairway which zigzagged from stage right to stage left and back again to stage right at ground level and which was used in a number of ways. There was no general schema, such as placing the ruling classes above and the others below, but at certain moments use of these levels did enhance More's connection with the rebels. Immediately prior to his quelling of the riot, he entered above, accompanied by the Lord Mayor and the Earls of Surrey and Shrewsbury. On beginning his speech of appeasement, however, he moved slowly down the staircase towards the rioters, who

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<sup>48</sup> Programme, [p. 4].

were holding the Serjeant hostage at ground level. He then stepped forward until he confronted the dangerous mob, freed their hostage and brought them to submission. Throughout this scene, the nobility remained aloof from the threat of violence, whilst More was presented as in personal danger. The executions of both Lincoln and More were staged on this upper level, drawing strong visual parallels between them.

A strong sense of the unseen authority behind these deaths was created by the use of the same staircase. As More presided over his first Privy Council meeting, Sir Thomas Palmer (Martin Head) appeared at the top of the staircase – visible only to the audience. His slow descent, bearing the undisclosed Articles from the King, mirrored that of More during the speech advocating obedience to authority, emphasising the moral dilemma created for him by the monarch's demand. Following his resignation, More once again appeared on the uppermost level, addressing his family below with the words 'Now afore God I am passing light' (IV.ii.53) and, although this staging may have reflected the lightness of spirit engendered by his decision, it also drew a visual link back to Lincoln's execution and forward to More's eventual end in the same spot. These journeys up and down the stairways were always undertaken alone, emphasising More's increasing isolation as he was forced to choose between obedience to the King or to his conscience. There was no specifically religious context for More's decision, reflecting a text written by a Puritan operating under a system of state censorship deeply concerned with religious division.

Again, due to limited resources, this production relied heavily on what *Time Out*'s Michael Wright referred to as 'David Taylor's highly sensitive lighting' in order to create atmosphere and to signal changes of both setting and mood.<sup>49</sup> The stage lighting narrowed to create a sensation of intimacy in More's scenes at home with his family, and most of the stage was in darkness in order to emphasise the claustrophobic atmosphere of the prison scenes. An increasing darkness pervaded the final scenes until the stage was flooded with light in order to reveal the public nature of his execution. This sudden contrast perhaps also created for the audience a similar experience to that of a prisoner emerging into the light after a long period of incarceration. The intention was to create a sense of the fear More experienced when finally faced with the consequences of his personal, moral stand; a demonstrable fear which Walling hoped would help 'remove the spectre of Paul Scofield' – whose portrayal of More in the 1966 film of Robert Bolt's *A Man for All Seasons* seems to haunt the reception of Munday's play.<sup>50</sup> In order further to demonstrate this fear, More's coffin was brought onto the stage, almost crash-landing at his feet on the words 'I see it, my good Lord' in response to Surrey's urging to remember 'the time of life is short' (V.vi.81). Such overt fear emphasised More's strength of character as he struggled with a strict, and very personal moral code which set him at odds with his family and, ultimately, isolated him from the politically pragmatic world around him. By allowing both the specific imperative behind More's decision and the contents of the Articles to remain hidden, the production sought to emphasise the universal relevance of such a moral dilemma.

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<sup>49</sup> Michael Wright, 'Time Out', (12.9.90), in *London Theatre Record*, Issue No. 18 (1990), p. 1166.

<sup>50</sup> Michael Walling, personal interview.

Such universality, however, did not inform critical response to the production, which reflected mainly its own theatrical concerns with the presentation of a little-performed text and the novelty of the company itself; the play's relevance, both coeval and contemporary, was less widely commented upon. Perhaps due to the size, and newness, of the company, its Press Night was not particularly well attended. However, one suspects partly at least because of Shakespeare's name, most of the major critics did review the show at some point during its run, with review dates ranging from 7 to 22 September 1990, the latter date being just one week before the end of the run. In fact, Georgina Brown of *The Independent* stressed this point by commenting that 'Had the big name not come up one suspects that this worthy exhumation might not have excited quite so much interest.'<sup>51</sup> Most critics, some more accurately than others, referred to the text's historical interest as an example of censorship at work, with Petronella Wyatt's previously reported comments on its lack of historical accuracy nicely counterpointing her own misunderstanding of the piece. There were certain shared elements within each theatrical review; addressing the play's historical context, its multi-authorship (with an emphasis on Shakespeare's limited contribution) and its relationship with political censorship. Some parallels with more contemporary political issues were also drawn, whilst others were not commented upon. Jeremy Kingston of *The Times*, for instance, drew interesting historical parallels between Tilney's concerns with the text's presentation of rioting Londoners at a time which 'coincided with another uprising of citizens voicing the same concerns' but drew no comparison with the London of 1990.<sup>52</sup> This seems almost an act of self-censorship worthy of the co-authors themselves, given

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<sup>51</sup> Georgina Brown, 'Authority Problems', in *Independent*, (11 September 1990).

<sup>52</sup> Jeremy Kingston, *The Times*, (8.9.90), in *London Theatre Record*, Issue No. 18, (1990), p. 1167.

that major headlines in 1990 included poll tax riots, the release of Nelson Mandela, an Act of Parliament which ‘gagged whistleblowers’ and continuing concerns about Britain’s increasingly close ties with the European Union.<sup>53</sup> Malcolm Rutherford, writing in the *Financial Times*, perhaps understandably, emphasised this contemporary concern, drawing on More’s own writings concerning ‘European federalism’ to suggest ‘a lasting topicality’. With an interesting echo of the intertextuality of the play text itself, which draws as source material upon biographies both of More and of Thomas Lord Cromwell, he also referenced *Utopia* to illustrate his argument that ‘More was always a potentially subversive figure.’<sup>54</sup>

Ultimately, however, it was the manuscript itself, and the exciting probability of such a lengthy example of Shakespeare’s handwriting, that drew most attention from the critics, reflecting the company’s own emphasis within their souvenir programme. At a time when the long debated attribution was being formally acknowledged in the academic press, with the publication of the Revels edition, it would seem that Renaissance drama was still being viewed by acting companies and critics alike through a lens that was always centred upon William Shakespeare.

Just as this lens appears to have influenced the number of theatrical reviews written about this production, it seems that it also bore heavily on academic responses. These were noticeably weighted towards the play text rather than the performance, and this seems, in turn, to have impacted upon the performance history. The play itself

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<sup>53</sup> BBC website, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/> [accessed 20 September 2006].

<sup>54</sup> Malcolm Rutherford, *Financial Times*, Reviews, 10 September 1990.



appears to have become trapped into a cycle in which it is not performed because of its lack of performance history, a situation which also affects both academic and theatrical interest in such performances. As critical response is so often informed by comparisons with previous productions, it is naturally difficult to set a production of such a little known Renaissance text, with such a limited performance history, into such a context. Although Petronella Wyatt's brief review generated an academic response from Roberta Mullini in her essay 'The Book of Sir Thomas More and its Performance' some six years later this would, unfortunately, appear to be the only academic response to this performance. Even though *Shakespeare Survey* carried an article, also in 1990, on 'The Play of *Sir Thomas More* and some Contemporary Events' it has not been possible to discover a corresponding review of the play in production.<sup>55</sup> From contact with the editors of *Shakespeare Survey* it would appear that Honigman's copy would have been received by them 'in its final form late in 1989 and possibly considerably earlier.'<sup>56</sup>

Although this article could not itself have had the opportunity to discuss the play in performance, neither did it generate any ongoing interest in the production. The subsequent edition, in fact, reviews two new books addressing Shakespeare's connection with the manuscript, but again makes no reference to the play in performance.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, the only mention of the production appears as a brief note in *Shakespeare Survey* 45 (1993) under the heading 'Professional Productions in the British Isles' and a sub-heading of 'Shakespeare Apocrypha.' Here the play is listed alongside a production of

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<sup>55</sup> E.A.J. Honigmann, 'The Play of Sir Thomas More and Some Contemporary Events', *Shakespeare Survey* 42, (1990), 77-84.

<sup>56</sup> Peter Holland, personal correspondence with the author (12 December 2006).

<sup>57</sup> MacDonald P. Jackson, reviewer, 'Editions and Textual Studies', *Shakespeare Survey* 43, (1990), 255-270, pp. 262-3

*Arden of Faversham*, also played in a small London venue (The Old Red Lion) and only basic information is given. The play's authorship is once more inaccurately ascribed to 'William Shakespeare and Anthony Munday, etc,' and other than information on venue, company, director, and star, the only additional comment is that the play was '[B]illed (inaccurately) as the first professional performance.'<sup>58</sup> *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 42, 1991 certainly seems to indicate a growing interest in the play in the year following this production, but again this interest appears to have been in the play text rather than its performance. Listings of publications addressing the 'Apocrypha' contain not only the Revels edition itself, but also papers discussing attribution, classification, and sources. In addition, comparisons were drawn with both *A Man for All Seasons* and *Thomas Lord Cromwell*.<sup>59</sup>

There is, however, a dearth of academic response to the production itself at the time of its performance. It has not been possible to trace any response to the staging of the play, even when contemporaneous academic papers address the text. Although *Shakespeare Bulletin* has an emphasis on North American productions, it also reviews performances from the United Kingdom, as well as feature articles and book reviews. In the Spring edition of 1991, therefore, Roslyn L. Knutson reviews both the Revels edition and *Shakespeare and Sir Thomas More: Essays on the Play and its Shakespearean Interest* edited by T.H. Howard-Hill, and published by CUP in 1989.<sup>60</sup> No mention of the Stage One production, however, appears in the editions appearing in the four quarters

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<sup>58</sup> Niky Rathbone, compiler, 'Professional Shakespeare Productions in the British Isles: January-December 1990', *Shakespeare Survey* 45, (1993), 145-157, p. 157

<sup>59</sup> 'Play Groups', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 42,1-4 (1991) 654-655, p. 654-5.

<sup>60</sup> Roslyn L. Knutson, 'Book Reviews', *Shakespeare Bulletin*, 9 (Spring 1991), 35-42, (pp. 37-39).

beginning in the winter of 1990. *Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama* does not appear to have been published between Vol. XXX in 1988 and XXXI in 1992, thereby avoiding the possibility of an academic review here, nor does any mention of the play (or, interestingly, of the Revels edition) appear in the 1992 'Index to Volumes XVII-XXX' pages 105-113. A search of the 'Cumulative Index to Topics' in *Shakespearean Criticism*, 14, reveals no reference to the play at all, nor is Ken Bones referred to in the 'Cumulative Index to Artists.' *Cahiers Elizabethains* did not review this production either, although, interestingly Stage One's production of Marlowe's *Dido, Queen of Carthage* in November 1993 was reviewed, even though this took place at the Stamford Arts Centre. This may be an indication of Marlowe's canonical status, or that the Shaw Theatre production was simply overlooked. A search of *World Shakespeare Bibliography* appears to confirm that no academic response to Stage One's production but the Roberta Mullini article exists.<sup>61</sup>

Bridging the gap between the academic and the journalistic review is the *Times Literary Supplement* review which appeared in the 14-20 September 1990 issue. This time lapse between performance and reaction allowed a more considered, and an interestingly personal, analysis of both text and performance. Overtly critical of Bones's performance as 'an inwardly vain and passionate man rigorously curbing his nature,' he nevertheless seeks to present this as a valid interpretation of what he considered to be Munday's 'passionately anti-Catholic' authorial intent.<sup>62</sup> This response emphasises the religious elements within the text, which were not picked up by the journalistic reviews at

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<sup>61</sup> World Shakespeare Bibliography website: <http://www.worldshakesbib.org/> [accessed 6 December 2006].

<sup>62</sup> John Henry James, 'The Mighty Fallen', *Times Literary Supplement*, 14-20 September 1990, p. 975.

the time. As has been previously, mentioned, any contextualisation there was more to do with the very contemporary issues of anti-racism and England's relationship with Europe.

Unfortunately for the Stage One Theatre Company, however, although Shakespeare's name did, at least, generate this large number of media reviews, these proved insufficient to guarantee commercial success. Despite this heavy coverage by reviewers, and many positive comments on both the play and the production, the company played to almost empty houses throughout the short run. Partly, perhaps, because such reviews appeared in print at different times during that run. In fact, Michael Walling admitted that his new company was almost bankrupted by its first attempt to stage this piece of theatrical history. Any new, precariously funded, company takes a financial risk in staging a little known play, by a number of lesser known authors, and, therefore, there is a strong commercial imperative to invoke Shakespeare's name where possible. Although commercial interests are not as overt within the academic world, scholarly responses to the performance of works by canonical authors operate within a world where such responses can be contextualised in relation both to other academic work and to other productions. Status is, therefore, increased by connection with the iconic name of William Shakespeare, and the commercial impact of such a connection will perhaps militate against Munday and his other co-authors ever achieving full recognition for this contribution to this multi-authored text.

## STAGING *THOMAS MORE* AT THE RSC - 2005

Censorship, Shakespeare and the stage history of *Sir Thomas More* are inextricably linked, with the hand of the Master of the Revels attempting to revise the drama in a manner acceptable to the authorities, whilst still allowing it for performance – connections exploited to the full in the RSC’s pre-publicity for its first production of the play in 2005. The text’s revisions, however, indicate no sustained attempt to address Tilney’s concerns, seeking instead to improve the play’s dramatic potential. The many hands involved in the construction of this extant manuscript, therefore, reflect the debate between the requirements of the stage and the authority of the State as much as that between More’s conscience and the supremacy of the Monarch – a subtle reflection of the play’s inherent meta-theatricality.

The Master of the Revels attempted to make a powerful contribution to the final dramatic piece; without apparent success as it seems never to have been staged in the lifetime of either censor or authors. This lack of a performance history in its own period reflects the inability to reconcile such fundamental differences. There is, of course, no record either of any attempt to seek for a second time a licence to perform, but neither did Tilney dismiss the play out of hand. Perhaps the self-censorship inherent in the text and the anonymity afforded the Articles which More and Rochester refuse to sign informed Tilney’s decision not to forbid this scene entirely, indicating rather that it should be ‘all altrd.’<sup>1</sup> The decision to leave untouched Rochester’s refusal, but to seek amendment of the recording of More’s response, is indicative of Tilney’s major concerns here. The

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<sup>1</sup> W.W. Greg, ed., p. 42.

attempted censorship of the text is most strongly weighted towards the secular concern about social unrest and the battle between individual conscience and State authority, rather than specifically sectarian religious concerns that even in Elizabeth's reign may have seemed less contentious. The RSC's first production of this play opted to emphasise secular concerns rather than to present More as a religious martyr. This choice reflected not only an attempt to draw parallels with contemporary issues, but was also an acknowledgement of a modern, secular society. The play was written at a time when the Reformation was no longer new-fledged, and the passage of time had perhaps allowed the Established Church to feel less threatened by remnants of Catholicism within the general population, who had certainly not risen as a body in support for the Armada of 1588. Similarly, the religious realities behind the presence of persecuted strangers in London are peripheral to the general xenophobic fear, antipathy and danger that the drama presents.

In contrast to his wish merely to amend the scene surrounding More's refusal, Tilney was adamant that the opening scenes of insurrection be left out 'wholly and the cause thereof'. Instead, he offered the suggestion that the play should begin with 'Sr Tho: Moore at ye mayors sessions with a report afterwards off his good service', indicating no serious concern about this sympathetic portrait of a Catholic martyr executed on the orders of Elizabeth's father. The Master of the Revels's further instruction that More's pacification of a 'mutiny Agaynst the Lombards' should be merely reported and not shown 'at your own perilles' militates against a belief in the power of the audience to hear what was not shown (or at least the censor's interpretation

of the impact of a play), his objection to the use of words such as ‘straungers’ and ‘ffrenchmen’ and the marking for deletion of II.iv.17-30 all indicate two major concerns for any censor. References to the abuses suffered by Londoners at the hands of ‘aliens’ came too close to the ‘troublous times’ (II.iv.17) existing in London during the period in which it seems that the original playscript was submitted for approval. Given the theatre’s role as the primary transmitter of popular culture, particularly in the metropolis, the Master of the Revels indeed walked a fine line between containment and suppression. Such concerns are not of paramount importance in 21st century Britain, particularly as theatre is no longer perceived to be a subversive medium.

Although no accurate date has been established, either for the original text or its revisions, editors generally agree the Tilney’s contribution can be assumed to be made to a play book submitted for approval in the early 1590s, a period of increasing anti-alien unrest in London. The staging of the Ill May Day Riots of 1517, along with scenes showing apprentice boys abusing foreigners, were too close for comfort in a city which saw disturbances break out throughout the period, culminating in fully-fledged rioting in 1593 and 1595. In addressing the Martin Marprelate controversy, Richard Dutton proposes that Tilney’s ‘role seems more to have been one of preserving public order than of promoting ideological orthodoxy;’ an argument supported by his interventions into the manuscript of *Sir Thomas More*.<sup>2</sup>

Janet Clare argues cogently against this interpretation of the role of Master of the Revels, but it is difficult to read Tilney’s reaction to *Sir Thomas More* as that of ‘the

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<sup>2</sup> Dutton, p. 80.

agent of that most arbitrary and punitive instrument of state control [viz. censorship].'<sup>3</sup> Indeed, it would be most surprising that working playwrights would even have submitted to the censor a sympathetic portrayal of a Catholic martyr condemned to death by the father of the present monarch. Unconcerned with the dramatic impact of his intervention, which left the original collaborators with an unperformable piece, Tilney was, however, deeply concerned with the impact upon a potential audience. At a time where public disorder and the theatre were closely linked in the collective minds of the City Authorities and when anti-alien riots were feared, the presentation of such an analogous situation on the public stage was thought too provocative. As Laura Hunt Yungblut states, ““Evil May Day” is the best known of the attacks [on immigrants residing in London] but risings and attempted risings against foreigners occurred with surprising frequency all the way through the century.’<sup>4</sup>

Unlike other scenes of civic unrest in the drama of the period, including Shakespeare’s *Coriolanus* and *2 Henry VI*, *Sir Thomas More* may well have struck closer to home. Its setting, using place names and connotations familiar to its audience, and its graphic description of the wrongs suffered by fellow Londoners at the hands of the aliens, seem clear analogies with the London for which it was written. *Coriolanus*, with its Roman source and setting, and its less sympathetic view of the amorphous mass of ‘Citizens’ avoided any close censorial attention. Nor does Jack Cade exhibit the nobility of Doll Williamson or the dignity of Sherwin, preparing to go to their deaths for

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<sup>3</sup> Janet Clare, *Art Made Tongue-tied by Authority: Elizabethan and Jacobean Dramatic Censorship* (Manchester: MUP, 1990) p. 215.

<sup>4</sup> Laura Hunt Yungblut, *Strangers Settled Here Amongst Us: Policies, Perceptions and the Presence of Aliens in Elizabethan England* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996) p. 40.



defending what was theirs. Portrayed as an ignorant, boastful thief, mocked even by his fellow 'rebels', it is unlikely that an audience would be moved to ally themselves with his cause. The strongest driving force behind Tilney's objections, therefore, was the close analogy between the dramatic situation so clearly portrayed, and the realities of life in 1590s London. By the 21<sup>st</sup> century such analogies were the stuff of promotional material and public discussion.

This conjunction of the hands of the National Bard and the State Censor has stimulated academic and dramatic interest in a play that might otherwise have remained as unperformed in modern times as in its own. Whilst less than subtly drawing upon this documentary connection, the RSC's promotional material cunningly avoided the inconvenient fact that there is no indication that Shakespeare's contribution was ever submitted for approval. It is, however, Tilney's hand in the original manuscript insisting that the author(s) 'Leave out the insurrection wholly with the Cause ther off', scenes in Munday's hand, that gave rise to the RSC's promotional material marketing their 2005 production of the piece.<sup>5</sup> This production of 'Shakespeare's banned play' was carefully, and somewhat misleadingly, marketed to link England's greatest dramatist with contemporary concerns about an uncontrolled influx of foreigners following the 2004 expansion of the European Union to include Eastern European countries such as Poland, and fears that migrant workers may 'eat the bread from the fatherless children, and take the living from all the artificers' (I.ii.11-12). The *Gunpowder Season* in the Swan Theatre opened with:

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<sup>5</sup> W.W. Greg, ed., p. 1.

‘Shakespeare’s ‘banned’ play written in collaboration with Anthony Munday and Henry Chettle. Race riots and dissent abound in London as a result of asylum seekers from the Continent fleeing religious persecution. Londoners see them as a threat to their employment and relationships. Thomas More attempts to quell the uprising with wise words pleading for racial harmony.’<sup>6</sup>

It may be worthwhile to take a moment to deconstruct this thematic summary. Shakespeare’s name is the obvious ‘tag’ on which the rest of the statement is hung; with Munday and Chettle relegated to bit players and Dekker and Heywood ignored completely – perhaps not totally unexpectedly given the iconic status of the RSC’s house playwright, and indeed of the organisation itself. The scare quotes are a subtle, and perhaps tongue-in-cheek acknowledgement of the fact that the play itself was never ‘banned’ and that Shakespeare’s contribution may be read as a possible sop to State censorship. Such subtleties would be easily overlooked by anyone not conversant with the text’s history. This is a rather enjoyable reversal of the authors’ own attitude to censorship. It is inconceivable that the play’s contentious nature would have been open for public debate, let alone promotion, during its own period and the self-censorship apparent in the Articles scene is proof of this. However, once ‘allowed’ by the censor on the page a text may become more overtly political on the stage. Philip Massinger’s apologetic Prologue to *Believe As You List*:

‘... If you find our Roman Empire here,  
Or hapless Asian continent, draw too near

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<sup>6</sup> Royal Shakespeare Company, *Gunpowder Season*, promotional material, [April 2005].

A late and sad example ...'

may well have been added for performance, and not included in the original playbook finally approved by Henry Herbert.<sup>7</sup> This play too formed a part of the same 'Gunpowder' Season, with the promotional tag line 'The Hunt for Rome's Most Wanted.'<sup>8</sup> Again, Renaissance concerns, addressed obliquely through allusion and subtlety, became the bold subject matter of 21<sup>st</sup> century commercial considerations.

Within *Sir Thomas More*, the strong emphasis on a dramatic theme which dominates less than a third of the play, and disappears almost completely in the second half is also interesting. The treatment of asylum seekers was dominating the run-up to the General Election due in May 2005 and, therefore, engaged much public and media attention, particularly in light of the growing electoral support for the British National Party. As the BBC News website reported on 5 April that year, 'Mori's monthly political attitudes poll has consistently recorded immigration as one of the top concerns among those questioned.'<sup>9</sup> The play itself, however, is at least as much concerned with the more complex contemporary issues of civil liberties, freedom of conscience and of expression. Street riots against immigrants who had settled in many Northern towns are ample demonstrations of the violence bred of the kind of fear exhibited in the early part of the play, and such parallels were drawn in critical reviews of the RSC's *Thomas More*. At times feeding almost directly from the RSC's own promotional material, critics picked up

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<sup>7</sup> Philip Massinger, *Believe As You List: A Tragedy*, ed. by T. Crofton Croker (London: Printed for the Percy Society by Richards, 1834, [Prologue], p. 106.

<sup>8</sup> RSC, *Gunpowder*.

<sup>9</sup> Dominic Casciani, *Election Issues: Immigration: Analysis*, <http://news.bbc.co.uk> (5 April 2005) [accessed 17 May 2006].

much more overtly on the message of the first half of the play, relegating More's crisis of conscience to a minor element of the whole. Commenting upon those scenes that could not have been performed in the Renaissance period, Benedict Nightingale of *The Times* draws a clear parallel with contemporary concerns, describing the production as one that 'treats issues that matter in 2005', and specifying 'xenophobia' as the major issue.<sup>10</sup> More subtle parallels between the curtailment of freedom of speech by the office of the Master of the Revels, and of the freedom of conscience curtailed by the imprisonment and death of the protagonist were, however, largely ignored in the printed media. Whilst keen to stress the play's modern relevance, there also seemed to be attempts at drawing distinctions between Munday's rioters and 'our own anxieties and moral evasions over asylum-seekers.'<sup>11</sup> Michael Billington of *The Guardian* expressed concern that the modern-dress production 'pre-empts our own awareness of the play's topicality,' although a more accepted argument may be that Jacobean dress distances a modern audience from a production's contemporary relevance.<sup>12</sup> *The Independent's* Paul Taylor certainly argued that 'what gave the censor pause will give a modern audience pause, too' and that the depiction of the insurrection 'comes across as inflammatory.'<sup>13</sup>

Radio, at the time of the production's opening, was keener to stress its wider political implications. BBC Radio Four's *Start the Week* set its discussion about the play as part of a wider debate.<sup>14</sup> Chaired by Andrew Marr, the programme linked humanity's response to asylum seekers, the question of animal rights, repression and suicide in

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<sup>10</sup> Benedict Nightingale, 'Riotous Assemblies Ring a Bell', *The Times*, 28 March 2005, p. 17.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Taylor, 'Explosive Stuff', *Independent*, 24 March 2005, Reviews, p. 8.

<sup>12</sup> Michael Billington, 'Thomas More/A New Way to Please You', *Guardian*, 26 March 2005, p. 22.

<sup>13</sup> Taylor, *ibid.* pp.8-9.

<sup>14</sup> *Start the Week*, Presenter: Andrew Marr, BBC Radio Four, 7 March 2005.

Ukraine, and the Channel 4 docu-drama *The Government Inspector*. This programme, broadcast on 17 March 2005, dramatised the events surrounding the death of Dr David Kelly, who had recently appeared before the Hutton Enquiry to explain his revelations to Andrew Gilligan, a journalist, concerning the validity of documentary evidence used to support Britain's involvement in the Iraq war.

A broad debate about the contemporary relevance of *Sir Thomas More* ensued, not only about asylum seekers, but also with strong parallels being drawn between the world of Henry VIII and the present time. The monarch who sent More to his death and presided over a massive growth in capital offences, was linked to what Kosminsky described as an erosion of 'the tenets of civilised society' in Britain over the last five years, including 'the separation of powers between the Executive and the Judiciary, trial by a jury of your peers' and the principle of innocent until proved guilty. Robert Delamere too drew parallels with contemporary threats to Habeas Corpus, and 'the executive class drawing power to itself.' Such an open debate, available to anyone who wished to hear it, could not have been conceived at a time when control of public opinion was much more overt. Pressure, however, was certainly brought to bear upon potential contributors by what Kosminsky described as 'a profoundly secretive government, alarmed by the concept of scrutiny.'<sup>15</sup>

There was, however, no need for a 21<sup>st</sup>-century censor either to ban the broadcasting of such a debate, or to amend a 400-year-old text to avoid public unrest at its performance; neither were these much more contentious contemporary analogies so

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<sup>15</sup> Peter Kosminsky, 'The Answer is No', *Guardian*, 8 March 2005, p. 24

sharply drawn in either the publicity material or the print media's response. The *Start the Week* discussion did, however, establish the climate of fear and suspicion within which the RSC's production was presented. Certainly, however, the production at the RSC, with its iconic combination of monarchy and Shakespeare, generated no violent public outrage.

Since the abolition of the Lord Chamberlain's Office, there has been no formal vehicle for government censorship of theatre, and the British Board of Film Classification operates as a non-Governmental regulatory body. The regulation of what is acceptable in public entertainment is now taken up by small, but vocal, pressure groups. Some of the most effective of these pressure groups have sprung from communities who could be considered as modern equivalents to those whose presence first aroused the May Day Riots of 1517.

A play at the Birmingham Repertory, with an opening night due just three months before that of *Sir Thomas More* and less than an hour's drive away, aroused an irate response. This little known new play *Behzti* (Dishonour) by a Sikh female, Gurprett Kaur Bhatti, hit the headlines in a way *Sir Thomas More* has never done. As no national review appeared, it would seem that major publications saw little need to send a critic to its Press Night on 16 December 2004. By the following Monday, however, the play's title and content were dominating the media and it became, if briefly, a *cause celebre* for freedom of speech. British-born Bhatti's play portrayed acts of sexual abuse and murder within a gurdwara (Sikh temple) and, therefore, was considered offensive by many –

Sikhs and non-Sikhs alike. It was not, though, government legislation or local negotiation that brought the run to a premature close, but local protests led by Sikh leaders led to the evacuation of ‘over 800 people’, whilst ‘security guards were attacked and thousands of pounds’ worth of damage was caused.’<sup>16</sup> It was the sort of violent protest launched by the London rioters of 1517, and feared by Tilney when he set his hand to the playbook, that achieved this objective. As the play text of *Behzti* was being offered for sale on the same page as Theatre Record’s scathing editorial about its cancellation, it must be assumed that it was the immediate impact of live theatre that most concerned the protestors.<sup>17</sup> There is, therefore, some irony in the amount of publicity such a cancellation generated.

Having been premiered in a newly built provincial theatre in 1964, and debuted in London in 1990 by an unknown, and newly-established, company, *Sir Thomas More* finally reached Stratford-upon-Avon in 2005 with the contentious issue of theatrical censorship still close, both in terms of time and of geography. The Royal Shakespeare Company’s imprimatur led to a much wider audience, and far greater publicity, than had previously been achieved, with much of the publicity concerned with the contribution, and putative ‘censorship’ of the company’s ‘house playwright.’ This first staging by the RSC opened in the Swan Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, on 9 March 2005, travelling to The People’s Theatre, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, before closing for the final time at the Trafalgar Studios, London, on 14 January 2006. The production opened a *Gunpowder Season* by the same ensemble company, which also comprised Middleton and Rowley’s

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<sup>16</sup> BBC News, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/>, [accessed 15 March, 2005].

<sup>17</sup> Ian Shuttleworth, ‘Prompt Corner’, in *London Theatre Record*, 25-26, 2-31 December 2004, p. 1659.

*A New Way to Please You*, Massinger's *Believe What You Will*, Ben Jonson's *Sejanus: His Fall* and a newly commissioned piece by Frank McGuinness, *Speaking Like Magpies*. All of the Renaissance plays were promoted as being contentious or dangerous within their own period, with *Sir Thomas More* perhaps the most famously censored. During its long run, across three theatres, there were changes in staging necessitated by the different playing spaces, and, more importantly, some significant textual changes that will be discussed in detail later. There were also, however, significant performative alterations that affected the tone and balance of the production during this period. An analysis of the production will attempt to assess directorial intention, how specific choices influenced its tone and impact upon its audience and how such decisions were recorded.

Heavily promoted as 'Shakespeare's banned play' in which 'race riots and dissent abound' as Londoners see them [asylum seekers] as a threat to their employment,'<sup>18</sup> Robert Delamere in many ways challenged this simple, if topical, marketing ploy; conceived and produced in Stratford whilst the company rehearsed in London. The production, instead, attempted to address, in a cohesive manner, much more complex, yet equally topical, concerns about personal liberty, the boundaries of State authority and the fearful consequences of a society in which violence may be considered an acceptable response to threats. In doing so, however, a further challenge was to retain the text's presentation of one man's decision to face death at the hands of an authority he had previously sought to defend and to address the often oblique narrative for a modern audience.

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<sup>18</sup> RSC, *Gunpowder*. These statements were reiterated in flyers, posters and the programme for performances in Stratford, Newcastle and London.



The initial set comprised a bare stage liberally strewn with ash and debris, with a backdrop of torn hangings and damaged auditorium seating; a framing device considered by the director, Robert Delamere, to provide both a ‘place of memory’ from within which the Londoners re-enact their hero’s history, and a ‘poetic framework’ for a piece rooted so strongly in one man’s life story.<sup>19</sup> This was a setting in which traumatic events had occurred, and created a sense of potential further violence. The burned out seating was not, however, simply another theatre but instead, as a projector light cut through the darkened auditorium, it may also have been read as the battle-scarred ruins of a cinema. This conflation of two iconic representations of popular culture, drawing together the popularity of Renaissance theatre and the importance of cinema, particularly as a medium for the transmission of both news and propaganda during the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, universalised the play’s subject matter. The tension between the beautiful Swan Theatre, the RSC’s own iconic representation of a Renaissance theatre, and the destruction of another place of both entertainment and information, seemed deliberately unsettling.

Through the half-light of this scene of destruction moved an assorted group of ill-dressed citizens, dressed in the working-class garments of the mid-twentieth century, as a violin and accordion played plaintively. The music’s creation of a mournful and elegiac mood, incorporating both Eastern European and Romany elements, added to a sense of uncertainty and of alienation. Although the text itself is deeply embedded in the rapidly developing early modern city of London, the play was no longer rooted specifically in

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<sup>19</sup> Robert Delamere, Director, *Thomas More*, Royal Shakespeare Company, personal interview with the author (London: 11 January 2006).

either time or place. Instead, the production presented a much less specific picture of a society experiencing violent change and the poverty it brings. Having then taken their seats, as if perhaps to view some cinema newsreel reporting on the civil unrest responsible for the destruction surrounding them, members of the 22-strong company stepped forward in turn to present *Sir Thomas More* as a play within the play, illustrating their own interpretation of the life of a local hero. The democratisation of this original title simply to *Thomas More* reflected the iconic status the protagonist held in the eyes of the common man and the unhistorical elements of the play text that exaggerate his humble beginnings. There was also a sense throughout the production that the protagonist is less than comfortable with his rapid ennoblement.

The setting, music and costumes all acted as directorial pointers to a much broader contemporary relevance than the parallels with the contentious issue of asylum seekers that had been stressed in the RSC's promotional material. Instead, the much more pervasive themes of violence and State power versus the individual were introduced almost immediately. This conflict built throughout the play, with some extremely entertainingly staged scenes of light relief undercutting and, paradoxically heightening, the unfolding tragedy.

The decision to stage the play in 20<sup>th</sup> century dress was taken independently of any overall strategy for the Season, which comprised an Elizabethan styling for *Believe What You Will*, a striking 1970s vision for *A New Way to Please You*, and a *Sejanus* set very much in its Roman period. Robert Delamere, as start-up director for the Season, felt

strongly that the costumes of both Rome and Renaissance England have an ‘iconic status’ that, whilst creating for the audience a theatrical spectacle, also run the risk of distancing them from engaging fully with the text. He felt particularly that ‘doublet and hose’ costumes are far too easy to satirise into what he described as ‘Tudor bling.’<sup>20</sup> Such contemporary staging, interestingly, was adopted by the only modern play in the Season, with *Speaking Like Magpies* set very much in the Jacobean world of ruffs, farthingales, and extravagant spectacle, including a ‘Masque of Death.’ Instead, Delamere was keen to reinforce the play’s broader relevance, downplaying much of the religious iconography present in the text, and presenting, instead, aesthetic references from which audiences could draw analogies with more modern concerns about wider issues of State power and control.

The decision to remove overt religious symbolism may have spoken to a less theistic audience than that originally encountered by the playwrights, but also restricted interpretation and relevance. In a world where religion and violence were yet again closely linked it was perhaps unfortunate that this connection was so understated in this production. Although this oblique approach to the text echoed that of its original authors, whose subtle attempts to avoid the pen of the censor would seem generally to have failed, it seemed unnecessarily limiting. Many modern audience members were confused about the unsigned Articles that so rapidly brought about More’s downfall – an unavoidable consequence of the passage of time perhaps – but no problem would have been posed for a Renaissance audience for whom these events still carried political resonance. The absence of any such clear indication of More’s strong religious convictions undercut the

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<sup>20</sup> Delamere.

hagiographical elements of the play highlighted by many critics. His rejection of the pleas of his family seemed, at times, arbitrary and irrational without any indication of the deep-seated religious belief that drove his decision overtly to challenge earthly authority and led, eventually, to his death at the hands of a 'God on earth' (II.iii.112).

The violence of that death, which was not depicted on stage here, nevertheless permeated this production. The choice of a vaguely mid-20<sup>th</sup> century setting hinted at a society looking back to a sense of pre-war security but also forward to the possibility of greater opportunities and social mobility, together with the tensions such movements bring. Parallels perhaps could be drawn with a Renaissance London in turmoil as its population expanded rapidly and a mercantile class was beginning to make its political presence felt; reflected in the text's unusually large number of characters, representing a cross-section of a class-ridden community. The underlying violence was demonstrated clearly, mirroring both Renaissance and modern realities as the extremes of human behaviour were staged. State sanctioned violence was shockingly portrayed, and the physical and sexual tensions between the citizens, the incomers and the ruling classes were also made clear in the staging.

Although More's only soliloquy was lost in the major textual cuts made mid-run, the staging of key scenes allowed Nigel Cooke the opportunity to indicate aspects of More's interior life. His close ties to London and its inhabitants were clearly demonstrated, often in sharp contrast to his less easy relationships with those figures representing State authority. This closeness was demonstrated obliquely in the execution

of John Lincoln, another whose challenge to earthly authority leads to his State-sanctioned death. The decision to stage this death graphically, with Lincoln urinating in the process, was surely intended to resonate with modern sensibilities surrounding the current debate on the repatriation of terror suspects to countries retaining the death penalty, and which led in December 2005 to the formation of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Extraordinary Rendition.<sup>21</sup> In contrast, More's death was left to the collective imaginations of both the stage and the actual audience, allowing him a dignity not afforded to the less elevated Lincoln. Throughout the production, More was portrayed as a man caught not only between his King and his conscience, but between the ruler and the ruled. His elevation was never an unalloyed joy and he was often presented as uncomfortable with his new responsibilities.

The rejection of Renaissance costume left the problem of staging visually the power of the ruling classes. Tudor Sumptuary Laws indicate that any contemporary audience would have read signals of status and authority through costume, but modern society is far less easily defined by appearance. This production did, however, make powerful use of one remaining iconic symbol of status and of power – the dinner jacket. From the moment that two young men strode confidently across the stage, arrayed in evening dress, two central elements of modern social tension were signalled. These tensions were immediately and visibly delineated along lines of race and social status, and emphasised by the decision to cast young black actors to present the aggressively arrogant Lombards as so clearly 'other'; distinct from the indigenous population in both

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<sup>21</sup> All Party Parliamentary Group on Extraordinary Rendition: <http://www.extraordinaryrendition.org/> [accessed 17 May 2006]

racial and financial terms. Whilst working against the text, and again removing any religious context, this choice foregrounded both Elizabethan and current concerns of otherness. This very clear choice was not, however, true across the entire production, with the rest of the casting remaining 'colour-blind.' This duality was generally confusing, but did physicalise the racial tensions, as clothing did those tensions that arose through class. It also gave a contemporary relevance to the depiction of the riots later in the play, expanding the asylum-seeker parallels upon which the production's publicity so heavily relied across a broad sweep of modern European history. From Londoners dressed as if they themselves were Eastern European immigrants, to young black men who perceived themselves to be above the law, the production presented a microcosm of the problems inherent when differing cultures clash in a rapidly changing world – particularly a world already in flux and struggling against internal inequities. The increasing complexity of power relations within the text were constantly demonstrated in performance, not least with the addition of the presence of de Bard and Cavaler as silent participants in I.iii.

Far removed from the environment in which they had so blatantly abused the poor of the city, the RSC staged this scene as an elegant cocktail party in which the mercantile and ruling classes could meet socially. Here the young Lombards were welcome guests, handing their drained crystal wine glasses to anonymous servants and departing cheerily, before the Earl of Shrewsbury raised the issue of 'the displeased commons of the city' (I.iii.8). Once again, evening dress not only symbolised authority, but also the isolation of the ruling classes from those whose fate rested in their hands. More was not yet in

attendance and this was a social elite from whom he too was distanced prior to his elevation – an elevation only to be attained once the ‘displeased commons’ were appeased.

Such a civilised meeting of two cultures was set in sharp antithesis to the opening interaction between Lombards and commoners, where the reasons for such displeasure were very clearly demonstrated. Michelle Butterly’s Doll Williamson was ‘haled’ by the hair across the stage by a young black man in evening dress, his bow tie undone. This immediate deviation from the stage directions in which she is dragged ‘by the arm’ highlighted a clear sexual element to the attempted abduction, echoing the story of the seduction of the Goldsmith’s wife.<sup>22</sup> This sexual threat was made even more apparent as de Bard dragged Doll face down to the ground, sitting astride her and pulling her towards him suggestively. Her spirited retaliation too was specifically sexual, grabbing his crotch as she broke free. The contempt expressed by de Bard for the indigenous population extended across class barriers, although only as far as to those who, in Renaissance times, might be defined as the ‘middling sort’; the emergent middle classes. These social distinctions were clearly delineated in the opening three scenes of the play, as an audience sequentially encountered the poor of the streets, the professionals of the judiciary and the ruling aristocracy. These groups are isolated textually, meeting only in situations where authority must be maintained, and this isolation was reinforced in performance. Violence, either explicit or implied, overshadowed any contract between the different social strata, as well as the clash of cultures, and More was presented as the only figure who could bridge those divisions.

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<sup>22</sup> Revels, I.i.9-14.

In the absence of any overt religious element within this production, More's humanism and humour were foregrounded. His first encounter with State authority is as a member of the rising professional classes, yet he undermines that authority in defence of the individual.<sup>23</sup> More's business suit and casually seated position set him at odds with his formally robed opponent, Justice Suresby. Instead, he was visually allied with the defendant and recidivist pickpocket, Lifter, who also wore a business suit, subtly undermining his apparent submission to the Court's authority by the wearing of trainers. These costume choices demonstrated physically the verbal connection between the two made clear in the text, as they share a joke at Suresby's expense. The lightness with which this scene was played undercut the serious element within the text itself, written at a time when a guilty verdict would indeed cost Lifter his life. The production's concern with the arbitrary nature of authority was, however, apparent, as it was so easily defeated by More's playful prank.

This central theme and the pervasive threat of death were very much more clearly presented as the riot scenes were brought to a conclusion by More's second intervention in the conflict between the State and its subjects.<sup>24</sup> Just as the opening scene had graphically demonstrated why the Londoners were driven to riot by the extremes of behaviour of the Lombards, the audience had just been presented with demonstrations of equally irrational violence of the indigenous population. There was a clear topicality about these violent images, and Robert Delamere's direction emphasised the catalytic

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<sup>23</sup> Revels, I.ii.

<sup>24</sup> Revels, II.iii.



effect on this population of the arrival of the ‘alien’ community. The text of the ‘Prentice Boys scene may be almost incomprehensible to modern ears, but the rationale for its inclusion became clear when it was played out during a sustained, and almost casual, assault on Cavalier’s semi-conscious body by young men masked by scarves. Their similarity to contemporary TV images of political protests hijacked by a violent minority was reinforced by the appearance of a flour-bombed Lord Mayor and a bleeding Sir John Munday. A similar image of disaffected modern youth – a business-suited and masked young man hurling a petrol bomb - adorned both the RSC’s programme and its printed play text.<sup>25</sup>

A sharp contrast was drawn between More’s concern for the individual lawbreaker with whom he could demonstrate a jocular affinity, and his attitude to the unruly mob. The potential consequences of a lawless society having been graphically demonstrated in the preceding scenes, More was presented as a man whose humanity could bridge the class divide and negotiate a peace. His words spoke a concern with an orderly State, and the religious rationale behind the necessity of ‘obedience to authority’ (II.iii.101). Again, however, the religious gave way to the secular in performance. Shakespeare’s words argue the religious case, but Nigel Cooke’s More was much more concerned with humanity as he tended the injured Downes and tidied away the makeshift weaponry of the rioters whose anger he had calmed.<sup>26</sup> An audience member with any knowledge of More’s life would have been aware of the irony of this persuasive speech, particularly as he had earlier been depicted undermining the very authority he now so

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<sup>25</sup> Royal Shakespeare Company. *Thomas More*, promotional material [2005].

<sup>26</sup> Nigel Cooke, Thomas More in *Thomas More*, RSC, personal interview with the author (Stratford-upon-Avon: 13 October 2005).

ably defended. A similar irony pervaded his reluctant acceptance of the Lord Chancellorship's symbols of office, and expressed verbally with the acknowledgement that 'My service is my king's, good reason why/Since life or death hangs on our sovereign's eye' (II.iii.128-9). Although More's ultimate death was the price he paid for an unwillingness to sacrifice his scruples, and Lincoln's was for violent rebellion in pursuit of equality before the law, the affinity between the two men was strongly apparent. They were both executed for protesting against what they believed to be an arbitrary and unjustified misuse of the power of the State, as well as for offences whose consequences undermined the authority of that power.

Prior to some substantial mid-run cuts, Lincoln's death was directly followed by a series of short scenes demonstrating More's discomfort with his sudden rise 'as 'twere, up to my country's head' (III.i.7) and, in each, ideas related to class, status and clothing were used as pointers to More's personal concerns. The textual density of the conflated Erasmus/Falkner scene was not transmitted in performance and was, subsequently, cut mid-run. Its initial staging, however, together with the subsequent dinner party and play-within-the play, emphasised the dichotomy that lay at the heart of More's difficult relationship with temporal authority. Although within his own home during each of these scenes, More was consistently portrayed as uneasy in his new role. The prank played on Erasmus may have been intended as a test of his guest's perception, but Nigel Cooke's More appeared eager to grasp the opportunity to shed the robes and trappings of his new office. His arbitrary condemnation of Falkner for his disruptive appearance emphasised the sense of a man uncomfortable in his new role, but the performance did not allow a

depth of analysis that would have mined the close ties between his own character and that of the unruly ruffian. Both men shared a jocular approach to their debate, and both were ultimately to be faced with a choice between conformity and disobedience. This scene, which has clearly been a problem for all three professional directors, will be discussed in more detail later. More importantly, however, by cutting the scene in its entirety More's only soliloquy was lost. The production thus excised the one opportunity that the text allows for direct access to More's interior life, his learning and his fears of the corruptibility of power. Two further examples of the text's oblique approach to contentious issues were lost with these cuts. More's veiled reference to the King's marriage, 'vows are recorded in the court of heaven' (III.1.13) disappeared, as did the opportunity to emphasise More's uneasy relationship with authority and a further, contrasting, connection with an ordinary man at risk through an arbitrary use of power.

Like Lincoln, Falkner's position mirrors More's later crisis of conscience closely, but here More's uncertainty in his role came to the fore. The haste with which he despatched Falkner to prison until such time as he forswore his 'foolish vow' (III.i.118-9) drew parallels with the speedy execution of Lincoln before the King has time to consider More's plea on his behalf. Acting as a bridge between the two halves of the play, it also pointed forward to the second State sanctioned death – that of More himself. Their equality of wit made More's arbitrary dismissal of his opponent to Newgate difficult to explain, and this production gave no opportunity to consider that Falkner's recantation represented the antithesis of More's later refusal to compromise his conscience by signing the unnamed Articles. The discussion between Surrey and More, however,

should do much more than fill the hiatus before Falkner's resentful return. The most telling point here, however, is textual. This second interruption disrupts a potentially dangerous discussion between Surrey, the poet, and More about the need for poets to have great subjects to write about.<sup>27</sup> Any sense that More himself, in the play being enacted, has now usurped the role of the King as an appropriate subject for poetry was completely absent from the production.

Domesticity dominated the second half of the RSC's production, presenting scenes revealing something of More's relationship with his family and servants. As he strode across the stage, fiddling with the bowtie that identified his ascension of the class ladder, he was clearly ill at ease with the situation in which he found himself. The confidence exhibited when calming the rioters and making plans concerning the defence of his city, deserted him in a social setting in which he was the uncomfortable host. The play-within-the play, selected by More himself, and entitled *The Marriage of Wit and Wisdom*, stands representative of the play's eponymous subject as a whole and More was most at ease when replacing a missing actor; but this is a play text of constant interruptions. Before the interlude can be completed, More is hurried away to attend to matters of State and, at the zenith of his advancement, he begins his rapid decline to death.

The staging of More's refusal to sign the undisclosed Articles made no allowance for a modern audience's possible lack of knowledge. During the run of the play,

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<sup>27</sup> Actually a conflation of the historical figure of the Earl of Surrey at the time of Thomas More and his poet grandfather (see Revels, p. 78).

however, it did allow the development of another strongly modern parallel with the events being portrayed. In conversation, Robert Delamere discussed his views that, although never appearing on stage, the figure of Henry VIII was crucial to the presentation of ‘the arbitrary nature of power,’ the major theme in his view, and a reflection of the way in which political decisions were then being made and power was becoming increasingly centralised. When analysing the low turnout for the 2005 local elections, *The Times Higher Education Supplement* commented that ‘the single most important factor in explaining the decline of parties is the trend towards centralisation of the British state.’<sup>28</sup>

During rehearsal it was decided that the Earl of Shrewsbury should be portrayed as Henry’s representative on stage and his presentation of the role developed to reflect this more clearly during the course of the run. His relationship with More became increasingly antipathetic, and he was eager to distance himself from a man he saw as a threat, both to his position as the King’s favourite and, ultimately, to the King’s authority. In preview, both Surrey and Shrewsbury were shocked by Rochester’s refusal to sign the proffered Articles and by More’s wish to consider things more fully. Once Rochester had been despatched to the Tower, and More to his home in Chelsea, the two Earls fought over the document in their eagerness to append their signatures. By the time the tour reached Newcastle, however, Tim Treloer’s Shrewsbury was clearly aware of the contents of the documents and took satisfaction in More’s refusal to sign. No threat to the King’s authority could be permitted and his refusal to shake More’s hand even on the

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<sup>28</sup> Paul Whiteley, ‘Big Government, Enormous Turnoff,’ *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, 14 May 2007: <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/> [accessed 18 May 2009].

scaffold contrasted sharply his political awareness with the ex-Chancellor's quiet otherworldliness.

The production also seemed to draw parallels with the current rise in English nationalism, and the ways in which fear can lead to violence. The Union flag, so often now co-opted by the Extreme Right, was present both during the riot scene and, most noticeably, as a covering for the table across which the discussions of European War took place and the Articles were offered for signature. It not only embodied the textual reference to 'under our English flag' (IV.i.46), and made oblique reference to Henry's wish to establish himself as head of the English Church, but also offered the audience a potent reminder of contemporary issues of nationhood.

Despite such strongly political references, however, the second half of the production was most deeply concerned with More the man and it was here that the deliberate absence of any strongly held religious motivation for his refusal to sign was most apparent. The effect was to deny him adequate motivation for the damage and distress caused to his family and wider household. He seemed unable to articulate fully the reasons for his decision, leaving his wife frustrated and uncomprehending. The audience too may have been in a similar state of confusion, but the moving final scenes had the power to transcend this. More's humanity rather than his saintliness was increasingly foregrounded, as he chatted casually to gaolers, made jokes about his headache and the King's cure, and took leave of his family and friends. He finally shook

off his jesting to go to his death with quiet dignity and a firm belief in a better life hereafter.

This was a production which at times adopted the original authors' oblique approach to the narrative, but managed to transcend its pre-publicity in order to address not only the text's limited connection with current questions concerning asylum seekers, but many other topical political issues. By cutting the text to end each half with a State-sanctioned killing, the over-arching question of the misuse of State authority was powerfully brought home, but the play never became a specific political polemic. Violence, class and community were inextricably linked, and a disconnection between the ruler and the ruled was highlighted. Ultimately, however, Robert Delamere and the RSC produced a moving and generally coherent account of one man's life and death. The approach mirrored that of the Renaissance writers themselves, often leaving the audience to pick up, or discard, veiled allusions and potential contemporary relevances but at the same time producing a cohesive piece of theatre which could be enjoyed on many levels.

The textual choices made in order to achieve the director's specific intentions, however, seemed somewhat arbitrary at times. An initial examination of any text of *The Booke of Sir Thomas More* reveals a complexity of additions and amendments working within a strong dramatic structure charting the arc of the tragic hero. Munday's original plot reveals not only a picture of More's rise, achievement and fall within the political sphere but, together with the contributions made by his collaborators, also presents an

historical biography of a much-loved Londoner with strong personal relationships and deeply held beliefs. Given these additional contributions, the collaborative nature of the text, and the lacunae that have resulted from damage to the original manuscript, directors have had available to them a variety of options from which to select those elements which would best present a drama to reflect their own vision of the play and its contemporary relevance. The lack of a strongly recorded performance history may also have freed directors from the constraints of conforming to, or challenging, audience expectation. A situation which, bearing in mind the amount of coverage given to the RSC's production, may alter in the future.

The textual starting point for the 2005 RSC production was, however, described by the Assistant Director, Richard Twyman, as 'slightly bizarre.'<sup>29</sup> The RSC presented the directorial team with a copy of the play text that had been downloaded from the internet and which included a number of typographical errors. It did, however, present a complete original text, with an editorial decision having been made to fill any lacunae. This text is described as having been compiled by 'a team of about twenty Project Gutenberg volunteers' and was 'created from multiple editions.'<sup>30</sup> It does not, however, include any of the rejected or alternative passages appended within the Revels edition, and it was to this hard copy that Richard Twyman constantly referred during rehearsals. During the same conversation with the Assistant Director, it became apparent that it was indeed the perceived contemporary relevance of the play's central themes that drove both the textual, and performance, choices made. References to 'the

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<sup>29</sup> Richard Twyman, Assistant Director, *Thomas More*, Royal Shakespeare Company, personal interview with the author, Stratford-upon-Avon: 22 September 2005).

<sup>30</sup> Project Gutenberg, *Sir Thomas More* [E-text]: <http://www.gutenberg.org/> [accessed 18 November 2005).



arbitrary nature of authority’, ‘an oppressive state’, ‘draconian legislation’, ‘race riots’ and of an increasing centralization of power permeated the discussion, with parallels being drawn with the current debates surrounding the conflict between civil liberties and an increasing need for public safety measures. Its depiction of the irrational violence of the race riots was discussed in detail, and it was also felt to be important that More’s humanity and his closeness to the ordinary people of London should be clearly illustrated.

The major textual choice made to enhance the contemporary relevance of the play was the incorporation of the truncated ‘Prentice Boys scene as II.i. This ‘imperfect and cancelled’<sup>31</sup> scene is included at this point in the Project Gutenberg Etext which would appear, at this point at least, to follow the Dyce edition.<sup>32</sup> Having been initially marked for deletion, however, this remaining fragment is not included within the text of the Revels edition, but merely appended within the Rejected or Alternative Passages as Addition 2 (p. 211). Similarly, it is appended as Scene 4a in John Jowett’s edition, incorporated in the updated second edition of *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works*.<sup>33</sup> From the revised opening lines of the Guildhall Scene, which the RSC staged as II.iii, it is clear that the remainder of this fragment would have contained a physical assault on Sir John Munday:

*Lord Mayor*    What Sir John Munday, are you hurt?

*Sir John*        A little knock, my lord. There was even now

A sort of prentices playing at cudgels.

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<sup>31</sup>W.W. Greg, p. xxvi.

<sup>32</sup>Dyce, pp.17-18.

<sup>33</sup>*Shakespeare*, Wells and Taylor, eds., p. 840.

I did command them to their masters' houses,  
But now, I fear me, they are gone to join  
With Lincoln, Sherwin, and their dangerous train.

This may well indicate that Heywood's revision of the original Scene was intended to replace the 'Prentices with a report only, adapting Tilney's suggestion for the opening scene, which is not in fact revised at any point. This textual hint was ignored in the RSC's staging, however, and this may well account for their re-positioning of the scene in line with the E-text edition. If this abbreviated scene were to be retained, and placed at the end of the general insurrection scene as originally intended, such a strong and closely aligned textual link would surely demand the portrayal of a physical attack on Munday. Instead, however, this production provided a different victim, in the person of Cavalier, a Lombard.

As the young, black foreigner was dragged bleeding across the stage to be threatened and kicked, the audience was not only forcefully reminded of contemporary racial tensions, but was also distracted from the text itself. This is a scene that is almost incomprehensible on the stage, and requires to be heavily glossed and footnoted on the page. In performance, the words seem almost unintelligible and it would appear that only the possibility of drawing such a contemporary parallel informed the decision to stage the scene at all. The constant references throughout the original fragment to 'cudgels', 'backswordsmen' and fighting, create a sense of an increasingly violent city, but do not provide a cohesive, dramatic narrative. Nor does the list of very specific London place

names help inform the scene, localizing rather than generalizing the violence. As is argued in Richard Rowland's introduction to the Revels edition of Heywood's *Edward IV, The Book of Sir Thomas More* may be 'the one extant play written before 1599 in which the precise delineation of locale is of paramount importance.'<sup>34</sup> Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday* is, of course, another Renaissance drama of around 1599 in which the London of the period is vividly portrayed.<sup>35</sup> The clearly delineated topography of such scenes as this would have allowed an Elizabethan audience, should the play ever have reached one, to draw parallels between unrest in the London of More's era and their own. This was, however, no longer the case in the early part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as racial tensions flared in towns and cities far removed from London itself. Instead, the sight of young white men, with scarves pulled across their faces, physically attacking their victim as he lies helpless on the ground recalled contemporary news footage of the mindless thuggery that so often accompanies race riots, football matches and large political rallies.

Another consequence of placing this scene before, rather than after, the main Insurrection Scene, was that it isolated the 'Prentices from the group of rioters led by Lincoln and Doll Williamson. The remaining fragment of text specifies no victim and may even be read as a group of young men scuffling amongst themselves. There may be some audience sympathy with Lincoln's insurrectionists, who have been seen to suffer at the hands of their intended victims, but they do not achieve their revenge. Instead, their leader is publicly hanged and the threat of death hangs over them all. In contrast, the

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<sup>34</sup> Thomas Heywood, *The First and Second Parts of King Edward IV*, ed. by Richard Rowland (Manchester: MUP, 2005) p. 16.

<sup>35</sup> Thomas Dekker, *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, ed. by R.L. Smallwood and Stanley Wells (Manchester: MUP, 1979)

'Prentices have no demonstrably valid reason for the violence they are actually seen to inflict on Cavaler, and the unpunished attacks on both Cavaler and Munday may now be seen as discrete examples of unprovoked aggression.

Unfortunately, however, the transposition of these two scenes undermined another textual connection. As more usually placed, the main Insurrection scene follows immediately after a messenger has brought word to members of the Privy Council that 'a number poor artificers are up in arms and threaten to avenge their wrongs,'<sup>36</sup> leading Shrewsbury to prophesy that 'Some to their graves this morning's work will bear.'<sup>37</sup> Thus prefaced, there is a dramatic poignancy in juxtaposing this with a revised scene that incorporates the figure of Clown Betts (Fred Ridgeway), who draws to a close the insurrection that will eventually bring Lincoln to the gallows with the words 'If hanging come, 'tis welcome, that's the worst.'<sup>38</sup>

Still following closely the Project Gutenberg Etext, the RSC also chose to include the later addition, increasingly attributed to Shakespeare, of More's soliloquy reflecting upon his sudden rise 'up to my country's head' and the dangers attendant upon this.<sup>39</sup> This scene places More in a private rather than a public setting for the first time, humanizing him and giving insight into his reputation as a light-hearted lover of practical jokes. It was also revealed in discussion with Richard Twyman that the RSC hoped to

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<sup>36</sup> Lacuna in the original text is filled thus by the Project Gutenberg E-text, possibly based on a footnoted suggestion in the Revels Edition, p. 83, which itself refers to A.F. Hopkinson's privately printed edition of *Sir Thomas More*, (London: 1902).

<sup>37</sup> Revels, I.iii.94.

<sup>38</sup> Revels, II.i.76.

<sup>39</sup> Revels, III.i.7.

demonstrate the speed with which More had to ‘learn on the job’ and the insecurity that this created within him.<sup>40</sup> The discomfort expressed in his soliloquy may inform his eagerness to dissemble during his first meeting with such a notable figure as Erasmus. John Jowett convincingly argues that this scene, during which More’s disguise is soon uncovered, demonstrates that he ‘has the wit and education to be his new self’ and that the play’s concern with role-playing is a way of presenting insight into the spiritual self.<sup>41</sup> Within the soliloquy, however, it is also possible to discern More’s fear that he may prove to have insufficient ‘strength of nature’ to avoid the potential for ‘corruption.’ His swift, and somewhat merciless, reaction to Falkner’s unruliness demonstrates the constant tension between authority and the individual that pervades the text, and which would eventually be mirrored to fatal effect in More’s own end. By opting for the conflated scene, there was the potential to further compress time, leaving More with no breathing space in which to think through more thoroughly the concerns expressed in the soliloquy. Just as his musing is interrupted by the entrance of Randall dressed as More himself, so is his scene-setting disrupted by Falkner’s intrusion. The playfulness with which More seeks Lifter’s freedom even as the jury return a guilty verdict, undertaking the role of Lifter’s accomplice in order to assist in staging a crime, is replaced by an unwillingness to discover the truth of the allegations against the accused. Morris’s intrusion to appeal on behalf of Falkner disrupts More’s meeting with the great humanist at a point when More has just obliquely introduced the subject of ‘kingly deeds’ and an opportunity to debate the nature of authority is passed over.

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<sup>40</sup> Twyman.

<sup>41</sup> John Jowett, *A Long Beard for Young Wit: The Play of ‘Sir Thomas More’* (unpublished paper: Shakespeare Institute, 2005).

It was felt by the director that the many dense textual layers within this scene were not sufficiently decoded or transmitted clearly in performance and it was cut in its entirety. This textual density appears to have created problems in staging this scene throughout the short performance history of the play, and will be discussed in more detail later. Interestingly here though, the time constraints that the RSC felt may have rushed More to hasty judgement were echoed in the directorial decision to excise the scene. Time did not allow sufficient opportunity to re-block and re-work it, and this ensured that, having selected initially the conflated alternative, cutting it meant that even the soliloquy was lost.

Other than in choosing to fill the lacunae in the original manuscript with suggestions made in the Revels edition, the only textual additions made in this production also bear echoes of this scene. It is through Randall's lack of Latin that his imposture is undone, and, conversely, it is the use of this language of State and of authority, both spiritual and temporal, that demonstrates More's suitability for the powerful role he must now undertake. In deference to modern audiences, however, the RSC chose to translate as much of this as is possible without appearing too heavy-handed, and without disrupting the narrative. During the familial discussions surrounding More's decision to resign his office and, ultimately, to go to his death rather than submit his conscience to the King's will, More's commitment to education was used as a vehicle through which these translations are incorporated into the text. His son-in-law Roper translated More's Latin for the benefit of the remainder of the family and, it may be safely assumed, for that of the majority of the audience. There was an irony about this directorial decision, in that

Roper's biography reveals that More educated his daughters in Latin. However, the difficulty of incorporating such a translation into More's discussion with the learned Erasmus undermined a key element within the scene, which was subsequently lost to that audience. His reasoning that 'This is no age for poets' because 'Epic poems praise what kings do' (*'Qui faciunt reges heroica carmina laudant'*) subtly suggests that the present king was unworthy of such praise, but the lack of an English translation means the subtlety was wasted.<sup>42</sup> The possible self-censorship of the authors in having Morris interrupt More here was unwittingly echoed for a contemporary audience.

The loss of the Erasmus/Falkner scene also led to the loss of the small scene immediately following it (III. 2) but, fortuitously perhaps, this avoided a minor textual incongruity. Within this scene More is delighted to be informed of an unexpected visit by a group of dignitaries headed by the Lord Mayor and his Lady. In keeping with their concept of his concerns about his ability to adapt to his new position, however, Nigel Cooke's More, for the RSC, emphasised the nervousness inherent in the text concerning his unpreparedness to receive such distinguished guests. It was, therefore, perhaps a little incongruous to hear an implication that it was at his invitation that the guests have assembled:

That on so short a summons you would come

To visit him that holds your kindness dear. (III.ii.109-110)

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<sup>42</sup> Revels, III.i.202-5 and related footnotes.

His nervousness in performance did, however, make strong links to the meta-theatricality of the text as he once more retreated into role-playing by becoming an ‘understudy’ player. Just as he had earlier playfully undermined the hierarchical structure of society by allowing his servant, Randall, to represent the Lord Chancellor of England, that Chancellor now presented himself to his distinguished guests as an actor.

Having made the initial textual choices outlined above, a number of incisive cuts were made during the production’s run in Stratford, in addition to the loss of the conflated Erasmus/Falkner scene. The first of these appears, initially, to be the simple loss of a short scene that added little to the narrative, and involved a distracting amount of stage work in presentation. Using the trap as a cellar in which three serving men wrestled with barrels and boxes whilst discussing the day of their master, More’s trial, V.ii appears yet another episode designed to demonstrate the love in which he is held by the common man and the impact his fall has upon them. It spans the period between More’s entry into the Tower and the revelation that the death sentence has been passed upon him. As the Revels footnote indicates, it is also an ‘effective theatrical device’ to avoid staging the trial itself and, as such, its removal may be seen as a loss in both textual and dramatic terms.<sup>43</sup> In an increasingly episodic second half, however, it also immediately follows a scene with a similar general theme. In V.i, a poor woman with a lawsuit in Chancery approaches More and seeks the return of paperwork without which she would be ‘utterly undone’ (V.i.26). Although distraught to learn that she must now appeal direct to the monarch for assistance, she describes More as ‘the best friend the poor e’er had’ (V.i.43).

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<sup>43</sup> Revels, p. 189.



In conversation, Twyman revealed that the rehearsal process led to a belief that one or other of these scenes needed to be lost in order to tighten up the pacing, and the decision was made to cut the Poor Woman scene (V.i). Once the production was placed before an audience in preview, however, a directorial decision was made that it was, in fact, the Servants (V.ii) scene that 'just didn't seem quite right.'<sup>44</sup> The rationale behind this was twofold. As previously mentioned, the set-up time involved in using the trap slowed the action at a point in the play when time is increasingly contracted as More's arrest, imprisonment and death follow speedily upon one another.

A more telling argument for the inclusion of V.i instead, however, has much to do with two central themes running through the text and foregrounded in this production. These were concerned with a portrait of a human and humane More, but also, crucially, with the arbitrary nature of authority. The staging of V.ii removed More from the audience's sight at a point when it is essential that they are engaged with him as a human being about to lose his life over an almost unexplained unwillingness to accede to the authority of his monarch. In contrast, the Poor Woman scene encapsulated More's tragic arc from 'State pleader' (V.iv.73), via powerful Lord Chancellor, to powerless condemned man; whilst simultaneously reminding the audience of the arbitrariness of Henry's decision-making. Power shifts further towards the centre as the King orders the execution of his friend and First Minister, and then takes upon himself the resolution of what must surely be a minor Chancery lawsuit. The wish to strengthen these two through-lines that link More and his unseen monarch had also informed the decision, immediately

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<sup>44</sup> Twyman, interview.

prior to the performance on 1 August 2005 to remove the conflated III.i – the Falkner/Erasmus scene. More importantly, however, this cut incised from the production More's only soliloquy, probably written by Shakespeare although appearing in Hand C in the manuscript, and which, in the absence of any clear religious context in the production was the only opportunity for More's interiority to be presented to the audience.

This decision came five months into the run, but followed a period of some 19 days when *Thomas More* had not been performed; as *Sejanus: His Fall* was teched and previewed. Showing an ongoing commitment to a production from which he had been paid off on Press Night back in March, Robert Delamere returned to Stratford-upon-Avon to address his concerns about the production and its reception and to make the changes he considered necessary to ensure his vision was achieved. These changes were performed hurriedly as, although *More* was not being performed during this period, the majority of the cast were heavily involved in *Sejanus* and Delamere had little time to spare away from his then current project. The driving force behind the decision to lose this scene was a re-awakening of his initial sense that the play itself is problematic, making very strong demands on its audience. More specifically, it was felt that this scene, in particular, did not engage the audience in the narrative being presented. This, allied to his firm belief that the play is as much about the unseen Henry VIII as it is about its nominal protagonist, led to a re-shaping of the now heavily cut first half of the play in order to end on another textual adjustment. Rather than the unanimity implicit in the stage direction 'All', it was the Earl of Surrey's voice alone that increasingly desperately reiterated 'God save the King. God save the King' (III.iv.176).

Twyman also revealed that there was also a strong sense within the company that they were constantly struggling to present the Falkner scene in a way that made clear its wider relevance. His entrance brings public disorder into More's own private and jocular disruption of the orderly society he defends so eloquently in Shakespeare's words in II.iv. Unfortunately, the playfulness with which More and Randall conspire as Lords of Misrule, inverting society's hierarchical structure, was not darkened in performance by Falkner's foreshadowing of More's ultimate crisis of conscience. The arbitrariness with which More dismisses Falkner to Newgate, the prison to which Lincoln and Williamson, as ringleaders of the riots, had previously been committed, was not explored. This contradiction within a character who has undermined the authority of the judiciary by conspiring with the recidivist, Lifter, to mock the pompous Suresby, and who now dismisses Falkner to prison 'because it is an odious sight/To see a man thus hairy' (III.i.117-118) was, as presented, merely confusing.

Any overt insight into More's discomfort with his sudden elevation had been lost by the cutting of the soliloquy. Together, his reactions to Erasmus and to Falkner may be presented as demonstrating a man attempting fully to comprehend the extent of his new-found authority in a rigidly hierarchical world, the order of which has been displaced by his elevation. His reflections on this disruption to the natural order reveal to the audience an awareness of the dangers inherent in such an unsought challenge to the divinely authorised structures of power. Falkner's facetiously hairy protest undertaken 'upon a foolish vow' (III.i.108-9), allied to his involvement in another example of civil disorder,

structurally link the causes of More's rise and his overtly unexplained fall. A sense in performance of these structural links, and an indication of a psychological imperative behind More's uncharacteristically harsh response to Falkner's defiance, might have rescued at least part of this pivotal scene.

The Erasmus element within the cut scene worked more successfully, becoming more than simply an example of More remaining playful and witty despite the new cares imposed on him by his sudden elevation. As his servant, Randall (Nigel Betts), mimicked his master's physical mannerisms but revealed his limitations once he opened his mouth, the text allows for the introduction of a darker element as Falkner enters. Randall is desperately keen to abandon the pleasures he initially perceives as adhering to high office once confronted with a situation in which the authority invested in that office must be administered. He joyously leaves his master to arbitrate between conformity and disobedience. The contrast between More, the humble Shrieve who quells the rioters through the power of oratory, and the power conferred upon him as the newly-appointed Lord Chancellor was lost; as was the opportunity to delineate more clearly the arbitrary nature of the Kingly authority that brings about More's own rapid rise and fall.

A natural consequence of this decision to excise was the loss of the now redundant first 22 lines of III.ii. These had linked the two first-half demonstrations of More's wit and acquisition of wisdom with a third in the second half – his intervention in the play-within-the-play, appropriately entitled *The Marriage of Wit and Wisdom*. There were, however, additional textual and structural links that were lost.

A perhaps less striking loss is a further, if minor, textual link between More and Lincoln, whose death now brought to a close the first half of the play, just as More's ended the second half of the play. His assertion that 'The Londoners fare richest at their boards' (III.ii.22) echoed that of Lincoln inciting the rioters with national pride in the fact that 'Our country is a great eating country' (II.iii.7). Without Erasmus, however, nowhere in the play was there an indication that More's fame and influence operated beyond the confines of London, and this narrowing of focus increased a sense of the episodic nature of the play. Having already lost the opportunity to demonstrate More's 'learning on the job' here, the play's European dimension no longer as clearly spanned both halves.<sup>45</sup> The War Council over which More presides, and which shows him at the height of his new powers, clarifies the rationale behind the presence of the Lombards in London. Without the Erasmus interlude, however, there was no indication that More's words would bear weight beyond the 'serious square' (IV.i.14) around which decisions of the English State are made.

It may also be the case that the decision to cut this scene in its entirety had been influenced by its problematic textual and stage history. Previous research has shown that the scene was not only re-worked during its own period, but was cut completely from the first major performance for the professional stage - the Nottingham Playhouse production of 1964 - and from the 1983 BBC Radio production, both of which starred Ian McKellen as Sir Thomas More. Although played in its entirety in the 1990 Shaw Theatre production, it would appear from contemporaneous critical reviews that this was seen as

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nothing but a further humorous interlude. Georgina Brown commented on More's 'sense of fun (he frees a rioter on condition he gets a haircut).'<sup>46</sup>

Discussions took place as to the possibility of reinstating some of this most heavily cut section of the text, with the probability that the soliloquy at least would be re-introduced when the production opened in Newcastle upon Tyne on 14 November 2005. This would have assisted the production in achieving one of its major stated aims – a presentation of a humane man whose Catholic martyrdom is no longer central to his story, but who almost 60 years after his execution is rather remembered with affection as a friend to London and its poor. Unfortunately, however, despite much debate, the soliloquy was never reinstated and any sense of More's interiority was lost, making his own decision not to acquiesce with the King's demands appear almost as arbitrary as Henry's reaction. In tightening the narrative and ending each half with a graphic illustration of the fatal consequences of the King's power of life and death, some of the text's subtlety and complexity was lost. Such textual excisions highlighted the freedom with which Robert Delamere approached a play with so little performance history, or audience expectation.

Instead of reducing the perceived episodic nature of the original text, the excisions further compressed time, leaving a sequence of snapshots rather than a cohesive dramatic work. In cutting More's own arbitrary use of his newly acquired authority, the play became an even more hagiographical portrayal than was perhaps originally intended, and the loss of some points of textual symmetry in order to highlight others undermined

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<sup>46</sup> Georgina Brown, *Independent*.

the efforts of the revisers to achieve cohesion. These losses also reduced the complexities of the debate about State power, and the impact on the individual of the abuse of that authority, which was the second major through-line the directorial team was working to demonstrate.

Dramatically, however, the truncated production generally functioned well in performance, holding the attention throughout and, from personal experience of audience reaction both before and after the cuts, there was a much more positive response to the play in its revised form. Without a thorough textual understanding or previous production history upon which to draw, however, there was much that was confusing or appeared irrelevant to a modern audience, an issue that was not adequately addressed in performance. This gulf in understanding would have to have been addressed if any reinstatement of these major excisions was considered, but it is interesting also to note that these cuts impacted on the production in a way that supported closely the RSC's promotional material, about which both director and acting company members expressed serious reservations.

The Royal Shakespeare Company's production of this little-performed text certainly created more critical interest than had previously been achieved, with promotion and response being generated across the media. The production was not only the subject of media coverage prior to its opening night – as previously discussed – but press nights in Stratford-upon-Avon, Newcastle upon Tyne and in London, all generated an interestingly wide-ranging media response. Those covering the Stratford opening

included the usual broadsheet reviewers, internet amateurs and, perhaps unsurprisingly, two leading Catholic publications, the *Catholic Herald* and *The Tablet*. A large amount of local coverage too ensured that news of the play's existence is likely to have reached a much wider audience than its two previous professional incarnations. Many of these initial reviews placed the production in the context of the *Gunpowder Season* itself, with most responding to the authorship question as well as to the themes highlighted in the promotional material. *The Observer's* Susannah Clapp linked both in an opening paragraph that commented on the dearth of performance history and the fact that 'considered as a work with a scene that may be by Shakespeare, its non-production becomes startling'.<sup>47</sup> She was one of many who drew clear contemporary parallels between Shakespeare's plea 'to a ravening mob to treat immigrants kindly' but this timeless message did not encourage some critics to accept a modern-dress interpretation.<sup>48</sup> *The Guardian's* Michael Billington 'longed to see it anchored in its period' and was the only reviewer to link this production with a previous one, commenting that 'the play's contemporary resonance emerged just as strongly in a 1964 Nottingham Playhouse period revival.'<sup>49</sup> John Gross of *The Sunday Telegraph* shared Billington's concern commenting that Delamere's decision to opt for modern dress 'makes More's lines about the refugees less remarkable, less ahead of their time'.<sup>50</sup> Theatrical critics generally were unconvinced by the play as a whole, perhaps, like the RSC's pre-publicity, finding themselves too concerned with Shakespeare's contribution to assess the production on its own merits.

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<sup>47</sup> Susannah Clapp, 'What a Merry Old Soul Was He', *Independent*, 3 April 2005, p. 10.

<sup>48</sup> Clapp, *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> Billington, *Guardian*.

<sup>50</sup> John Gross, 'Keep Your Powder Dry', *Sunday Telegraph*, 27 March 2005, p. 9.



Some responses too were heavily influenced by another, much more well-known, theatrical depiction of the life of Sir Thomas More. Robert Bolt's *A Man for All Seasons* was referred to by both Robert Hanks of *The Independent* reviewing the Stratford opening, and by most critics once the production moved to London; these later reviewers clearly influenced by the fact that Martin Shaw was then playing More in a production of Bolt's play at the Haymarket. Like many other critics, Peter Brown of the *London Theatre Guide* reviewed both plays together, recommending *Thomas More* rather than *A Man for All Seasons*, partly because it provided 'a glimpse into a different and more dangerous kind of society reflecting some of the strikingly similar concerns we face today.'<sup>51</sup>

Whilst other metrocentric critics generally felt that 'More's interest-value remains largely academic' understandably, perhaps, local reviewers promoted the production with an emphasis on the positive.<sup>52</sup> Stratford-upon-Avon and its environs are clearly dependent upon the revenue brought in by theatre-goers, and critics writing for the *Leicestershire Mercury*, *Birmingham Post* and *Evesham Mercury*, among others, agreed with Jeannine Alton of *The Oxford Times*, that the play 'deserves a lasting place among our historical dramas.'<sup>53</sup> Academic interest was indeed aroused by this production, with Katherine Duncan-Jones reviewing it, alongside *A New Way to Please You*, for the *Times Literary Supplement*. It is natural that her article illustrated a deeper understanding both

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<sup>51</sup> Peter Brown, *London Theatre Guide*, 6 January 2006: <http://www.londontheatre.co.uk/> [accessed 12 January 2006].

<sup>52</sup> Fiona Mountford, 'This Much – And No More', *Evening Standard*, 30 March 2005, p. 44.

<sup>53</sup> Jeannine Alton, 'Explosive Double Hit', *Oxford Times*, 1 April 2005, p. 9.

of the history of the text and of its eponymous protagonist. There is a clear awareness of the ‘neat parallels, ironies and reversals’ inherent in the text, which passed by most reviewers, along with a view, shared by Michael Billington, that the production’s modern-dress presentation was a mistake.<sup>54</sup> John Jowett’s considered review for *Shakespeare at the Centre*, addressed both the play’s textual history and ‘Robert Delamere’s assured and convincing production.’<sup>55</sup> No mention was made of the Shakespearean contribution to the RSC’s Swan Season in Patricia Tatzpaugh’s review of ‘Shakespeare Onstage in England’ in *Shakespeare Quarterly*.<sup>56</sup> However, the same publication carried Lois Potter’s analysis of the *Gunpowder Season* productions.<sup>57</sup> Here, Potter provided an insightful analysis of the play itself, the staging and the rationale behind the RSC’s marketing strategy and directorial choices. Their ‘team needed to make the plays attractive to audiences for whom the titles and authors meant nothing, and also had to make their texts intelligible and to find a theatrical language to accommodate their different styles.’<sup>58</sup> *Cahiers Élisabéthains* carried reviews of the entire RSC season that year, including one in which *Thomas More* was reviewed alongside a comparison with the Swan season’s only new work – *Speaking Like Magpies*, written by Frank McGuinness and directed by Rupert Goold. Both productions addressed the dramatisation of ‘the tragic consequences of a faith that glorifies martyrdom’ and were situated within a season commemorating the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Gunpowder Plot.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Katherine Duncan-Jones, ‘Pleaders and Players’, *The Times Literary Supplement*, 8 April 2005, p. 18.

<sup>55</sup> John Jowett, ‘Sir Thomas More’, *Shakespeare at the Centre*, 5, 1 (July 2005), 8.

<sup>56</sup> Patricia Tatzpaugh, ‘Shakespeare Onstage in England: March to December 2005’, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 57, 3 (2006), 318-343.

<sup>57</sup> Lois Potter, ‘Political Tyrants: The 2005 Jacobean Season at the Swan’, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 57, 4 (2006), 450-462, p. 451.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.* p. 451

<sup>59</sup> Kath Bradley, ‘*Thomas More* and *Speaking Like Magpies*’, *Cahiers Élisabéthains*, 68, (Autumn 2005) 41-43, p. 43.

The wide-ranging response to this production emphasised the power of Shakespeare's name, even in a subordinate authorial role and the iconic status of the theatre company that bears his name. The variety of media involved in publicising and reviewing this production, together with the RSC's own performance archive held at the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust in Stratford-upon-Avon, finally provides the sort of performance record that is lacking for many non-Shakespearean Renaissance dramas. This may help to ensure that this is a play that will be more frequently performed in the future. It has, however, become increasingly clear that even the range and detail of research material available here cannot guarantee an accurate reconstruction of the play in performance.

## CONCLUSION

Whilst gathering and analysing research materials for the history of the performance of *Sir Thomas More*, there began to emerge a sense in which this performance history acts as a paradigm for the development of the relationship between textual studies and performance – between the scholarly and the theatrical. Lukas Erne urges an acceptance that Shakespeare’s collaborators must include his modern textual editors, those ‘who prepare the texts we read in modern editions’, in addition to his fellow playwrights, actors and composers.<sup>1</sup> It has become clear that theatre directors who prepare and interpret those editions for the stage must also be considered as collaborators. Normally taking a modern edition as their starting point, it has been demonstrated that they edit, re-work, excise and interpolate text, driven by imperatives that may seem at variance to those of the textual editor.

A clear shift in attitudes to the text is revealed, with a movement from the assiduous attention to detail required of the academic editor, to the freedom with which such texts are now used by the theatrical professional. Differing approaches and attitudes to the didactic elements of textual studies also became evident, highlighting very different approaches to the anticipated audience as well as to the importance of record-keeping for posterity. What has emerged is a movement away from the sanctity of the written text towards the creation of an ephemeral theatrical event which uses the perceived immutability of the edited text merely as a starting point rather than an end result.

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<sup>1</sup> Erne, p. 3.

This can be most clearly seen by comparing the earliest printed transcription of the manuscript<sup>2</sup> with the most recent printed edition of the play - the RSC's published play text of their 2005 production.<sup>3</sup> The Shakespeare Society's 1844 publication of *Sir Thomas More*, edited by Alexander Dyce, was produced 'to print and distribute to the Subscribers, books illustrative of Shakespeare and of the Literature of his time.'<sup>4</sup> It is, therefore, clearly a text intended to be read rather than performed. In his preface, Dyce's commitment to a faithful, and detailed, representation of the manuscript's content is emphasised in footnotes such as that which explains that 'the inconsistency in the use of *u* and *v*' is due to the 'several hands' in which the MS is written. This edition is very heavily footnoted, ranging from a simple gloss to detailed accounts of historical sources for such incidents as the Poor Woman scene.<sup>5</sup> In addition, Dyce takes care to explain that the physical state of the manuscript has made it difficult to produce an accurate reproduction of the entire text.

In sharp contrast both to the scholarly approach of Dyce and subsequent textual editors, the RSC's play script is completely lacking in footnotes or explanatory detail. It is, instead, intended as a record of the textual choices made in the play as presented, but fails to achieve this objective. It stands rather as a record of the production as initially planned with the intention, it must be assumed, to provide audience members with a lasting record of the performance they have experienced rather than of the original

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<sup>2</sup> Dyce.

<sup>3</sup> *Thomas More* [for the RSC].

<sup>4</sup> Dyce, [p. i]

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p. 88.

manuscript or of any academic edition. For those audience members purchasing a copy late in the play's Stratford run, or during its touring visits to Newcastle and London, however, this was simply not the case. The major excisions made early in the Swan Theatre run were not correspondingly excised from the printed text, originally published to coincide with first preview. As a permanent record of an ephemeral event, therefore, it cannot reflect accurately the changes in text that developed over the period of those performances. Unlike previous scholarly editions, therefore, the final result would seem to fall between two stools, recording neither the original text, nor the RSC's specific performance choices. In its limitations, it is also indicative of the problems arising when theatrical records are utilised as research tools for the performance historian.

Between these two extremes, there lie textual and performance histories that increasingly intersect and overlap. Initially, published editions were clearly intended as reading texts, with accuracy of transcription of paramount importance. The earliest recorded performance of the play was presented as a scholarly exercise by the students of Birkbeck College, London in 1922. It has not been possible confidently to establish which of these early editions was used as a base text but it is unlikely that any substantial emendations were made for dramatic purposes, bearing in mind R.W. Chambers's assertion that the role of such University productions was to present 'plays that are not produced elsewhere.' Its scholarly intent is clear from the opening line of Chambers's introduction, in which he states that 'All students of the Elizabethan drama must feel deep gratitude to those who are responsible for the production.'<sup>6</sup> In the same article, Chambers also stresses the important 'truism that plays, written not to be read but to be

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<sup>6</sup> R.W. Chambers, *The Lodestone*, Birkbeck College Student Magazine (Spring Term, 1923) p. 51.

seen, can only be properly judged after the critic has seen them acted.’<sup>7</sup> That such a play, originally existing only in a damaged and somewhat incoherent manuscript, must require the intervention of modern textual scholars before it can be presented was perhaps so much a truism that it needed no underlining by him. Correspondingly, at the same time, a number of respected academics were working on papers that would be printed the following year under the title *Shakespeare’s Hand in The Play of Sir Thomas More*, edited by A.W. Pollard.<sup>8</sup> These papers included Chambers’s own ‘The Expression of Ideas – particularly Political Ideas – in the Three Pages and in Shakespeare,’ whilst the stated intention of the publication as a whole was to ‘strengthen the evidence of the existence ... of three pages written by Shakespeare in his own hand as part of the play.’<sup>9</sup>

It was not until 1938, however, that an attempt was made to draw an absolute distinction between the existing text, as presented in 1922, and a specifically ‘acting’ text. In providing this, however, Shirley still remained as faithful as possible to the textual content of the manuscript and its subsequent editions. No major emendations were made, but the relationship between ‘producers’ and editors was highlighted when Shirley, like Chambers before him, acknowledged that a full-text production was required before cuts for dramatic purposes could be made. Once more, the audience was essentially scholarly (the students of the King’s School itself) and the intention was to present as complete a production as possible. In a further interesting parallel, like the Royal Shakespeare Company in 2005, the programme promoted the sale of the play’s text post-show. A programme note advised the audience that ‘The Text, edited with Introduction and Notes,

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Shakespeare’s Hand in The Play of Sir Thomas More*, ed. by R W Pollard (Cambridge: 1923).

<sup>9</sup> Pollard, Preface.

being the first complete edition for the stage ever published, is on sale in the Chapter House.’<sup>10</sup>

Emphasising the link between page and stage, Erne points out that ‘modern readers expect (and modern editors strive to provide) a surrogate performance’ and that this has led to an editorial responsibility ‘to amplify the [stage] directions of his original texts’ to assist the reader in visualising the play in performance.<sup>11</sup> Thus, modern editions include, in addition to explicatory introductions and footnotes, many more detailed stage directions than can be found in the original manuscript or in those early editions aiming to represent that manuscript as accurately as possible.

As productions of *Sir Thomas More* moved into the mainstream, professional theatre it has also become demonstrably ‘common practice .....for the director to change what the dramatist has written’ excising, interpolating and emending in ‘an attempt to clarify an issue or sharpen the focus of the audience.’<sup>12</sup> George Walton Williams states this more bluntly - ‘Directors always edit.’<sup>13</sup> As has been seen, the directors of each of the three professional productions examined in detail have clearly edited the text to best serve the performances of their actors and what they perceived to be to requirements of their audience. These directorial/editorial choices, therefore, have not been concerned with an accurate representation of the text contained within the original manuscript, but

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<sup>10</sup> King’s, [Programme].

<sup>11</sup> Erne, pp. 60-61.

<sup>12</sup> Reynolds, p. 46.

<sup>13</sup> George Walton Williams, ‘To Edit? To Direct? Ay, There’s the Rub’, in *In Arden: Editing Shakespeare: Essays in Honour of Richard Proudfoot*, ed. by Anne Thompson and Gordon McMullan (London: The Arden Shakespeare, 2003), pp. 111-124, p. 112.



rather with producing a theatrical event that was both cohesive and theatrically compelling.

It was Greg Doran who was responsible for the most radical textual emendations. It was his decision, in 1996, to ‘weave together the excellent parts of both [i.e. *Sir Thomas More* and *Henry VIII*] to form a new play, which would appear to have been presented under the title of *All is True*.<sup>14</sup> In a personal interview with the author some 12 years later, Doran still expressed an ambition to present both these plays in full, and in repertoire, for the Royal Shakespeare Company, believing that such a link would provide the necessary explication of More’s willingness to go joyously to his death, without the need overtly to ‘amend either text.’<sup>15</sup> This is, perhaps, an extreme example of how the theatrical imperatives driving each production influenced greatly the textual choices made.

It has become increasingly apparent through an examination of productions of *Sir Thomas More*, particularly in those presented in the professional theatre, that one major scene which has proved, in theatrical terms, problematic for modern directors is III.i. This is described by The Revels editors as Addition IV, comprising ‘both sides of fols. 12 and 13’ in the original manuscript and ‘replacing and adding to the largely lost scenes in the original of Erasmus’s visit and of the long-haired ruffian (Rejected or Alternative Passages 4 and 5).’<sup>16</sup> The bulk of this scene (to l.212) is in Hand C (the playhouse scribe) but attributed to Dekker, whilst the remaining lines are in Dekker’s own hand

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<sup>14</sup> Globe Education Centre, [Programme].

<sup>15</sup> Doran, personal interview.

<sup>16</sup> *Sir Thomas More*, Revels edition, p. 21.

(Hand E). If we are to accept Scott McMillin's well-argued case for the play as the only extant example of a 'prompt book prepared for the copying of the actors' parts' then it would follow that the dramatists saw this conflated scene as an integral, and coherent, element within the play.<sup>17</sup> It was also incorporated in full in those earliest productions, which took place within the academic environments of Birkbeck College and The King's School, Canterbury. Later productions seem to have found staging this scene increasingly problematic, with excisions that culminated in the RSC production cutting the character of Falkner entirely well into the Stratford run, but prior to the season's tour to Newcastle and London.

What, therefore, is it that modern directors and audiences have found so difficult about the scene? Other than the fragment of the 'Prentice Boys scene, which exists in too damaged a state to produce a fully coherent contribution, this is the most frequently excised element of the play. This is indeed unfortunate, as here many of the major themes of the play are rehearsed and the collision between the individual and the authority of the state is played out in a seemingly light-hearted fashion. The portrayal of riotous public behaviour, which caused Tilney such concern, is here merely reported; but it falls again to More to quell the unruly long-haired ruffian, and also to punish him for his presumption. Falkner is More's match in the witty riposte. When asked 'But how long/Hath this shag fleece hung dangling on thy head?' he responds, with wilful misunderstanding 'Why, sometimes thus long, sometimes lower, as the fates and humours please' (III.i.98-101), justifying his unruliness as the consequence of 'a

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<sup>17</sup> Scott McMillin, *The Elizabethan Theatre and the Book of Sir Thomas More* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1987) p. 16.

foolish/vow which as the destinies shall direct I am sworn to keep' (118-9). It is also the point at which the cause of the rift between More and his King is most closely touched upon. To the contemporary audience, More's response, 'Vows are recorded in the court of heaven/For they are holy acts,' may well have seemed an implicit reference to Henry VIII's marriage vows to Katherine of Aragon. The breaking of those vows and Henry's subsequent second marriage are, of course, the greatest lacunae in the text – the matter which could not be addressed overtly. This self-censorship by Munday and his fellow collaborators has created a problem which has been addressed in a variety of ways by subsequent directors. Without a deep knowledge of the contemporary issues addressed within the text, the scenes in which Falkner represents More's dilemma of conscience can be seen simply as further evidence of More's playfulness, and informing an audience of such issues has clearly proved problematic.

Accepting that the idea of a facsimile edition allowing access to 'the authentic Shakespeare' or even the 'authentic Shakespeare playbook' is illusory; it falls upon the modern editor to mediate between that facsimile and the reader.<sup>18</sup> It is similarly illusory to accept that a director who does not cut, interpolate or emend, will present to an audience a Renaissance text as it would have been originally performed. Informed as we are by 21<sup>st</sup> century sensibilities, even time-travel would not allow us to receive a production as if we were its contemporaries. Instead, both critical editor and theatre director strive to clarify and enhance for a modern audience.

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<sup>18</sup> Erne, p. 7.

Both the methods used to achieve this aim, and the ways in which those methods are made accessible and open for scrutiny may, however, differ. On opening a modern edition of a Renaissance drama, one is greeted with much that explains and justifies the editor's methodology. An edition within the Revels series, for example, opens with a General Editor's Preface explaining general editorial practices which involve, for example, inserting 'Act divisions .... only if they appear in the original or if the structure of the play clearly points to them.' However, those divisions not 'found in the original are provided unobtrusively in small type and in square brackets.'<sup>19</sup> A Preface by the editor or editors offers an overview of the critical works that have informed their editorial principles, and the text itself is augmented with introductions, collations, footnotes, appendices and an extensive bibliography. The researcher or more general reader is, therefore, allowed access into the processes which have resulted in the finished product.

There is no such open access available to the theatrical historian or performance student. Theatrical research materials can prove as ephemeral as the performance itself. As has been demonstrated, prompt books do not necessarily record accurately performative decisions and can even, in the case of the two extant prompt books of the 1964 Nottingham Playhouse production, prove to be contradictory. They are generally dependent on the assiduousness of the stage manager, whose responsibility they are, and this can, in turn, be influenced by the speed at which such performative decisions may be made and the myriad other demands made upon him or her during the run. The RSC's 2005 prompt book does, indeed, in many ways exemplify what Scott McMillin defines as the 'textual debris' that can be found 'behind the most coherent stage performance.' He

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<sup>19</sup> Revels, p. viii.

recommends that, to see such ‘textual debris’, one should ‘ask for the original prompt copy, the one that was used at the beginning of rehearsals.’<sup>20</sup> Although in many ways the RSC’s prompt book proved to be an extremely well organised document, contained within a loose leaf folder, there are echoes of the original manuscript of *Sir Thomas More*. In the RSC’s prompt book the insertion of stage directions and lighting cues, etc., are recorded on post-it notes – a modern equivalent of those additional leaves recording revisions to the original text. The marginalia of the stage manager (Paul Sawtell) indicate suggested textual cuts and emendations, both for clarity and to meet the demands of a limited running time; but, as with the original manuscript itself, the prompt book is a fluid document recording only potential performance choices. It is clear from the examination of the theatrical records of each of these productions that the purpose of the modern prompt book is indeed to act as the equivalent of the Renaissance ‘prompt book prepared for the copying of the actors’ parts.’<sup>21</sup>

Such debris is much less likely to be found ‘backstage’ of those productions whose imperative was more scholarly and which did not deviate from the wish to provide a full text reading. Prompt books recording emendations, interpolations or excisions are not required if no such amendments are planned or made. Instead, the scholarly text itself acts as a script for performances serving the two-fold purpose of ‘enhancing appreciation and understanding’ of the text for ‘all students of the Elizabethan drama,’<sup>22</sup> whilst simultaneously fulfilling Shirley’s belief that ‘producers cannot possibly “cut” for

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<sup>20</sup> McMillin, *Elizabethan Theatre*, p. 19.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* p. 16.

<sup>22</sup> *Lodestone*, p. 54.

the stage until they have seen the whole.’ It is only the details of casting, costuming, and staging that are recorded for posterity in articles and reviews, etc.

For the professional theatre, a comprehensive account of directorial decisions, textual emendations and performances must be gleaned, albeit inconclusively, from a large number of sources, varying both in accuracy and detail. Prompt books act only as a starting point for those researchers who have not had the opportunity to view a production firsthand, and the value of their contribution must be assessed against the wider variety of other records which exist. Such sources, as has been demonstrated, are themselves incomplete. Both journalistic and academic reviews are necessarily selective in what is recorded, video and DVD recording are limited by what the director chooses to concentrate on at any given moment and personal interviews are influenced by the fallibility of human memory. The ephemerality of theatrical performance becomes an essential element of its record-keeping also.

The only primary source, the live performance itself, ceases to exist the moment the lights go down on any particular performance, and those secondary sources which remain are necessarily limited by human mediation. The stage manager must select what is important enough to be recorded within the prompt book, whilst the director and the technicians must consider the practicalities of filming a live performance for posterity. Most often this is by a single, unobtrusive, camera in a fixed position; restricting still further its value as a research tool. The filming for public consumption of a production such as the RSC’s recent *King Lear*, directed by Trevor Nunn and starring Ian McKellen,

moves yet further from an accurate record of the stage performance. This was filmed at Pinewood Studios, England, shortly after the stage production had completed its world tour and was broadcast on the independent TV channel, More4, on Christmas Day 2008. Although the casting remained the same, the different medium of television demanded changes of set, blocking, etc., whilst allowing close-ups not afforded a theatre audience. Such distancing from the stage performance reduces the film's value as a research tool. The production was also broadcast on America's PBS the following March, and this channel's sensibilities necessitated the cutting of the full frontal nudity experienced by the live theatre audience. Perhaps McKellen's slightly disingenuous comment that "If you didn't see it on stage, you're lucky, because you'll have a better seat than anyone ever had in the theatre' could be construed as modesty.<sup>23</sup>

Human mediation between the live performance and the researcher who has not seen the production itself is also apparent in press and academic reviews of that performance. No such review can be completely free of subjectivity, given that each reviewer has viewed the performance from a different seat in the auditorium, possibly on a different night, and has brought to the theatre expectations built on different experiences. Lois Potter, for example, makes a judgement based on having viewed both the Stage One and RSC productions that 'on both occasions I had the impression that the director was determined above all to make sure that the play didn't look like *A Man for All Seasons*', not an impression that could have been formed by an audience member not familiar with the film of Bolt's play. Similarly, Potter also states that seeing the play

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<sup>23</sup> Charlotte Higgins, 'Ian McKellen's *King Lear* to ring in the Christmas Cheer for Channel 4', *Guardian*, 26 November 2008, Section G2, p. 25

'one week after the London bombings' influenced her reaction to the fact that black actors were cast as the foreigners in the opening scene.<sup>24</sup> Not only personal experiences beyond the theatre walls but such unexpected events as the necessity for an understudy to play a specific role, an actor 'drying' or 'corpsing' on stage, accidents with weaponry, or the technical failure of props or scenery must also influence audience reaction to a specific performance.

The role of the performance historian is inherently limited by the ephemeral nature of the production being researched, and the necessary subjectivity of much of the research material available. It is, therefore, incumbent upon that historian to bring to bear as much assiduous research and personal objectivity to these imperfect materials and to construct as accurately as possible a record which will be of value to future readers.

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<sup>24</sup> Potter, p. 451



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Birkbeck College, University of London, *Sir Thomas More*, (London: 8-9 December 1922)

Bristol Old Vic Theatre School, *Sir Thomas More*, a rehearsed reading by graduates, directed by Chris Garner, (Theatre Royal, Bath (Bath Literary Festival): 11 March 2001)

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