FOURTH INTERNATIONAL MARLOWE CONFERENCE

The Society is now beginning to plan its Fourth International Marlowe Conference, to be held in Cambridge, England, in the summer of 1998. Members with ideas for papers or sessions are invited to correspond with President Deats. See address on page 2.

MSA ELECTION

The slate of officers on the ballot distributed with the last newsletter was confirmed by the membership. Former Vice President Sara M. Deats will now serve as President, former Treasurer Robert A. Logan will serve as Vice President, Roslyn L. Knutsen is the new Treasurer, Viviana Comensoli continues to serve as Secretary, and Bruce E. Brandt will continue as Membership Chairman.

HOFFMAN PRIZE

The seventh Calvin and Rose G. Hoffman Prize for Distinguished Publication on Christopher Marlowe has been awarded to Professor Jonathan Bate of the University of Liverpool. Entries for the eighth prize should be submitted to the Headmaster by September 1, 1996. The prize will not be less than £6,500. Further details may be obtained from the Headmaster's Secretary, The King's School, Canterbury, Kent CT1 2ES, England.

MARLOWE COMES TO MADISON, WISCONSIN

In August, 1996, I shall see a long-planned project come to realization: a production of Christopher Marlowe's Doctor Faustus based on my edition of the 1604 text. (Those of you who were at the Oxford conference in August 1988 may remember something of this.)

The production will be within "community theater," but I will be using professional actors, University of Wisconsin MFA candidates, as well as experienced actors from a fine pool of local talent. (I have been acting, directing and producing for over twenty years in Madison's professional and amateur theaters.)

The main obstacle in offering Marlowe's 400-year-old Elizabethan play to a modern Madison audience is the audience's expectation that the production will be esoteric and difficult to understand—going to the theater a duty, not a joy.

Any production of any play ought to be based on the assumption that "a play is a play—and especially so here: we will not be "doing Marlowe"; we'll be doing "a play." Hence, the production will not be self-consciously "stately"—it will be purposefully "casual." In other words, I want to catch the audience unawares. I shall allow the play to unfold scene-by-scene, each showing its own center, but all contributing to the building of the simple complexity of the through-line.

The production will be unique because based on my own edition of the play, one which I believe comes closer to Marlowe's original version than any other published or performed version. I have divided the play into twelve scenes, six in each "act" (an arbitrary division because the play was and could be performed without the interruption of an intermission). Furthermore, with this production there is another difference; I leave the audience with the implication that all of the play has taken place in Faustus's head, just as it has taken place in the heads of the audience, through the simple move of repeating the last line of the Prologue as the last line of the Epilogue: "And this the man that in his study sits."

The staging will be simple and the action continuous within each "act." The one permanent set-piece will Faustus's study, up-stage, center, behind a curtain which opens to reveal a tall writing desk, a tall stool, and piles of books. The few hand props are suggested by the text (goblet, dagger, etc.). The
stage-furniture will be limited to boxes and planks, easily set and easily struck. (And the actors will do all the shifting.) The costumes will be suggestive for the most part. Faustus will be dressed throughout in humble scholar’s dress, Mephistophiles will be in a Franciscan friar’s gown, and the rest in black turtlenecks and tights, adding what small costume pieces are needed to suggest roles.

Although Faustus has some 30 specified roles, plus "friars," "devils," and "attendants," I will do the play with 12 actors: 7 male, 5 female, because I shall emphasize ensemble and fast-moving team work. The pace will be fast, the house will be used for staging business, and there will be a great deal of audience interaction.

My goal is not to present a classic play to an audience, but to draw the audience into Faustus’s story in order to experience that story with Faustus. My ultimate goal is to prove that drama is realized ultimately only through an audience, stimulating and engaging its thoughts, laughter, and tears. I wish to show Madison theatergoers that Marlowe’s Doctor Faustus is a great play not because it is greatly written, not because it is 400 years old, but because it simply and completely entertains broadly and deeply.

The performance time will be 8 p.m. on August 29, 30, 31, September 5, 6, 7, and September 12, 13, 14, at Brave Hearts Theatre, 1988 Atwood Avenue, Madison, WI 53704. Tickets will cost $7.

Further information on this production of Doctor Faustus can be obtained from Robert Kimbrough, 3206 Gregory Street, Madison, WI 53711-1821. Tel: 608-238-1266 USA. Fax: 608-251-4279.

Robert Kimbrough
Professor Emeritus
University of Wisconsin-Madison

FROM THE EDITOR

CONTRIBUTIONS FOR THE MARLOWE SOCIETY OF AMERICA NEWSLETTER

MSAN has no backlog and depends upon the membership for its contents. Materials for the next issue of MSAN should be received by September 15, 1996. Reviews of films or productions relating to Renaissance and especially Marlovian drama, brief articles and notes on Marlowe or matters related to Marlovian studies, announcements and calls for papers, and ideas or experiences relating to teaching Marlowe are welcome. Send submissions to Bruce E. Brandt, Editor, MSAN, English Department, Box 504, South Dakota State University, Brookings, SD 57007.

MARLOWE SOCIETY OF AMERICA

Sara M. Deats, President
Robert A. Logan, Vice President
Viviana Comensoli, Secretary
Roslyn L. Knutson, Treasurer
Bruce E. Brandt, Membership Chairman and MSA Newsletter Editor
Paul Whitfield White, MSA Book Reviews Editor

All business and organizational correspondence except for memberships should be addressed to the President:

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4202 East Fowler Avenue, CPR 107
Tampa, Florida 33660-5550

New memberships and renewals should be sent to the Membership Chairman:

Professor Bruce E. Brandt
Membership Chairman
Marlowe Society of America
English Department, Box 504
South Dakota State University
Brookings, SD 57007

ALL MEMBERSHIP FEES SHOULD BE PAID IN U.S. DOLLARS

U.S. and Canada: 1 year = $20, 3 years = $50
Overseas members: 1 year = $25, 3 years = $65
Graduate students: U.S./Canada = $10; Overseas = $15

MSA Newsletter publishes reviews of Renaissance, and especially Marlovian, drama; notices of recent and forthcoming publications; announcements; and brief articles or notes of interest to Marlovian scholars. The opinions expressed are those of the authors, and do not necessarily reflect that of the MSA. The editor reserves the right to refuse items, to ask for revisions, and to make stylistic changes that he deems appropriate. Send inquiries, announcements, and submissions to Professor Brandt at the above address. The deadline for the spring issue is Sept. 15, 1996.

MSA Book Reviews publishes reviews of books on Marlowe and his period. Reviews, suggestions for reviews, and inquiries should be sent to the Reviews Editor:

Professor Paul Whitfield White, Editor
MSA Book Reviews
Department of English
1358 Heavilon Hall
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"UNTIL OUR BODIES TURN TO ELEMENTS": THE USES OF MALE/MALE LOVE IN MARLOWE'S PLAYS

An abstract of the paper presented at the 1995 MSA Workshop, by Roger E. Moore, Vanderbilt University.

Most recent criticism on male/male eroticism in Marlowe has focused almost exclusively on Edward II. While this is certainly the play in which homoeroticism is most deeply explored and fully developed, it is not Marlowe's only exploration of this subject—it is merely the culmination of many attempts at pinpointing the meaning of homoerotic attraction. My paper intends to open up discussion of the overall uses of same-sex desire in Marlowe's canon by looking at two other sites of homoerotic interrogation—the "friendships" of Tamburlaine/Thebridamas, Barabas/Ithamore—and how they function in Marlowe's exploration of the politics of embodiment. Marlowe clearly offers, I think, two models of male/male love with which we are to contextualize the love of Edward and Gaveston, and by analyzing them we can come to a fuller appreciation of Edward II and the redefinition of the masculine self he effects in that play.

In constructing the friendships between Tamburlaine/Thebridamas and Barabas/Ithamore, Marlowe draws on classical texts and precedents that code these relationships as erotic ones. In Part I, l.ii., Tamburlaine and the Persian general mutually vow their undying affection for each other, and Tamburlaine further solemnizes the ceremony by invoking the "love of Pylades and Orestes / Whose statues we adore in Scythia." While this may seem merely to be an act of "friendship," such a supposition is untenable when we realize Marlowe draws here, in both the allusion and the ritualistic ceremony, on Lucian's Tarsaris, a primary classical work privileging male/male devotion, often in erotic terms.

Marlowe also draws on classical tradition in his rendering of the Barabas/Ithamore relationship. After Abigail's death, Barabas' affection for Ithamore greatly increases, so much so that he formally adopts his "love," his "second self," as his only heir. Barabas does not adopt him as a son, but as a friend; in doing so he suggests the ancient tradition of "collateral adoption," a legal uniting of two adults of the same sex which, as John Boswell points out, was performed less for financial and familial reasons than for personal, emotional ones.

By thus emphasizing the homoerotic character of these friendships, Marlowe intends us to contrast them with that of Edward and Gaveston. The former are indeed very different from the latter, for in Tamburlaine and The Jew of Malta same-sex desire is pursued by the protagonists because it suggests freedom from the body, the earth, the feminine. To foster an erotic relationship with another man was traditionally the ultimate means of transcending the troublingly complex and filthy world of desire. Both Tamburlaine and Barabas are highly invested in scourging, disciplining, and overcoming the body, and therefore same-sex relationships seem especially attractive to them. Marlowe's consistent critique of this transcendent attitude culminates, I argue, in the love of Edward and Gaveston, for here male/male love, far from denying the body, is actually born out of a fervent acceptance of bodily pleasure and desire. Marlowe effectively renders a transformation of the male self,
for rather than defining it as exclusively spiritual, he suggests, in Edward II, its inseparability from bodily categories. Marlowe’s exploration of homoeroticism thus becomes the cornerstone of a much larger agenda by which he critiques Renaissance notions of selfhood and urges the acceptance of embodiment and earthly location.

EDWARD II, JAMES I, AND THE FIGURE OF THE SODOMITE KING

An abstract of the paper presented at the 1995 MSA Workshop, by Curtis Perry, Harvard University.

Marlowe’s depiction of Edward II as fiscally irresponsible, intemperate, and politically inept has reminded several critics of accounts of James I written by his contemporaries. Several of these critics have in fact suggested that Marlowe was drawn to the chronicle accounts of Edward II because of its parallels with James—who was of course still James VI of Scotland, but who had already attracted some criticism for his devotion to his older French cousin Esmé Stuart, Lord Aubigny.

Though it is possible that Marlowe saw a connection between Gaveston and Aubigny, I think it implausible that he saw one between Edward and James. For James became notorious for the kinds of political and fiscal irresponsibility epitomized by Edward only after his accession to the English throne. Despite some pointed barbs at Aubigny, James was seen in an altogether different light during his reign in Scotland. Consequently, Edward II cannot be read simply as a roman à clef representing James VI & I.

To me, this makes the parallels between the two figures all the more striking, and I want to argue for a different relationship between them. In particular, I want to argue that Marlowe’s play resembles Jacobean historiography not because it is based on James, but rather because both Marlowe and the writers who have given us depictions of James as a sodomite use the hints of sodomy to register their complaints about other royal vices. As may be evident, I am drawing here on the work of recent critics like Alan Bray, Gregory Bredbeck, and Jonathan Goldberg, who have shown that accusations of sodomy in Renaissance England are associated with—and used discursively to symbolize—a range of more mundane transgressive behaviors such as treason, heresy, or social climbing. In other words, I want to argue that the association between sodomy and other royal vices (profligacy, irresponsibility), which Marlowe shares with several of James’s contemporary critics, recurs precisely because it is overdetermined by the period’s discourses of sodomy and of kingship. To show this, I first examine how Edward II uses hints of sodomy as part of the symbolic logic of its critique of kingship. Then I show how the uses of sodomy in descriptions of James are shaped by the same rhetorical structures and ideological concerns. Finally, I argue that the similarities show that the figure of the sodomite king—as manifested in descriptions of Edward and James—recurs as part of what we might call a vocabulary of images with which English renaissance writers responded to specific concerns about the office of kingship.

"HERE, TAKE MY PICTURE, AND LET ME WEAR THINE": MARLOWE, HILLIARD, AND THE INTERPRETATION OF HOMOEROTIC DESIRE IN THE ELIZABETHAN MINIATURE TRADITION

An abstract of the paper presented at the 1995 MSA Workshop, by Stedman C. Mays, Rutgers University.

As the line cited in the title of my paper indicates, King Edward exchanges miniatures with his beloved Piers Gaveston in Marlowe’s Edward II. The moment in which this act of exchange occurs has not received the kind of attention it deserves. Therefore, in my essay, I focus on the resonance for the play that seems to emanate from the inclusion of the miniatures in the world of the drama, arguing that the miniatures are a fitting symbolic microcosm of the play’s larger questions of sexual selfhood and artistic representation. Accordingly, I address certain basic issues in the following order: (1) How and why does Marlowe have the lovers exchange miniature images of one another at this point in the script? (2) How and why does this reference to the visual arts seem to encourage readers and audience members to reflect upon visual references and metaphors throughout the rest of the text?; and, on a broader level, (3) How and why does Marlowe seem to be in conversation with the miniature tradition in the general context of Elizabethan culture, especially in relation to contemporary commentary on "limning" that have come down to us? The paper concludes with a consideration of Marlowe’s Edward II in light of Nicholas Hilliard’s images of handsome males, with particular emphasis on Hilliard’s The Art of Limning, a handbook on producing miniatures written late in the artist’s career that is the culminating expression of his lifelong preoccupation with small-scale portraiture highly suitable for exchange and portability. Both Hilliard and Marlowe are profoundly concerned with the pleasures and perils of creating and exchanging seductive images, and both men seem to engender the possibility of reading the visual arts in ways that are suggestive for the emerging field of queer studies.
DOCTOR FAUSTUS

Compass Theatre Company, directed by Neil Sissons, at the Crucible Studio, Sheffield, as part of a tour. 3 April 1996.

Hell, it seems, is minimalist theatre, nor am I out of it. The Compass Theatre have made a speciality of small-scale, intimate studio performances, very often of Renaissance plays, and their version of Doctor Faustus is no exception, with only five actors, all of whom are on stage throughout. Nick Chadwin, the usual lead, plays Doctor Faustus himself, in scholar's gown in the first, study-bound half, and resplendent in red frock-coat, long black periwig and exaggeratedly whitened face and red lips for his travels after the interval. Richard Heap, tall and darkly elegant in evening dress and white spats, was a low-key, melancholy Mephistophilis who also, improbably, donned a gold wire mask to appear as Helen of Troy (a decision made even more odd by the ascription of the role to one of the 'supporting' actors in the cast list). Throughout Faustus' opening soliloquy Mephistophilis waited visibly, silently, in one of the aisles, while behind Faustus' desk (present throughout the production as one of the very few props) the three other cast members, Anna Darvas, Amanda Jones, and David Westbrook stood to comment, whisper, and chant. Dressed all alike in long gray greatcoats, whitened faces, and tousled gray hair, they did duty as musicians, the horse and the horse-courser, the Seven Deadly Sins, the Pope and two cardinals, Alexander and his paramour, the Duke and Duchess of Hahnolt and the courtiers of the Emperor (with Mephistophilis doubling the Emperor himself). Apart from a number of wire masks in such shapes as the papal tiara and a horse's head, there were no props: everything was mimed, from Faustus' conjurings for the Vanhols (even the grapes were absent) to the Pope and the Cardinals greedily stuffing imaginary food into their mouths while noisily chewing, crunching and belching. The only gestures towards a richer kind of staging practice came from the lavish use of music, with mandolin and violin played by one of the three 'support' cast and all three joining in for various musical fragments and, while Faustus was waiting for night to conjure, a complete anthem on the persecution and death of Jesus.

The text used was an amalgam of the A and B versions, though with the complete omission of Wagner, Robin and Rafe (due, probably, to casting considerations). There was in fact no audience laughter throughout the production (Mephistophilis tried to get an increasingly distraught Faustus to laugh at the misfortune of the horse-courser, but to no avail), and little relief of any other kind: no sense of pleasure, excitement, or spectacle, for this was a Faustus doomed, it seemed, even before he had set foot on stage, with his quiet, private dismissal of his books suggesting the weariness of an old debate, an impression confirmed by the looming presence of the waiting Mephistophilis. Just as there was no escape for the audience from the claustrophobic presence of the whole cast and the bare furnishings of the study, so Faustus was, indeed, in hell already, with a strong sense of the whole drama being played out merely within his own, damned, mind. Strikingly, for instance, he exclaimed in triumph at the presence of Mephistophilis before his actual appearance, strongly suggesting the strength of the focus on his own perceptions. This was a stress well served by the use of poor theatre, since the shadowy slipping in and out of roles was neatly in tune with the idea of thoughts taking on a transitory life, and also increased our own awareness that we, too, were at least temporarily being offered a vision of hell.

Lisa Hopkins
Sheffield Hallam University

MARLOWE ON BOARD

FORD'S STAGECOACH


Stagecoach was made in 1939, John Ford's annus mirabilis during which he also directed Young Mr. Lincoln and Drums Along the Mohawk. Stagecoach is the first film he shot in Utah's Monument Valley, whose landscape shaped many of Ford's westerns, including the great The Searchers (1956). Stagecoach is also Ford's first film with John Wayne, the American icon, whose slow and steady drawl and pace became the characteristic style of the western hero. Finally, Stagecoach is widely recognized as one of the pioneer classic westerns which elevated the genre from its "B" movie status to the ranks of respectability.

The film contains a number of character prototypes which became the stereotypes of later westerns: the tainted but essentially innocent hero Ringo Kid (Wayne); Dallas, the tart with a heart (Trevor); the gambler Hatfield, a fading gentleman killer of the old South with an inflated code of chivalry (Carradine); Mrs. Mallory, the snooty Eastern woman (Platt); the drunken, yet poetically noble Doc Boone (Mitchell, who received the academy award for best supporting actor); Mr. Gatewood, the embezzling 'respectable' banker (Churchill); and a timid liquor salesman Mr. Peacock (Meek). These people with different social backgrounds and values are put into close quarters under extreme pressure to reveal their true characters, which are often opposed to their public personas. The immediate source of the movie is
Ernest Haycox's short story Stages to Lordsburg, but it is also indebted to Maupassant, especially Boule de Suif in its depiction of the changing relationships and revelations in a group of characters on a voyage in a country at war.

Stagecoach is structured symmetrically, opening with a demeaning expulsion from a town and ending with another expulsion, but one that is patently beneficial and resurrectorial. The narrative is divided into three stagecoach stops, each one moving the characters farther from civilization into the wilderness. The movie presents this process as necessary and salutary, and the final movement across the border to Ringo's Edenic ranch completes the Marlovian theme presented at the outset of the movie.

Stagecoach opens with a scene which involves the inversion of some of Marlowe's most famous lines from Dr. Faustus. Two disreputable people are being kicked out of town by the Law and Order League, a group of bluenoses who object to Doctor Josiah Boone's drunkenness and Dallas' prostitution. Dallas is upset at her expulsion, but Doc Boone, the drunken poet type who in Hollywood tradition exemplifies in vino veritas, accepts his fate and even waxes eloquent about it. He inverts Marlowe's paeon to Helen of Troy, applying it to the sour-faced matron who is ejecting him. Dr. Faustus saluted the dangerous beauty of Helen which "launched a thousand ships/ And burnt the topless towers of Ilium" (5.1.94-96). Faustus wanted to be made immortal from the kiss of the supernatural figure summonsed by Mephistophilis "to glut the longing of . . . [Faustus'] heart's desire" (86). Faustus welcomed damnation for the "heaven . . . in these lips (99). By contrast, Doc Boone wants nothing to do with the woman whose plain face "has wrecked a thousand ships and burned the towerless tops of Troy. Farewell, fair Helen."

Boone is being ejected from town, kicked out of civilization, but he turns his condemnation back on her as an ugly Helen, whose not making him immortal with a kiss is actually doing him a favor by saving him from the so-called "blessings of civilization." She retorts that he is no doctor because he can not cure anybody. His first name Josiah means "God-healed," an ironic name for a doctor who does not seem capable of healing anyone as the dour "Helen" claims. But he does save the pregnant woman Mrs. Mallory by delivering her baby under emergency circumstances. Moreover, he "heals" Ringo and Dallas, two wounded victims of civilization, by helping them to escape to their new Eden across the border.

Josiah is also ironic in another way. Josiah was the 16th king of Judah, who conducted a law and order cleansing of his country (Kings 23:22). As we have seen, Boone is victimized by the Law and Order League. However, his last name alludes to his providing a boon for Mrs. Mallory and Dallas and Ringo. He brings the lovers to birth as he does Mrs. Mallory's baby. He also espouses fleeing civilization and ends up fighting Indians à la Daniel Boone.

At the outset of the movie, Dallas is a Helen of Troy figure as whore, who is being cast out of civilization by the respectable women for her divisive licentiousness. She is Helen as the cause of discordant lust. On the stagecoach journey she is ostracized by everyone, except Ringo and Doc. She tries to befriend the respectable Mrs. Mallory but is rebuffed by her and her friends. In one incident, Gatewood, who ostensibly is a respectable banker but in reality an embezzler, refuses to drink from the canteen after Dallas' lips have contaminated it. However, she earns her way into Mrs. Mallory's graces when she serves her during the dark night of parturition. Both Doc and Dallas, denounced as "two-of-a-kind" by the "fair Helen," achieve grace under fire on the night of delivery by bringing to birth the baby, themselves, and the ensuing relationship between Ringo and Dallas.

Ringo and Dallas are reverse Adam-Eve, Faustus-Helen figures who move away from the blessings of civilization toward a new Eden across the border. Ringo has been in jail since sixteen, and now he has escaped to revenge the cowardly murders of his father and brother by the Plumpers, who were also responsible for sending Ringo to jail on false charges. He journeys to Lordsburg, as in a revenge tragedy, the single revenger out to get even with his enemies. He succeeds in killing the Plumpers in the showdown on the street. He expects to be sent back to jail, but Doc and the sheriff (Bancroft) expel Dallas and Ringo into the "wilderness" of Ringo's parasitical ranch across the border. In their expulsion from hellish Lordsburg, they lose the guilt which society has imposed upon them and move toward the blessings they supposedly lost when rejected by civilization. Ford uses Marlowe's tribute to Helen in an intricate and inverted fashion to create a new Helen and Faustus reborn through their love and service to others.

Frank Ardolino
University of Hawaii

HENRY V: THE SHAKESPEARE THEATER

Nov. 28, 1995-Jan. 21, 1996. Director: Michael Kahn. Set Designer: Loy Arcenas. Costume Designer: Tom Broeker. Lighting: Howell Binkley. Composer: Adam Wernick. Fight Director: David Leong. Stage Manager: Susan Lynne McMillan. With: Harry Hamlin (Henry V); Len Childers (Gloucester); Jason Patrick Bowcutt (Bedford); Jack Ryland (Exeter, Montjoy, Governor of Harfleur); Harry Murphy (Westmorland); Kent Gasser (War-
wick); John Pasha (Warwick, Cambridge); Ted Van Griethuysen (Canterbury, Charles VI); Jarlath Conroy (Ely, Fluellen), Howard W. Oversown (Scroop); Elliot Dash (Grey); David Sabin (Falstaff, Gower); Emery Battis (Chief Justice, Erpingham, Burgundy); William Francis McGuire (Pistol); Wallace Acton (Nym, Le Feur); Eric Hoffman (Bardolph, Bates); Nance Williamson (Quickly, Alice); Antonio Pearly McQueen IV (Boy); Michael Solomon (Court); Craig Wallace (Williams, Translator); Matthew Rauch (Dauphin); Rob Nagle (Constable); Kit Halliday (Orleans); R. Scott Williams (Bourbon); Vivienne Benesich (Katherine); Bodde Bauer (Isobel); Pilar Witherspoon (Translator).

The play is a barometer of the times. After World War One in Great Britain, Henry V offered a nostalgic glimpse of a glorious past far from the horror of the Western Front. Branagh’s film evoked the Somme, itself a distant past, if hardly glorious. Olivier’s great film was released only months after D-Day, 1944, an invasion of France a bit larger and perhaps more significant than that of Henry V. In the United States at the turn of this century Richard Mansfield’s Henry V, which opened in October 1900, represented and retransmitted what Patty Derrick calls "patriotic contagion":

By 1900 the American people seemed to approve of a colonial empire [and] wanted to be perceived as a strong unified force in international affairs after years of divisiveness during and after the Civil War. (4)

In Michael Kahn’s 1969 Henry V at Stratford, Connecticut, as Agincourt ended, the "dead remain. Henry’s triumphal return to London. The Dead become the crowd. Sounds of ghostly cheering" (s.d. from playscript). That production "was a bold and unorthodox theatrical challenge designed to force the audience into individual and national moral self-examination" (C. Shaw 1994 10), but it tended merely to evoke outrage: "We happy few is taken to be a demagogue’s dishonest breast" (Kerr 1969); Kahn commits "fatal violence against the essence of this sacred work. The verbal magic is crushed" (A. B. 1969); "filled with . . . self-righteous zeal [Kahn] twists the play every which way, always certain that his little tune is superior to Shakespeare’s rich orchestration. The result is frequently a pompous bore" (Zeigler 1969); "to equate our modern view of the carnage of war with Shakespeare’s view of the fundamental glory is almost impossible" (Barnes 1969). And so on—people forget that anti-war sentiment in the late 1960s was met not by approval but often by tear gas and sometimes by gunfire.

Kahn’s new version in Washington does not attempt to reflect any perceived zeitgeist. The results of a balanced approach to the play are excellent. This is the best Henry V I have seen on stage since the superb Terry Hands production for RSC at Stratford in 1975, with Alan Howard as Henry. Kahn’s version is easily superior to the overblown and deafening RSC production of 1994, with Iain Glen, and the wildly anachronistic 1994 American Repertory Theatre version, with Bill Camp.*

For Kahn, everything begins with the set. Again, as in his excellent conflated Henry IV, Kahn’s set designer, Loy Arcenas created a flexible space which, with the aid of subtle lighting and the addition of chairs and tables, could become anything its inhabitants said it was. It was metallic, with platforms and catwalks, and lights in view, as well as a percussion section and six small spots along the apron. The stage was raked by about ten degrees with some thrust under the prosenium. The king’s crown, orb, scepter, and robe hung above the stage. This was a suggestive, not a pictorial stage and it worked superbly, from a small moment when a follow-spot pursued Fluellen’s exit, becoming his lantern in a wonderful madramatic instant, to the long sequence at Agincourt, where a white dropcloth reminded one critic of Valley Forge (Rose, 5 December 1995) and me of the newreels of the Russian front near Moscow during the early-closing winter of 1941.

The opening Chorus said “modern ’0’” as speech units shifted from speaker to speaker. Actors in mutt mimed meanings, a distraction happily not repeated, though segments of the Chorus were distributed in subsequent manifestations with the effect of unity of response rather than of an official voice telling us how we should view Henry and his war. The multiple voices of Chorus helped humanize Henry, replacing the adoring single interpreter, an official propagandist, with consensus. The objects of kingship dropped down upon Henry and he was ready to reject Falstaff!

That moment was powerfully reprised, with last year’s splendid Falstaff, David Sabin, again absorbing Henry’s cruel but politically potent speech. It is, after all, King Henry’s first public moment as king. Here, as I will mention, the payoff was remarkable later in the play.

Kahn left in the Archbishop’s disquisition about the bill urged in Parliament and thus we glimpsed an outline of the vast new feudal system that Henry V rejects in favor of his war with France. The English peers were seated on benches, like those in Branagh’s film. Henry walked from his throne to the Dauphin’s tennis ball down center, a movement from plurality to the personality. He has been insulted, even though he knows that the Dauphin is ridiculing a Hal who no longer exists except as a young man who learned how to be king from Falstaff. The repeated “mock” of his words made those balls bounce, an effect neatly reca-
pitulated later, when Exeter uses the word during his embassy to France. The opening, for all of Canterbury's proximity, was brisk, business-like. Henry was not necessarily a war-monger, but he was intent on his young man's adventure and had the skills to encourage it into being.

In the next scene, the low-lifes, Pistol, Barnard and company conducted a rollicking tavern fight, a parody of chivalric combat choreographed splendidly by David Leong. The point, well made here, is that for all of the surface luster of Henry's campaign he takes with him these bullies and drunks, hardly Chorus's "culled and choice-drawn cavaliers."

Kahn rearranged the back and forth court and tavern sequences by placing the first tavern scene, with its news of Falstaff's illness before the Chorus to Act 2, in which the treason of Cambridge, Scroop, and Gray is mentioned. We then launched directly into Henry's brilliant exposure of that plot. Shakespeare's arrangement is a misdirection, in which we expect to see Henry and his treasonous noblemen but get dropped into the tavern instead. That gives the tavern a tension that is not in or of the scene and links it to the larger dynastic issues of Henry's war. Shakespeare's placement propels us into the second tavern scene, with the Hostess's description of Falstaff's death. The first three scenes of Act 2 deal with Henry's disposition of his former friends. Kahn's rearrangement disturbed the sequence.

The disturbance was hardly fatal, however. Falstaff got a quasi-military funeral, a parody of those that occur on the hillside across the river in Arlington. The scene was a blend of the sad and the funny, appropriate to the great man being buried. Nym could not kiss because Pistol threatened him, not because Nym's "humor" denied him such activity.
The traitors were seen receiving money from France. This was to accept Chorus's (and Henry's) version of events. Why does Henry hand them written accusations—to specify their crimes to them, even as Henry waxes rhetorical about treason being like "another fall of man." The point that Henry suppresses here is that Cambridge hoped to put Mortimer on the throne and then take over himself. But that issue and Henry's skill in avoiding it were lost here, as were Cambridge's lines about "the gold of France not seducing" him. I would have liked to see Kahn try for the scene's subtext rather than shallowing it out to just what Henry wants the episode to show—that "God hath so graciously brought to light / This dangerous treason, lurking in our way, / To hinder our beginnings." Other editing included cutting the national rivalries within the English army, which might have been interesting given today's "identity politics," but were surrendered to running time, as was the discussion of the mines, and much of the French over-confidence before battle. The French were shown prancing around on cothurnae (platform shoes), but that idiosyncrasy was not, thank heavens, carried through to the absurd lengths of the Daniels American Repertory Theatre version, where the French were creatures from some world that the script does not incorporate. The only lines I missed were Grandpre's, which suggest forebodingly that there's something in the English army that he can't quite express:

Description cannot suit itself in words,
To demonstrate the life of such a battle,
In life so lifeless, as it shows itself.

There should follow an uneasy pause among the French and then the Constable's bluster "They have said their prayers, and they stay for death." Some day, a director will seize that moment.

The payoff for having Falstaff rejected came when Craig Wallace's stalwart Williams stood before Henry after Agincourt, accused of abusing the king: "It was ourself thou didst abuse." It is an illegitimate indictment, since Williams could not know that it was the king who had visited the campfire the night before. Williams gives an answer Falstaff might have given: "Your majesty came not like yourself: you appeared to me but as a common man; witness the night, your garments, your lowness . . . had you been as I took you for, I made no offence." Williams and the king stood where Falstaff and the king had stood much earlier. Williams knelt where Falstaff had knelt. The two moments were brought into powerful relationship simply by their placement on the stage. The latter sequence shows that practical jokes are no longer within the king's province, no matter how he may long to be Hal again for a moment or two. The campfire scene, where Henry had been forced to defend his own policies, had proved the same thing. Here, the production showed us what the play is all about. Once you reject Falstaff, all the king's horses and all the king's men are only that. Something magnificent and perhaps necessary has been banished from the world.

Kahn borrowed effectively from Branagh in a few places. Henry embraced Scroop, here his "boyhood friend," erotically even as he condemned him. Bardolph was left to swing in the wind just before intermission. And, as in Branagh, Henry was moved by this "necessary" execution. Henry was physically rough with Montjoy during the Herald's final visit, and played "Here comes your father" for a laugh, which it got.

The cast was uniformly excellent, with Antonio Pearly McQueen IV's Boy, complete with a Monet drummer's cap, Nance Williamson's Alice, whose vehement "Oui!" got perhaps the biggest laugh on the afternoon I attended, William Francis McGuire's effectively earnest Pistol, and Vivienne Benesch's vivacious Katherine particularly good.

Harry Hamlin's Henry was handsome and graceful. He was better, I thought, in his one-on-one confrontations with Montjoy and with Katherine, for example, than in Henry's oratorical mode. That might have resulted from his personal style but it also had to do with his placement on stage. The "into the breach" and "band of brothers" speeches were delivered, perhaps inevitably, mid-center, with troops around him. McGuire's Pistol was tempted by "crowns for convoy," but became an enthusiastic member of the band as Henry's speech developed. The speech itself, however, was hardly rousing. This production was less an essay on leadership than an interrogation of "the dilemmas of power," as Nelson Pressley said (5 December 1995). It was "ultimately more concerned with the inter-relationship of a popular king with his subjects than with victory on the battlefield," as Bob Mondello said (8 December 1995). When Hamlin was down front he was very good. He demonstrated none of the vocal strain that actors coming back to the stage from television sometimes show—John Nettles in the recent RSC Winter's Tale, for example. Hamlin's speech on "ceremony" was upstaged by the three spots in which he stood. The production was consciously theatrical, but here Hamlin would have been better served by a more colloquial, less formal, down front approach to that long speech. It was, ironically, too ceremonial. I hope that he will be persuaded to do more Shakespeare. Some great roles await him.

At the end, in an allusion to Kahn's previous production, Kabuki actors sat behind the wooing scene and moved in the furniture for the signing of the treaty. These were the dead of Agincourt who reminded us of whose bodies subsequent history was being constructed.
One superb piece of staging deserves a comment. As the French charged from upstage, the English archers drew their bows facing us. The imaginary arrows released, the French wilted and fell away. This reverse of any literal event captured the remarkable reversal of all expectation that Agincourt was in history and in Shakespeare.

The final Chorus suggested that "soon our stage may show the Henry VI plays. These are wonderful plays, particularly Part Two, which is a neglected masterpiece. I look forward to seeing them as performed in 1996 by this very talented company."

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Note


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