

Plays in Performance

The Inauguration of the New Swan Theatre with *The Two Noble Kinsmen* and *Every Man in His Humour*, Stratford-Upon-Avon.

In 1926 the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon was burnt to a blackened shell. The auditorium had been notoriously unsuitable and the event was regarded as providential in theatrical circles. George Bernard Shaw, who two years previously had published a condemnation of the building, sent a telegram crowing congratulations to the Festival Chairman. "It will be a tremendous advantage to have a proper modern building. There are a number of other theatres I should like to see burned down. . . ." The blackened shell remained to mark the site of that Victorian edifice when the present main house was built next to it in the early 30s. The fact that even then sufficient money to build the new design was not forthcoming in Britain and that the great part of the cost was met by American contributions foreshadowed the means by which The Swan Theatre has risen, a sixty years belated phoenix, from the cold ashes of that fire. Widely publicised as another supernatural intervention, an anonymous American has provided all the necessary funding for the Royal Shakespeare Company to create a new auditorium on top of the Victorian foundations. On 26 April, 1986, the Swan Theatre opened with *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, dedicated to presenting contemporary Jacobean works in an effort to place Shakespeare in an artistic and historical context. The repertoire is to be chosen from sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth century dramas which are deemed relevant to the present concept of Shakespeare.

It is an ambitious project. To present obscure or unknown plays which may or may not have influenced Britain's "national poet" is some scholars' idea of paradise, to be sure; but despite the RSC's disclaimer, will it really be possible ". . . to find ways of making the plays speak to a contemporary audience" without producing either a museum piece or worse, that condescending epithet, something merely academic?² There are those who would argue that this rather didactic approach reinforces both the RSC's monopoly on professional Shakespeare productions in England, and the elitist construction of a shrine for a national poet who creates and is created by English "culture." Similarly, there are less theoretical arguments which question the artistic merit and financial viability of presenting plays that few have ever produced, successfully or not.

The building has been designed by a Stratford architect, Michael Reardon, who coincidentally specializes in ecclesiastical restoration. His brief from Trevor Nunn was to construct an unchanging backdrop for Jacobean plays:

Of necessity, the key to the whole question is that the interior design of the theatre amounts to a permanent staging . . . [The Swan] is the simplest possible structure on which we can present the pre-proscenium plays of our dramatic tradition. It is a theatre for texts and actors, for the work of analysis, structure, insight and performance. Clearly design will have a vital significance in what we do there, but it cannot be design involving changing the configuration of the stage, or even of 'set building' in the sense that we currently understand it.³

Thus the auditorium has been expressly designed not to accommodate designers' impedimenta but rather to showcase the poetic texts themselves, as Elizabethan playhouses are thought to have done.

However, the design of the new theatre is not a copy of any particular playhouse Shakespeare may have known. Although interested in modern theories on the actual structure of Elizabethan stages, Reardon has explained that the exigencies of the Victorian foundation and current safety regulations have left him no opportunities for accurate imitation.⁴ Thus the Swan as it stands, with a wooden thrust stage surrounded on three sides by the stalls and two circular galleries, is evocative of the older playhouses without being an actual reconstruction. The influence of known Elizabethan theatres is demonstrated by the continuation of the top gallery into a complete circle incorporating the backstage wall. In performance, this is used by actors, musicians and stage staff. The result is a beautiful, light, and lively space: the structure is of brick and pale wood, and the acoustics are good. Architecturally it is the RSC's best auditorium.

The first two productions on The Swan's bare boards present an admirable dialectic on the projected character of the theatre. The play chosen to inaugurate the space was the Shakespeare/Fletcher collaboration, *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, directed by Barry Kyle. In mid-May it was joined in the repertoire by John Caird's production of Jonson's *Every Man in His Humour*. Ironically enough, these two directors certainly do not have the reputation for visually unencumbered productions. In the past few seasons Caird and Kyle have been responsible for some of the RSC's worst excesses in the direction of Britain's pilloried "designer-theatre"—the remembrance of Caird's bizarre 1984 *Merchant of Venice* lives on in infamy. To have two such directors open a theatre whose stage doors are deliberately only eight feet high in order to abrogate any possibility of scenic extravagance smacks of a refresher course in production economy.

From the look of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, Kyle and his designer Bob Crowley have not been deterred by this structural obstacle. Outsized poles, string and scarves appear constantly. The Gaoler's Daughter (Imogen Stubbs) spends a great deal of her stage time shinning up and down fifteen foot poles or perched on a bench up-stage. There is no flytower in The Swan but the kinsmen's gaol is a suspended crib perilously swaying from pulleys and anchored to the stage by ropes. Emilia follows a string inexplicably tied to

another pole into the "garden" where she is seen by the incarcerated men, hovering over her.

The entire production seems overcrowded with props. This impression is exacerbated by the incompatible but heavily emphasized Japanese Noh fashion in which Theseus and his court are dressed. The stylized and remote action of the play's main plot is thus embodied in dumbshows of Samurais combat. The chiaroscuro effect of white-face and black wigs enforces the overtones of symbolic activity and, to Kyle's credit, is consonant with the mythic elements of the play. However, they effect a distancing of the main plot while the typically English rustic details pertaining to the Gaoler's Daughter and the Schoolmaster's entertainment in III.v (with morris dancers and a huge, erupting phallic symbol) bring the subplot much more intensely to the fore. Hugh Quarshie and Gerard Murphy are physically powerful and are well matched as the warring kinsmen; however, this production has effectively rechristened the play "The Gaoler's Daughter."

Imogen Stubbs' haunting portrayal of the love-crazed Daughter displays her considerable technical and gymnastic accomplishments. She communicated the text simply and intelligently and with a rare sensitivity to its beauty. Her preservation of both meaning and poetry while scaling thin steel poles and swaying on top of them is spellbinding. While Stubbs' performance is memorable in itself, perhaps the Gaoler's Daughter subplot is spotlighted by the eccentric Oriental treatment Kyle uses to distance the characters in the main plot.

In Kyle's defence it could be argued that the disparity of treatment of the two plots is a function of the play as written. The play has been notoriously described as too awful to bear Shakespeare's mark but not awful enough to have been Fletcher's unaided work. Despite this, divided authorship cannot be blamed when scholarship generally divides the characterization of the Gaoler's Daughter fairly evenly between Shakespeare and Fletcher. Thus it seems that, faced with a difficult and mediocre play to open a theatre dedicated to such experiments, Kyle has succumbed to the temptations of gimmickry and gingered up an evening of patchy interest.

In contrast, John Caird's delightful revival of *Every Man in His Humour* is a testimonial to the exciting potential of the new theatre. The pale polished wood of the galleries and stage floor are complemented by a rough block and tackle and rack far upstage from which are suspended the economical pine chairs which furnish the stage when needed. The upper gallery is used as a discovery space allowing the audience and actors alike to stare at Kitley's wife and sister (played by Vanessa Redgrave's daughter, Joely Richardson) while he fumes downstage in painfully absurd jealousy. Henry Goodman is excellent as Kitley; his timing and delivery construct a sympathetically comic personality. He is one of several seasoned RSC actors in the cast and their presence typifies the superb company standard of ensemble playing. The even orchestration in this performance reflects the play's equal emphasis on the disparate elements comprising a community and recalls why Jonson's folio revision is a standard of the city comedy genre. The RSC production is a beautifully balanced chamber piece in which the corporate action is evenly divided by the whole company between the intricately plotted stories in Jonson's multiple vision of city life.

The London of *Every Man in* (Caird follows the folio version exclusively until the final scene) is a society based upon familial and social relationships which constantly threaten anarchically to transgress the bonds which hold the society together. Thus the servant Brainworm, energetically played by David Haig, propels the rapidly moving action from behind various disguises as representatives of London's legal authority. As soldier, lawyer's clerk and sergeant he impersonates the civic defenses against anarchy in a logical if undisciplined attempt to reconcile the father and son whom he serves. The disguise motif that runs throughout the play has been subtly but firmly dealt with by designer Sue Blane. Each of Brainworm's disguises becomes more cumbersome than the last, reemphasizing his increasingly inextricable relation to the burgeoning subterfuges. His repeated determination to pawn each suit and spend the money is mirrored by the impoverished, disreputable braggart, Bobadill (Pete Postlethwaite), whose shocking pink silk stockings are so obviously intended for the same fate eventually. Kitely's luxurious and appropriate green velvet proclaims his dominant humour as do the ghastly leggings on the pathetically pretentious Stephen (Paul Greenwood).

The disguisings and untrussings contribute to the anarchy intrinsic to Jonson's vision of London. Elizabethan society had strict rules governing appropriate apparel for the social classes and the visual metaphor of trading clothes in Caird's production brings home the instability of the upwardly mobile bourgeois. Clothes make and remake the men in *Every Man In*, and in Caird's production the elaborately assumed disguises stand out the more clearly against the Swan's unadorned wooden backdrop.

The action is lively and well-paced throughout, although the second half which comprises the confrontations and resolution passes more quickly. Kitely's jealous intrusion into the drawing room comedy of Wellbred and Knowell's foolish companions erupts into an uproarious fight wonderfully staged by Malcolm Ransom. This is paired later in Act IV with an interpolated dust-up between Cob and his wife—she proceeding to leave the stage littered with incapacitated men. Ransom's fights are beautifully choreographed and seem to be the natural outbursts of every man's seething humours.

In conclusion, if Kyle's production is not successful drama, Caird's show is a vindication of the current artistic policy for the Swan. It remains to be seen how the rest of the season—Aphra Behn's *The Rover* and Heywood's *The Fair Maid of the West*—progresses. The Swan is intended to be self-supporting. Because of this, few if any additional actors or staff accompanied the establishment of the new institution, nor were there any additional dressing rooms or storage space in the plans. It is to receive no portion of the company's government subsidy. Thus its future is entirely dependent upon box office receipts, themselves dependent upon artistic policy. It is to be hoped that Nunn's brainchild, the unexpected heir of a scholastic fancy and a fiscal fantasy, is not left on a barren hillside.

Susanne Collier
University of Birmingham, England

NOTES

1. I am indebted to Sally Beaman, *The Royal Shakespeare Company: A History of Ten Decades* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1982) for this summary of the events in 1926. On p. 93, Beaman states that the above text presented is the oral version which Archibald Flower, the chairman of the Stratford Festival, and his family preserved. She conjectures that the original text of the telegram is lost.

2. Simon Trussler, compiler, *Every Man in His Humour: A Programme/Text* (London: Methuen, 1986). An explanatory introduction to the theatre is printed on the inside cover of all the Swan programme/texts. The full paragraph from which I have quoted reads:

The promontory stage, surrounded on three sides by galleries, is not unreminiscent of the reconstructions of Elizabethan theatre, but there has been no attempt to produce a museum-like replica. Neither will the plays be presented as pieces of scholarly research. As in all RSC work, the most important consideration will be to find ways of making the plays speak to a contemporary audience.

3. Trussler 7. Trussler has included this segment of a memorandum from Trevor Nunn when he proposed the new theatre's artistic policy.

4. Michael Reardon described the Swan project to "The Conference on Elizabethan and Jacobean Plays in Performance" at The Shakespeare Institute, Stratford-upon-Avon, on 5 October, 1985.

King John at Ashland

King John, one of the most coldly-liked plays in the Shakespeare canon, is produced rarely though there have been memorable mountings in our era at the Old Vic and the Memorial Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon. At Ashland, *King John* was last produced fifteen years ago, and the version here reviewed did little to promote a speeding up of that schedule. What went wrong?

A huge genealogical chart hung above the stage throughout the play. An elaborate pre-play presentation of the characters explained who they were and their relations to each other. To open the play, the French Chatillon brought in a big map to diagram the geography of the conflict. These attempts at clarification distanced the characters and action firmly in another time and place, so that the audience was asked to see them under glass, as it were, foreign bodies, curious objects for historical study. Another indicator of this attitude was the four-page spread in the OSF Program entitled "The King's Majesty: What is it? Where did it come from? Who [sic] does it serve?" Again encouraging a museum-like, antiquarian approach to the plays, this article concluded with such questionable sentiments as these: "In the 16th century the combined elements of Aristotelianism, Platonism, Neo-Platonism, Stoicism, and Christianity were almost indistinguishably woven into a pattern which was universally agreed upon. . . . [Shakespeare's] kings could be enlightened and gracious or tyrannical and cruel, but they were men of the Renaissance and sanctioned by God." In other words, to see *King John* is to enter a closed ideological system of dubious relevance to today.

Once cast in the role of history buffs and told, moreover, that John was sanctioned by God, the spectators had little choice but to devote substantial amounts of their energies to keeping the characters sorted, attending primarily to political meanings, and trying to accept the machinations of John as teleologically fruitful. Largely lost were opportunities to consider other dimensions of the play such as its many-leveled skepticism toward the

prevailing systems of authority, kingship, and kinship. In particular, the relevance to our day of the plays' many discussions of paternity, legitimacy, adultery, bastardy, and the rights of sons, wives, and mothers as against fathers was severely muted by the religio-political focus, by the swathing robes and gowns that reduced age and gender almost to one form, and by the strident earnestness of speech given evenly to all topics.

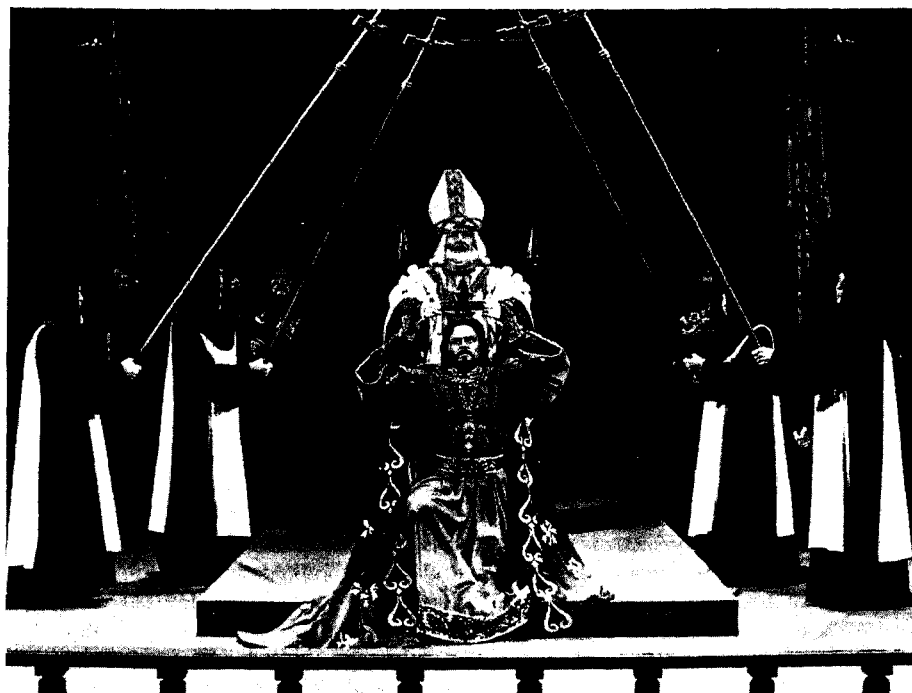
King John was played from the first as sober and single-minded, if also a trifle dull-witted. He vented self-righteously splenetic anger on the Chatillon for daring to challenge his kingship, but his considerable energy rarely flowed out to the audience, expending itself instead through lateral, cross-stage exchanges. After a while, I felt he was in touch mainly with himself.

Robert Faulconbridge and his brother, Philip the Bastard, argued with animation before the King who, for part of the time stood downstage center of them. Perhaps to point up the Bastard's lines about Robert's "half-face" (1.1.100), Robert at first stood in profile. The Bastard was costumed in a gray plaid tunic, less sumptuous than the others, and in later scenes, as he rose in eminence, his costume advanced in glory.

An interpolated character, a woman who looked rather like the soon-to-enter Blanche was onstage during this first scene, and the Bastard flirted with her a bit until interrupted by the exiting King. Lady Faulconbridge, upon entering to the Bastard, gave him a lusty slap with her riding whip. At first he cowered, but at his "What! I am dubbed!" he took the whip from her. Lady Faulconbridge then told the Bastard in sincere tones that King Richard was his father. By eschewing any hints of duplicity, she thus forfeited a useful opportunity to leave open the possibility that she might not have been seduced by Richard yet chose by her "confession" to further her son's career. This possible ambiguity in paternity would fit ambiguities raised later as to the faithfulness of Eleanor and Constance and the consequent paternities of John and Arthur.

In general, the English wore red and the French blue, as coded in the genealogical chart, but Arthur wore a red tunic. Constance wore green. All the costuming was heavy, ornate. Men wore boots, tunics, long gowns, big belts, swords, chain mail, cloaks, gloves, long-haired wigs, usually beards. The women wore long gowns, long sleeves, back-veilings or nun-like head-dresses. The whole production, like the costuming, came to seem weighted, over-pageant, bulky, a bit slow or thick. Before the Angiers gate, there were twenty-two actors, many more than were likely to have been on stage at The Theatre or The Globe. This crowding, moreover, seemed to encourage the general rant, the monotonous tone of angry shouting in which the principals conducted their debates.

"Thy bastard shall be king,/ That thou mayst be a queen and check the world!" (2.1.127): Elinor's crucial first accusation to Constance was in no way highlighted though it could have helped strongly to develop the relevant theme of women's manipulations of paternity and legitimacy in the very teeth of primogenitural codes. For my taste, both Elinor and Constance were played much too righteously, never suggesting as in the line above that either or both might be seeking primarily her own gain or at least the power to "check" mate opposing kings. In the same vein, Constance replied angrily enough but



Oregon Shakespearean Festival, Ashland, 1985. The coronation of the king in the Oregon Shakespearean Festival production of "King John," on the Elizabethan Stage through September 28. Directed by Pat Patton, with costumes by Sarah Nash Gates, settings by Richard L. Hay, and lighting by James Sale. (Photo by Hank Kranzler)

missed the chance to include the choric and testing Bastard in her repulse of Elinor (2.1.134-35): "My boy a bastard! By my soul, I think/ His father never was so true begot!" At "true begot" some gesture or turning toward the Bastard or some movement of his would at least make sense of the internal economy of the play, for the Bastard had speculated a few minutes before as to whether he was "true begot" (1.1.82) and would insist moments later that both armies contain "bastards" (1.2.292, 295). Women, and only women, as the text asserts repeatedly, have the final power to "blot" (2.1.137, 138) fathers, sons, and grandsons in their "sin-conceiving" wombs (2.1.194). This production, I think, should have made the women more attractive, insidious, and fearsome to the men, and more ambitious, pained, and tragic to themselves.

King Philip's line, "Women and fools, break off your conference" (2.1.158) was spoken by Lewis the Dauphin who changed it from a vocative/imperative addressed to the women, Bastard and Austria to an observation addressed to the two Kings. King Philip misexplicated part of the following threat to Angiers (2.1.274-77):

'Tis not the roundure of your old-faced walls
Can hide you from our messengers of war,

Though all these English and their discipline
Were harbored in their rude circumference.

King Philip took the final four words to refer somehow to the English and glared at King John for his naughty rudeness.

The “excursions” (2.1.319) of battle between the English and French armies were spectacularly choreographed. Big cannon blanks were fired at the audience, and smoke issuing from strips ascending the rear face of the two onstage pillars was caught by overhead stablights. The Bastard prominently fought Austria (who sported a big lion skin proudly described in Program notes as intricately wrought from hexaplast). After the French and English Heralds announced victory for each side, the cannons roared once more, and battle was renewed (2.1.354).

To deliver his skeptic speech, beginning “Ha, majesty! how high thy glory tow’rs? When the rich blood of kings is set on fire!” (2.1.374), the Bastard came down center while the others backed up conversing silently in groups, so that the speech became an aside. At “Why stand these royal fronts amazed thus?” (2.1.380), the Bastard turned and spoke to the warriors. Though he often spoke in a better modulated, more tuned, less ranting style than others, the Bastard sometimes stressed the meter surprisingly as in, for example, “E-ven till *un-fen-ced des-o-la-tion*/ Leave them as naked as the vulgar air” instead of “*E’en* till *un-fen-ced des-o-la-ti-on*” (2.1.412-13). He introduced interesting stage business when, during the parley over Blanche (2.1.498), he crossed to converse with her (only to be firmly rejected by her as Elinor, across stage, persuaded the innocent-faced Lewis to seek Blanche). The Bastard was next amazed and infuriated that John offered so many territories as dowry for Blanche (2.1.519), and he protested silently to Elinor. His attraction to Blanche and his horror at the King’s dealings helped to motivate and to inform the Bastard’s long closing soliloquy on base “Commodity.”

Constance failed, in her railings against the Kings (3.1), to suggest a full range of self-lacerating doubt as well as brassy anger. One could readily imagine why all but the first of the following lines were cut (repetitious, overly rhetorical), but such cuts kept the audience from attending to the vulnerability of Constance as well as to the plays insistent, nervous probings into the nature of women, wives, and widows (3.1.13-16):

For I am sick and capable of fears,
Oppressed with wrongs and therefore full of fears,
A widow, husbandless, subject to fears,
A woman, naturally born to fears.

The actress failed, furthermore, to give enough tonal modulation to the splendid meditation of Constance on adulterous Fortune, whom she terms Arthur’s parent (3.1.52-62). More care in carving out the clauses that intricately connect false Fortune with Constance, King Philip, and King John would have done much to advance the play’s skeptic blurrings of family, clan, and national loyalties, the very skepticism belied by color-coded chart and costumes ever suggesting firm divisions where the text belies them.

Just before Pandulph first enters, the Bastard and Austria twit each other over the “calfskin” on Austria’s “recreant limbs” (3.1.134-39). King John

then rebukes the Bastard (3.1.140): "We like not this: thou dost forget thyself." At Ashland, John plainly addressed these words to Austria, a seemingly small point but really one of many indicators as to how OSF productions continually revise and un-complicate Shakespeare. If John is made to rebuke Austria instead of the Bastard, then the Bastard's rise to heroic favor is smooth, Austria is consistently caricatured, and the "through-line" of the play remains unmuddled. But what if Shakespeare (and his audiences) enjoyed such muddle? What if they were prepared to watch the plus and minus signs of chivalry skew themselves around just as the plus and minus signs of political affinity skewed themselves around? What then? So to sacrifice dramatic richness for the sake of a simplified through-line deserves one name: condescension. Like all great writers, Shakespeare defined the reader's mind. He made audiences. His texts say who we are and can be, and the quality of directorial respect for the texts must be directly proportional to the quality of directorial respect for the crowd out front.

Cardinal Pandulph, stiffly pompous in white satin robes embroidered in gold and spotted with fluffy pompons, wearing white gloves, gold chains, and a huge mitred hat (not worn in 1200 in that form nor worn by cardinals, I believe), evoked the same righteous anger from King John that everyone else evoked. The exchanges of Constance and the Cardinal were, in contrast, nearly comic in their sing-song sharing of curses upon the Kings who sat at table with palms joined flat for dozens of ritualized lines (3.1.196-340).

In a play where the strengths and failings of mortal "mothers" are tied so intricately to the strengths and failings of Mother Church and Mother country, it seems unwise to cut, as the OSF production cut, Pandulph's lines (3.1.273-74): "Or let the Church, our mother, breathe her curse, / A mother's curse, on her revolting son." Perhaps the director feared audience snickers at modern connotations of "revolting," but an actor might normally be trusted to signal appropriate responses. Pandulph did elicit laughter, appropriately, at the involuted machinations of his persuasions to King Philip (3.1.287-90):

For that which thou hast sworn to do amiss
Is not amiss when it is truly done,
And being not done, where doing tends to ill,
The truth is then most done not doing it.

Another laugh, less wise, was provoked by Pandulph's sanctimonious tone at (3.1.296) "It is religion that doth make vows kept."

After King Philip's defection from his league with King John, there were vigorous "alarums" (3.2.1.s.d.) of drums and trumpets together with extended "excursions" featuring the Bastard's heroics against Lewis, Austria, and others. The Bastard chased them offstage and re-entered with Austria's lion skin but not carrying Austria's head contra the text.

Although Elinor drew the captured Arthur aside, as the text suggests (3.3.21), so that King John and Hubert might discuss murdering the boy even while he remained present, in this production Arthur kept glancing over at the two men and plainly suspected the import of their speech. At John's "But, ah, I will not!" (3.3.60), John started to exit. Elinor, who had been sitting with Arthur, saw John falter. She stood up and glared at him so that he returned to

persuading the murder. When John said "Death" (3.3.74), Hubert gasped out a perhaps too-surprised "My lord!" And yet John seemed, for my taste, too earnest, self-justified, and unmalicious in this scene, as elsewhere. His lines which should have been exultant and at least a bit Machiavellian—"I could be merry now. Hubert, I love thee: Will, I'll not say what I intend for thee. . . . On toward Calais, ho!" (3.3.79-85)—in this actor's range of kingly dignity and limited expression sounded wooden, fell flat.

Though the acting of Constance in distraction was mechanically strident and seemed "not well meant," as they say of thoroughbreds held back in the race, the idea that she might be wooing and seducing "amiable, lovely Death" (3.4.27) was meritorious. It was beyond the power of this actress to keep the audience from laughter at (3.4.54-55) "Preach some philosophy to make me mad,/ And thou shalt be canonized, Cardinal." But, in this play of extended perorations, the special extension of Constance's laments for her son, the many monosyllabic lines of deeply personal grief, made me feel Shakespeare's no doubt intimate knowledge of vulnerable affection for his own son, "since the birth of Cain, the first male child,/ To him that did but yesterday suspire" (3.4.83-84), an eldest son who may have died even while Shakespeare wrote *King John* as a drama of primogenitural agonies.

For the scene in which Hubert threatens to put out Arthur's eyes (4.1), attendants brought on torches, a glowing brazier, and a chair with chains attached. At "Go to, hold your tongue" (4.1.110), Hubert slapped Arthur and immediately looked abashed at the offending hand. At Arthur's "O, spare mine eyes" (4.1.115), Hubert brought the hot iron very close before stopping. Then, relenting, Hubert embraced Arthur just before he announced, "Well, see to live" (4.1.136). This scene was one of the most effective in the production and closed the first half with a total playing time of an hour and forty minutes. Still, my basic sense of the interpretation to that point was of earnest heaviness, as if this were an Ashland version of an antiquarian spectacular by Beerbohm Tree.

King John seemed more distraught than secretly pleased over Hubert's news (false) that Arthur was dead. Though John does say in soliloquy that he repents Arthur's death (after he has heard the outraged remarks of Salisbury and Pembroke), there should be a time intervening in which he indicates some small satisfaction in his belief that what he longed for, Arthur's death, has come to pass. When John hypocritically rebuked Hubert for killing Arthur—"I had a mighty cause? To wish him dead, but thou hadst none to kill him" (4.2.218-19)—the hypocrisy was played in such a low key that only a few spectators snickered.

When Hubert finally confessed to John that Arthur was alive, "This hand of mine/ Is yet a maiden and an innocent hand,/ Not painted with the crimson spots of blood" (4.2.267-69), the imagery of sexual violence seemed to leap forth with tangible strength, and it caught up as well the train of related images seething through: the mounted cannon brawling down the city's naked ribs (2.1.407-13); Fortune culling forth and kissing her happy minion, fresh victor in bloody face to face combat (2.1.416-20); the Kings, Philip and John, married and coupled in true love between their royal selves (3.1.244-48); the bloodied trothplight of Lewis and Blanche (3.1.262-63, 319-21); the uneasy

eroticisms of the hot iron scene between Hubert and the loving Arthur (4.1). Just as to murder Arthur would have been, in Hubert's terms, to deflower him, so in reverse the procreative urge is imaged throughout the play as leading to blood, violence, and loss. And this deeper fear or excitement should in my judgment enter more vividly into production values such as eroticizing the Bastard's relations to Elinor, John's relations to Elinor and Hubert, and Hubert's relation to Arthur. There should be opportunities, too, to glimpse the "breathing," "breeding" flesh so active beneath the gowns and armor.

The Bastard held his sword to Hubert's throat as he questioned Hubert about the cause of Arthur's death (4.3.123). Hubert, in utter dejection, embraced the boy's corpse.

As four monks held crosses on staffs over a King John weighted in resplendent red robes, the ceremony of taking off the crown and receiving it back from the white-silked and gold-encrusted Pandulph was fully blown (5.1.1). John became more and more distraught upon hearing news from the Bastard that the Barons had deserted him to fight with the invading Lewis. At John's command to the Bastard, "Have thou the ordering of this present time" (5.1.80), John grabbed his arm and gave the crown to the other man.

Among the more unfortunate cuts in the text of the heavily-cut production were the Bastard's lines of dismay that John might let Lewis "flesh his spirit in a warlike soil" (5.1.74) and Salisbury's lines of guilt that the defecting nobles as children of the isle should "march/ Upon her gentle bosom" (5.2.26-27). Such cuts impaired the capacity of the audience to feel Shakespeare's insistent personifications of the Mother Country as virgin and mater and pater all mingled for an eroticized affection analogous to the affection aimed at Queen and Church. On the other hand, Pandulph's speeches, very slow-paced in this production, to persuade Lewis and the defecting English nobles to a truce could well have been more heavily cut as could the very long speeches of Lewis and the Bastard in the same scene (5.2). There was already a kind of dead silence over the audience which was plainly suffering fourth-and fifth-act fatigue, and the heavy, competitive rhetoricity of the play had somehow to be made unborning.

Lewis, a blond pretty-boy, was consistently played as ultra sincere, and the Bastard's remark upon hearing from Pandulph that Lewis won't lay down his arms, "the youth says well" (5.2.129), was uttered with smiling sarcasm directly to Lewis.

The final battle (5.3) began with smoke issuing from the pillars even before any soldiers entered or cannon fired. In the struggle, the Bastard fought superheroically. As he stood above, Lewis received the bad news of the English lords falling from him and his supply sunk on Goodwin Sands. Prince Henry was inserted into the English company before his first text appearance. And the Bastard slowed and carved out the following two lines so as to suggest some sort of talismanic import (5.6.44-45): "Withhold thine indignation, mighty Heaven,/ And tempt us not to bear above our power!" King John was brought out in a white shirt on a portable bed to die in mild sadness. The Bastard kneeled to Henry and fully affirmed the lineal state and glory of the young Prince before closing the play on the rousing Anglophile lines—"Nought shall make us rue,/ If England to itself do rest but true"

(v.7.122-23)—lines which rang a little faint in 1985, in Oregon, in the atmosphere of the Falklands.

I left this production feeling defeated by the stolid, unimagined antiquarianism and the droning pleading of the men's voices in incessant argument. This was millinary Shakespeare. This was big-crowd, tableaux stuff, leaning perilously backward toward the spectacularisms of Beerbohm Tree. This was quintessential Oregon Shakespearean Festival. After fifty years, little progress and almost no risk. I asked the director of this *King John* what criticism of the play he had read, and he said he had started one book, whose author escaped his memory. I had been hoping to learn his opinions of such pieces as Eugene Waith's on *King John* and the drama of history, reviewing the theatrical record and arguing for a thinly-veiled formalist, universalist, aestheticist playing as opposed to any search for a pattern of historically-conditioned ideas. For I felt precisely such an interest in Shakespeare's ideas about primogeniture, about women's control over paternal identities, about men's loyalties to their biological, geographical, and religious Mothers; about shrewd questionings of sexual legitimacy; about strained qualities of breeding and breathing, mentioned so often in the play, and I thought that these ideas desperately need fresh exploration on stage. I had hoped to find a climate of directorial discussion amenable to incorporating insights of critics such as Sigmund Burkhardt, Eamon Grennan, and Virginia Vaughan who argue in telling fashion both for the contingent origins and for the surprising modernity of *King John*. But if such openness to possible contributions of the scholarly community to contemporary Shakespeare stagings exists in-house at Ashland, I've yet to discover it, alas.

Charles Frey
University of Washington, Seattle