

CHAPTER EIGHT

‘Not a man from England’:

Assimilating the Exotic ‘Other’ through Performance, from *Henry IV* to *Henry VI**Amanda Penlington*

Recent scholarship on Shakespeare’s *Henry* plays has critiqued England by association, giving attention to the surrounding nations: Wales, Scotland, Ireland and France. The national identities, use of language, and political allegiances of characters such as Fluellen, Jamy, Macmorris, and Glyndŵr have been the focus of this criticism, which acts to discourage readings of these characters as simple comic stereotypes (as typified in Olivier’s 1944 film of *Henry V*).¹ Such criticism has drawn attention to the English empire-building within these plays that intends to subjugate Wales, Scotland and Ireland alongside lands further afield. As Willy Maley has suggested: ‘The use of “empire” to mean extra-British activity overlooks the imperialism implicit in Britishness itself’.² At the start of *I Henry IV* audiences are informed that it is the need to eliminate the threat posed by such Britons that prevents the King (‘a true born Englishman’, *Richard II*, I, iii, 272) from pursuing ‘business’ in the Holy Land (*I Henry IV* I, i, 48)³. Henry’s need to defeat the ‘English rebels’ (as

¹ See John Joughin (ed.), *Shakespeare and National Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997).

² Willy Maley, “‘This sceptred isle’: Shakespeare and the British problem”, in Joughin (ed.), *Shakespeare and National Culture*, pp. 83-108, p. 103.

³ All references to the text are taken from Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard and Katherine Eisaman Maus (eds.), *The Norton Shakespeare* (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1997).

they are called at III, ii, 165) before undertaking his planned crusades irretrievably links the two plans of attack as one Empire-bolstering enterprise. Feminist critics have situated the creation of England's national identity as a gendered enterprise and the female characters who do not speak English, namely Princess Catherine and Mortimer's nameless wife, have received critical attention.⁴ Scholarship has, therefore, identified a narrative running through the *Henries*: an 'other' is identified and exoticised by differences in language and behaviour, the containment of that 'other' is then attempted through conquest and/or enforced compliance with the dominant English culture. For men like Macmorris this assimilation of the exotic 'other' means fighting for 'Harry, England and St George' (*Henry V* III, i, 34); for Princess Catherine it means learning English and, despite her misgivings, being kissed by King Henry. Nevertheless, their 'other'ness remains in their accents and language after their subjugation to pose resistance to the dominant discourse: Macmorris repeatedly asks 'What ish my nation?' (III, iii, 61-3), and Catherine alerts Henry to the fact that she, 'cannot speak your / England' (V, ii, 102-3).

I'm interested in how performances at the National Theatre (NT) and the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) since 2000 reflect critical concerns about national stereotyping by casting actors whose nationalities are a match for the characters they play, e.g., casting a Welsh actor as Fluellen. In addition I want to investigate the effects of casting actors from ethnic minorities in the roles of Henry V and Henry VI. I'm interested in the politics of assimilation evident in productions that use so-called 'colour-blind' casting alongside what I am calling 'nationality-specific'

⁴ See Jean E. Howard and Phyllis Rackin, *Engendering a Nation: A Feminist Account of Shakespeare's English Histories* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997).

casting.⁵ Despite inclusive casting policies, which apparently de-stabilise the presentation of Englishness within the *Henries*, the productions that are considered here are produced by subsidised English theatres (putatively ‘national’ institutions). I’m as interested in what these characters sound like on the English stage as what they look like, so I will also be drawing the reader’s attention to the use of accents within these productions. Following Foucault’s theory that ‘the manifest discourse ... is really no more than the repressive presence of what it does not say; and this “not said” is a hollow that undermines from within all that is said’, I aim to tease out the undermining ‘not-said’s of the casting decisions taken during the NT’s and RSC’s recent stagings of Shakespeare’s *Henry* plays.⁶ Calling the casting of performers from ethnic minorities ‘colour-blind’ suggests to me a ‘not-said’ founded on a politics of assimilation. That is, theatre producers aim to portray the Histories as a narrative of national unity regardless of ‘colour’ but I suggest that this narrative of national unity is problematic and partial. Specifically, I would suggest that it is Anglo-centric.

But before I move on to discuss the *Henries* in performance I want to provide a chronological and programming context for each production. The productions at the RSC in 2000 were part of a season called *This England: the Histories*. There was little visual inter-play between the productions, with different auditoria and creative teams

⁵ See Ayanna Thompson (ed.), *Colorblind Shakespeare: New Perspectives on Race and Performance* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006); and Celia R. Daileader, ‘Casting black actors: beyond Othellophilia’ in Catherine M.S. Alexander and Stanley Wells (eds.), *Shakespeare and Race* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 177-202.

⁶ Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge* (New York: Random House, 1972), p. 25.

involved across the two tetralogies.⁷ At the NT the two parts of *Henry IV* (2005) were programmed into the repertoire simultaneously, with the same cast presenting both parts. Although *Henry IV* was separated from the NT's *Henry V* (2003) by two years they were both directed by the company's Artistic Director, Nicholas Hytner and presented in the Olivier theatre. Mark Thompson designed *Henry IV*, whilst Tim Hatley designed *Henry V*. At the RSC in 2006 the *Henries* were presented by one ensemble of actors in the Courtyard Theatre as part of *The Complete Works* season. The productions were directed by Michael Boyd and designed by Tom Piper.⁸ The three parts of *Henry VI* and *Richard III* were billed as a revival of the productions from 2000 alongside new productions of *Richard II*, *Henry IV* and *Henry V*.⁹ I

⁷ *Richard II*, was presented at The Other Place, directed by Steven Pimlott and designed by Sue Wilmington. The two parts of *Henry IV* (in the Swan theatre) had one director (Michael Attenborough) and a design team (sets by Es Devlin, costumes by Kandis Cook) and utilised one cast across the two plays. Some actors playing recurring characters, like Northumberland and Bolingbroke, continued their roles across productions, regardless of the conceptual differences offered by the individual director's/designer's visions. *Henry V* (presented in the Royal Shakespeare Theatre) was directed by Edward Hall and designed by Michael Pavelka. The three parts of *Henry VI* (directed by Michael Boyd, designed by Tom Piper) utilised another ensemble of actors (who also went on to present *Richard III* designed and directed by the same team) in the Swan, situating the second tetralogy as a complete, but entirely separate, unit from the first.

⁸ The only exception to this was that 2 *Henry IV* was directed by Boyd's associate director, Richard Twyman.

⁹ The revival productions utilised some actors in their original roles from 2000, some actors remained but were playing different roles and some actors were new to the ensemble. The actors playing *Henry VI* (Chuk Iwuji) and *Richard III* (Jonathan Slinger) had taken no part in the original productions in 2000. Whilst the production concept for *Henry VI* was the same in 2006 as it had been in 2000, *Richard III* was substantially reconceived to locate it within a contemporary aesthetic. This was the only play in *The Histories* to be presented in contemporary dress.

conclude the chapter with a consideration of the RSC's decision to recreate the 2000 production of *Henry VI*. But I begin with a consideration of the presentation of the Welsh characters in productions of *Henry IV*.

In *I Henry IV* Glyndŵr is keen to point out to Hotspur his ability to, 'speak English, lord, as well as you' (III, i, 118), but his daughter, Mortimer's wife, remains resolutely 'other' through her lack of English. Within the play she has no name of her own, nor does she have any designated lines: her conversation and song is instead described in stage directions as speaking or singing 'in Welsh' (III, i, 187 and 241).¹⁰ Originally impersonated by the boy player, she is an exotic spectacle for English audiences to look at and listen to (but, like her English husband, not understand). She is passive in relation to her father (who speaks for her) and sexualised by her husband's kisses and Hotspur's desire to have access to 'the Welsh lady's bed' (III, i, 238).

At the RSC (2000) and the NT (2005), Welsh actors were cast as Lady Mortimer (Mali Harries; Eve Myles) and Glyndŵr (Rowland Davies; Robert Blythe). This casting avoided the problem of having non-Welsh speakers learn the dialogue phonetically. An approach of mimetic realism was used to create apparently-realistic individualised characters, drawing their presentation away from national stereotypes. Blythe had played Fluellen in Hytner's *Henry V* (2003) and now as Glyndŵr in *I Henry IV* the same decision to create the impression of a realistic individual was evident in his portrayal. Similarly, Myles's presentation of Lady Mortimer was a

¹⁰ Her historical name of Catrin is not used within the play. I am grateful to Willy Maley for suggesting the following reference, (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/wales/mid/3077859.stm>), accessed 5 August 2008.

detailed reading of the character that encouraged the audience's sympathy for the challenges of her situation by highlighting her frustration.

Whilst a realistic acting approach to the characters was evident in the NT production, at the RSC in 2000 the Welsh characters were presented in a more uneven manner, with one reviewer noting that Davies' overblown responses to Hotspur and his visual appearance (in silvery wig and flowing grey-green robes) made him, 'a marvellous cross between Jabba the Hut and Dave Gilmour'.¹¹ Davies' Glyndŵr moved from acting according to a coarsely-defined image of the Welsh magician (playing up to the English's perceptions of him) to a more measured, believable individual, keen to negotiate with the English rebels. The effect of the shift in his presentation seemed distinctly odd when viewed in relation to the portrayal of his daughter, played with verisimilitude by Harries, who (like Myles in the NT production) encouraged audience sympathy for the character. The audience was invited to understand Lady Mortimer's situation even further in 2000 when, at the end of the scene Lady Mortimer and Lady Percy (Nancy Carroll) were left alone after their husbands' exits. This silent moment, where they exchanged eye contact before exiting together, seemed to me to provide the scene with a coda of shared female experience. It enabled the audience to view both women collectively realising the potential tragic consequences of their husbands' actions but unable to do anything about it.

¹¹ Jabba the Hut is a fictional character from George Lucas' *Star Wars* film saga, first appearing in *Return of the Jedi* (1983). He is a slug-like alien who runs a variety of criminal operations and characterised by his size, his antagonistic nature and his deep laugh. Dave Gilmour is a guitarist and vocalist with the progressive/psychedelic rock group Pink Floyd. Nina Raine, 'Battle with truth', *New Statesman*, 5 June 2000, (<http://www.newstatesman.com/200006050039>), accessed 5 August 2008.

I want to draw attention to the effect achieved by the very contrast between Harries' conventionally realistic depiction and Davies' uneven performance. Davies' portrayal jarred in an otherwise understated production but his decision to initially wrong-foot the audience (by playing-up, to the point of excess, the image of the Welsh magician who can 'command spirits from the vasty deep', III, i, 51) neatly reflected Glyndŵr's identity shifts within the text. If every actor employs a style that presents characters as though they are real individuals then the processes of creation and reception involved in writing, staging and watching a play are obscured. Realistic acting works to deny the production processes involved: as an audience member it is possible to get momentarily lost in the apparently 'truthful' world of the characters. But for me, by its very contrast to the prevailing style, Davies' approach to Glyndŵr highlighted the artifice of the realistic approach. Whilst illuminating this 'not-said' of the pursuit of realism, Davies' performance also revealed that using 'nationality-specific' casting as a device to 'avoid the nationalist stereotypes' is a somewhat simplistic vision of the production process.¹² Davies' Glyndŵr was unsettling and it encouraged me as an audience member to be actively aware of the process of witnessing the creation of a dramatic character (albeit one based on a significant historical figure).¹³ Whilst I was watching Davies' uneven portrayal I considered the

¹² Nicholas Hytner, the director of *I Henry IV* (2005) and *Henry V* (2003), on the effect of casting actors whose nationalities accord with those of the characters, quoted in Peter Reynolds and Lee White, *A rehearsal diary of Henry V at the National* (London: NT Publications 2003), p. 3.

¹³ I am grateful to Willy Maley for suggesting the following studies on Glyndŵr, Camille Adkins, 'Glendower and Fluellen; Or, Where Are the Leeks of Yesterday?', *CCTE Studies* (Conference of College Teachers of English Texas) 48 (1983), pp. 101-8; Rees Davies, 'Shakespeare's Glendower and Owain Glyn Dwr', *Historian* (London), 66 (2000), pp. 22-5; Herbert V. Fackler, 'Shakespeare's

strangeness of Glyndŵr as a fictional creation by an English playwright writing for an English audience long after the events portrayed, and then re-created by the RSC through the director's, designer's and actor's collaboration.

In 2007 the RSC produced the play again and this time cast an English actor, Roger Watkins, as Glyndŵr. Watkins used a realistic acting approach but struggled to maintain a convincing Welsh accent. Seeing his problems with creating a credible character emphasized to me the limitations of mimetic realism as an approach to characters whose origins differ from the actors' who play them. This casting was an unfortunate consequence of the RSC's use of a resident ensemble that contained no Welsh actors. This made the casting of Lady Mortimer an interesting exercise as, contrary to the precedent of casting the English Watkins as Glyndŵr, none of the women in the acting ensemble were given the role of his daughter, instead Sianed Jones was cast in the part. Jones did not play any other dramatic roles but was employed in *The Histories* as a musician. What interests me about casting Jones was that the creative team clearly saw Lady Mortimer as a singer's, rather than an actor's, role. Despite the advances made at the NT (in 2005) and the RSC (back in 2000) in viewing Lady Mortimer as a significant character whose anger and sorrow acts as a filter for the audience through which to view her husband's political activities, in 2007 Lady Mortimer seemed to return to being an exotic 'other', an adjunct of the men's centralised experience. No interaction between Lady Percy and Lady Mortimer occurred this time. Hotspur's desire for the 'Welsh Lady's bed' (III, i, 238) was

"Irregular and Wild" Glendower: The Dramatic Use of Source Materials', *Discourse* 13 (1970), pp. 306-14; J. T. Jones, 'Shakespeare's Pronunciation of Glendower', *English Studies* 43 (1962), pp. 248-52; John Edward Lloyd, *Owen Glendower/Owain Glyn Dwr* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1931).

spoken from an upstage position (and not met with an indignant reaction, as shown by Lady Percy in 2000); this gave comic prominence to his remark about the woman situated downstage. In 2007 Lady Mortimer tearfully hugged and kissed her husband, without showing any signs of anger at the possible outcome of his plans. Her only potentially-subversive action was to take up the map that had been rolled out onto the floor by her father. However, instead of reacting against the map in a more confrontational way, she gathered it up and placed it across her lap before singing, the map then providing a comfortable cushion on which Mortimer (Keith Dunphy) could lay his head and listen to her song. The creation of such a maternal image (and one which was created before our eyes by Lady Mortimer herself and mirrored by Lady Percy and Hotspur upstage) seemed to me to signal the character's contentment within the domestic sphere. Lady Mortimer appeared before the scene commenced, signalling the start of the second half of the production, singing a wordless lament whilst spot-lit high on the set tower. Here, sadness (and, therefore, unquestioning acceptance) seemed Lady Mortimer's dominant emotion. Her lack of will to question her husband's actions was different from the earlier productions, where Myles and Harries had demonstrated anger at Mortimer as well as frustration at being unable to express it directly to him in words.

In *Henry V* a variety of characters originate from across England's borders but, as Maley has suggested, King Henry repeatedly uses 'England' and 'English' as if they are stable entities and synonymous for 'the British state': he wishes 'not a man from England' (IV, iii, 30) to enlarge his army.¹⁴ So Macmorris's repeated question,

¹⁴ Maley, "'This sceptred isle': Shakespeare and the British problem", in Joughin (ed.), *Shakespeare and National Culture*, p. 103.

‘What ish my nation?’ (III, iii, 61-3) is a pertinent concern that never gets answered either for or by those Britons whose origins lie beyond England. Whilst Macmorris’s question throws the assimilation of the non-English Britons into doubt the English Captain Gower takes control of the argument between Macmorris and Fluellen, warning, ‘Gentlemen both, you will mistake each other’ (III, iii, 72).¹⁵ In this moment Shakespeare presents in microcosm the ideological basis of the ‘exotic’ discourse: that the wild and disruptive nations are tamed by the civilising influence of the English, who, in subjugating them, are merely asserting their natural authority. Macmorris’s keenness to kill Fluellen could be read as a simple comic stereotype of the Irish but, read another way, his uncertainty about not ‘know’ing (III, iii, 70) Fluellen is a consequence of England’s empire building – at home and abroad. In conquering other lands and enforcing English rule ‘England’s’ identity is in perpetual flux. Macmorris’s position is bewildering – he is both conquered and conqueror, a ‘bastard’ (III, iii, 62) who fights on behalf of a fatherland (to extend his terminology) that rules him through conquest, rather than legitimate inheritance.

Whilst the comic stereotypes of the brawling Irish and the argumentative Scots and Welsh may be discerned in the play, recent productions have drawn attention to the lack of unity amongst those fighting for ‘England’. The putatively natural dominance of the English is lessened in performance when directors have repeatedly drawn audiences’ attentions to the distance between Henry’s rhetoric and the

¹⁵ Despite my suggestion that Gower and Williams are English characters and are usually played by English actors, Joan Rees has suggested that these surnames ‘seem to introduce a supererogatory Welshness into the play’. Joan Rees, ‘Shakespeare’s Welshmen’, in Vincent Newey and Ann Thompson (eds.), *Literature and Nationalism* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1991), pp. 22-40, p. 31. My thanks to Willy Maley for this reference.

physically exhausting conditions of war. When a repeated motif of rapidly-initiated physical disputes between the 'English' forces occurs in performance (at the RSC in both 2000 and 2007 and at the NT in 2003, physical blows were exchanged in scenes with the Boy, Pistol, Nim and Bardolph and between Williams and the disguised King) then the national stereotypes at work in the presentation of Macmorris, Jamy and Fluellen are somewhat reduced by being seen within a broader context of social divisions within the 'English' camp.

The performance history of *Henry V* has seen many negotiations of meaning pertinent to British socio-political contingencies, for example Terry Hands's 1975 RSC production was concerned with 'the overcoming of domestic disharmony'.¹⁶ The director aimed at 'specific unity ... a real brotherhood' but James N. Loehlin's comment that Macmorris was played 'with IRA fervour', suggests that either the production or his reading of it was informed by a sense of national stereotyping renewed by current events.¹⁷ The historical topicality of the Irish stereotype is informed by Essex's Irish campaign of 1599, as mentioned by the Chorus at V, 0, 29-32, with the Irish opposition being imagined dead on Essex's 'sword' at V, 0, 32. In recent years a greater sensitivity to national stereotypes has been perceptible in directorial and casting decisions.

Taking place at the beginning of the second Iraq War, the NT production in 2003 was presented in contemporary dress. It drew the audience's attention to the

¹⁶ James N. Loehlin, *Shakespeare in Performance: Henry V* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), p. 53.

¹⁷ Terry Hands, quoted in Loehlin, *Shakespeare in Performance: Henry V*, p. 53; Loehlin, p. 71.

politics of twenty-first century warfare, concentrating on the manipulation of opinion through propaganda. Television screens were placed on either side of the Olivier stage and signalled the differences between media rhetoric and the effects of warfare on individuals. As was the case at the RSC in 2000, at the NT in 2003 a military adviser was employed to assist with the handling of weaponry and to answer the production team's queries about military procedures.

According to Reynolds and White, Hytner 'made it clear on that first day [of rehearsals] that he sought to avoid the nationalist stereotypes', so 'nationality-specific' casting was used for Fluellen (Robert Blythe) and Macmorris (Tony Devlin), whilst Jamy was completely excised from the 2003 production.¹⁸ The excision of Jamy was one tactic in avoiding national stereotyping but his removal from the play lessens the text's historical relevance.¹⁹ Editing the text (and especially editing out key moments) was at the heart of Hytner's approach to revising the character of Fluellen away from the comic tradition, so the leek scene (Act V scene 1) was cut. Fluellen's concern with the rules of combat was seized upon by Hytner, not as a comic idiosyncrasy but as a moment of psychological breakdown after the death of the Boy, as Reynolds and White explain: 'Far from being comic, the direction results in a poignant image of an old soldier brought to the edge of a nervous breakdown by the stark reality of war'.²⁰ Despite this touching moment that acquired audience sympathy, Fluellen was also shown in a particularly unsympathetic light when it was

¹⁸ Reynolds and White, *A rehearsal diary of Henry V at the National*, p. 3.

¹⁹ See Andrew Gurr, 'Why Captain Jamy in *Henry V*?', *Archiv für das Studium der neuen Sprachen und Literaturen* 226, 141 (1989), pp. 365-73. Thanks to Willy Maley for this suggestion.

²⁰ Reynolds and White, *A rehearsal diary of Henry V at the National*, p. 30.

he alone who followed the King's orders to kill the prisoners (after all the other soldiers refused). Fluellen's apparent lack of empathy with the enemy was shown when he executed the (hooded) prisoners using a machine gun, and then efficiently killed (with a single shot) one prisoner who attempted to crawl off after his initial round of automatic gunfire. Ironically, in seeking to reveal 'the stark reality of war', the production fabricated such spectacular moments for its own ends. Just as Fluellen committed a twenty-first century war crime in killing the hooded prisoners, so King Henry was shown to kill Bardolph (with a single shot to the head). The verisimilitude of this moment obscured the fact that it was a faked vision of war's 'stark reality': the production's military adviser had insisted that current wartime protocol would prevent a Commander-in-chief from executing one of his own soldiers because he would not be in the field of military operations.²¹ In this context the production's presentation of Fluellen is particularly interesting as he was resolutely not 'other' but fully-assimilated into 'English' army life, to the point of being crucial in enacting Henry's orders (and emulating the actions of his King). England's 'other' was situated elsewhere in this production, which presented a cause and effect narrative of England's aggression against France.

Princess Catherine's scenes in *Henry V* are concerned with her significance as a potential wife for Henry and her inability to speak English. In learning the English names for body parts she provides the audience with an exotic spectacle on her first appearance in the play. She repeats (in broken English) the words that she learns and, as has become habitual in performance, the performer gestures towards the parts referred to. This presents an audience with a teasing display of the foreign Princess's

²¹ Reynolds and White, *A rehearsal diary of Henry V at the National*, p. 28.

body, which she itemises for their view. The risqué comedy at the end of the scene (III, iv, 46-53) exposes not just the problems of language that she and Henry will encounter in Act V scene 2 but it also highlights Catherine's awareness that she is engaging in sexual discourse. For an Early Modern audience the complex interplay between the suggested body of the fictional Princess and the actual body of the boy actor underneath (and with the scene ending in her utterance of the very part that differentiates those two bodies) serves to increase the scene's exotic and erotic appeal.

The French actor Felicité du Jeu played Catherine at the NT in 2003 and the production signalled that her decision to learn the English names for body parts was not sexually-playful but was, instead, an apparently-spontaneous reaction to her watching a televised broadcast (with French subtitles) of Henry, who threatened to wreak physical brutality on the citizens of Harfleur (III, iii, 110-15). Watching her witness threats of physical (and, particularly, sexual) violence via the media emphasized Catherine's isolation and audience sympathy for her plight was encouraged. Reynolds and White explain that the broadcast was intended to give a specific motivation for Catherine's decision to learn English, suggesting that an approach based on psychological realism was used for the character: 'she does it not out of playfulness, but because she has no choice – she has witnessed the power and potential for cruelty of her country's oppressors'.²² Reynolds' and White's account, which is the NT's published *Rehearsal Diary* for the production, goes further in demonstrating how Hytner's commitment to verisimilitude encouraged those present in rehearsal to speculate on what Catherine's thoughts might be in response to the broadcast:

²² Reynolds and White, *A rehearsal diary of Henry V at the National*, p. 8.

English is the language of the occupying power and she has to learn it. It is, to her, a hateful language; the fact that she has to listen to it with the knowledge that her fate is already inexorably linked to that of Henry, transforms the scene from a comic interlude to a central moment in this production.²³

Catherine's need to learn English in the context of this production echoed governmental drives for immigrant spouses to acquire English (and pass citizenship tests) to supposedly enable swifter integration within the UK.²⁴

Henry's wooing of Catherine also resisted the performance history of playing the scene as a comic climax because du Jeu's Princess remained at a polite distance throughout and did not smile at Henry's '*faux* French' (V, ii, 204). Once again a specific motivation was shown for her actions: the production staged the Dauphin's death at Agincourt so the French court was in a period of official mourning at the time of the marriage-making. In such a sombre context the marriage certainly seemed to be a political alliance and no love match.

Despite Hytner's drive to use 'nationality-specific' casting at the NT (and the same policy occurring in the RSC's 2000 production of *I Henry IV*), the casting of *Henry V* at the RSC in 2000 and 2007 revealed little convergence between the nationalities of the actors and the characters in the roles of Fluellen, Macmorris, Jamy

²³ Reynolds and White, *A rehearsal diary of Henry V at the National*, p. 8.

²⁴ My thanks to Willy Maley for suggesting the following link, (http://www.workpermit.com/news/2007_02_22/uk/english_language_test_immigrant_spouses.htm), accessed 5 August 2008.

and Princess Catherine. Whilst Macmorris and Jamy were played by Irish and Scottish actors in 2000 (Keith Dunphy and Kenneth Bryans), in 2007 the Australian actor Rob Carroll played Macmorris and the English actor Geoffrey Freshwater played Jamy. Princess Catherine was played by the Irish actor Catherine Walker in 2000 and the English actor Alexia Healy in 2007. In both productions Fluellen was played by Englishmen who assumed Welsh accents (Adrian Schiller in 2000; Jonathan Slinger in 2007).

However, Welsh, Irish and Scottish actors were cast in traditionally-English roles in these productions. Although for some roles they used the supposedly-neutral delivery of Received Pronunciation (RP), they did use their natural accents at other times. This extension of the range of voices represented broadened the context in which I read the hitherto marginalised characters. In 2000 the Welsh actor Joshua Richards played Williams using his own accent and the Earl of Cambridge using RP, and William Houston did not fully eliminate the cadences of his Belfast accent in the role of King Henry. In 2007 Keith Dunphy (who, in 2000, had played Macmorris with his own accent and Scrope with RP) played Nim with an Irish accent and Forbes Masson played the Chorus with his own Scottish accent.

The meaning of 'England' and 'Englishness' are created in performance through a negotiation between the actor, the text and the audience. The use of Welsh/Scottish/Irish accents in traditionally-RP ('English') roles draws the audience's attention to that very process of negotiation. Edward Hall's RSC production (2000) seemed to me to invite the audience to actively engage with the idea of how national

identities and stereotypes are created by highlighting the differences between the performer and the role.

When examining the evidence of the RSC productions, Hytner's attempts (at the NT) to redeem characters from being 'nationalist' stereotypes seem well-intentioned but perhaps somewhat simplistic. He did, after all, have to substantially cut the role of Fluellen and provide Catherine with a series of psychological motivations to achieve the apparently realistic characters that he sought. Despite the apparently 'nationality-specific' casting of Dunphy and Bryans as Macmorris and Jamy at the RSC in 2000, the presentation of these characters remained comic, with the Irishman appearing from a trapdoor surrounded by the fog of stage smoke (a device repeated in 2007).

Hall's production employed a Brechtian approach to make the familiar strange by drawing the audience's attention to the creation of juxtaposed stage images (often bringing up the house-lights to make the audience self-aware). It utilized an eclectic design with contemporary battledress worn by the actors, who were already on stage as soldiers when the audience entered. They scattered poppies onto a St George flag that covered the stage. One actor/soldier answered a mobile phone and then reminded the audience to switch off their phones for the performance. I use the term actor/soldier to indicate my own increased awareness of having 'double-vision' in this production. The production resisted any attempts by the audience to engage with a psychologically-real narrative, encouraging them instead to read those on stage as the characters and as the actors who stand for the characters. The Chorus speeches were divided up between the actors/soldiers, drawing attention to the production as a piece

of collaborative storytelling. The St George flag was drawn off to reveal a war memorial, making the petals scatter, whilst two actors/soldiers donned Bishops' regalia (seemingly improvised from old sheets) over their battle gear and began a jokily-played exchange between Canterbury and Ely.

The set was designed to signal the shifts in its use: a moving platform that resembled scaffolding remained at the back of the stage for much of the action but was visibly pushed/pulled by the actors/soldiers towards the audience during the siege (to the accompaniment of disorientating backlighting). Catherine's dress for the wooing scene – a farthingale – was an acknowledged anachronism in the context of the modern battlefield, with Walker/Catherine and the audience watching its descent from the fly tower on wires before she put it on. The final scene is depicted in the photograph, where Catherine's period dress is juxtaposed with the modern military uniforms. King Henry V (kneeling) holds the crown used by King Henry VI in the same RSC *This England: the Histories* season. In the background a torn, grey parachute is evidence of the production's self-consciously anachronistic design choices. The second half of the production began with the English army singing 'Thank Heaven for little girls', whilst surrounding Catherine at the front edge of the stage and looking at the audience. Catherine held a French/English Dictionary and launched into a rendition of '*La vie en rose*' before her scene with Alice was played. In drawing on anachronistic details and clichéd French paratexts – and playing them out front, literally with a nod and a wink – Hall's production framed itself as highly self-aware.

Canterbury's Salic Law defence was rushed through (with the help of a family tree scroll being unravelled by an actor/soldier on a ladder) and the line 'as clear as is the summer sun' (I, ii, 86) was played directly to the audience with a droll delivery. So by the time of Henry's proud declaration of his nationality, the audience was familiar with the tactic of the performance dislocating the meaning of the text. William Houston drew on his own Belfast accent to play the King, so when he said 'For I am Welsh you know' (IV, vii, 96) the disparity between Henry's claim and the actor's identity was accentuated. This disparity was pursued further by having the actors/soldiers laugh at the assertion. The audience were made to confront the lack of stable national unities within this one line, seeing simultaneously the King of England, Harry of Monmouth and the Irish actor. Houston playing the King offers an interesting contrast to Graham Holderness's reading of Kenneth Branagh's portrayal of Henry. Holderness suggests that Branagh's audience, 'catch a momentary glimpse of an Irishman weeping over the historical devastations of British imperialism'.²⁵ In a reversal of Branagh's situation Houston was born in England but grew up in Belfast. Houston's King did not weep for the English dead; his reaction to the death of Bardolph was to observe the on-stage hanging without pity as the army marched through the stalls of the auditorium. Everything about Houston's King was cool and delivered without any apparent sense of conflicting emotions. Henry's actions were offered to audience members to read according to their own judgements and not clouded by emotional manipulation.

²⁵ Graham Holderness, *Cultural Shakespeare: Essays in the Shakespeare Myth* (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2001), p. 78.

The conclusion of the performance provided a coherent end to this eclectic production and highlighted the play's lack of closure regarding questions of national identity. The wooing was conducted in a perfunctory manner: Henry hung his crown on the back of a chair, retrieving it at 'here comes / your father' (V, ii, 59-60). As the marriage was confirmed Catherine and Henry faced each other and the grey, torn parachute that had dressed the back of the set dropped to reveal a Union Jack flag. The final Chorus speech was begun by David Acton who stepped out of the wheelchair that he had used for the King of France, signalling a shift in his stage persona. Walker/Catherine and Houston/Henry briefly joined hands, then she removed the crown from his head at the mention of Henry's death (Epilogue, 8-10). The actors/characters silently watched Houston/Henry walk downstage and disappear through the auditorium. The British flag then fell to the ground, no Henry VI emerged and Walker/Catherine was left holding the crown.

In 2007 the framing device of the Chorus again encouraged the audience to view the play critically. Because Forbes Masson used his own Scottish accent, the Chorus' speeches about 'England' and 'the English' gained extra resonance and invited an increased scrutiny than if the actor had used the supposedly-neutral accent of RP to deliver them. The text of the Prologue was altered to encourage the audience to view this production with an increased awareness of their own spectatorship, 'This wooden O' (Prologue, 13) was replaced with a reference to the appearance of the RSC's Courtyard auditorium: 'This rusty shed'. The third Chorus speech drew the audience's attention to their own partisan allegiances when Masson asked the audience to 'leave *your* England' (III, 0, 19). Having a Scottish Chorus acknowledged the dramatised events as a biased English history, and actively subverted the idea of a

unified 'England' through a variety of production decisions. On two occasions lines written for other characters were given to Masson's Chorus. Rambures' line, 'That island of England breeds very valiant creatures. / Their mastiffs are of unmatchable courage' (III, vii, 127-8), was delivered by the Chorus with a slight pause between the two sentences to accentuate its bathetic effect. In Act IV scene 1 the Chorus took Alexander Court's line: 'Brother John Bates, is not that the morning which breaks / yonder?' (IV, i, 84-5). On both occasions these interjections had the Chorus siding with those who oppose the dominant English discourse. His association with the 'other' was indicated by his delivery of these lines from a position suspended above the stage, seated at a piano, which partially-descended from the gods on wires. He played a melancholy melody on the piano to underscore the names of the French dead (IV, viii, 70-94) but did not provide any musical accompaniment for the few English names reported (IV, viii, 97-98). Having the Chorus then verbally echo Exeter's reaction 'Tis wonderful' (IV, viii, 107) whilst close to tears, suggested the gap between the words uttered and the lives lost. On Henry's order that the soldiers acknowledge 'That God fought for us' (IV, viii, 114), Masson's Chorus signalled his resentment by shaking his head. At the end of the scene the Chorus began the singing of *Non nobis* and *Te Deum* whilst crying, an ironic counterpoint to Henry's claim that 'ne'er from France arrived more-happy men' (IV, viii, 120). The French then brought on coffins whilst the Chorus sang, and the English followed, building a trestle stage on top of the French coffins.

Henry's triumphant return to London after the French War is invoked by the Chorus as a premonition of Essex's return (V, 0, 29-34). In using 'rebellion' here the Chorus differentiates between the Irish who fought on the English side (like

Macmorris) and those untamed Irish who need to be quelled ‘on [Essex’s] sword’ (V, 0, 32). In this production the lines about Essex’s activities in Ireland were cut (V, 0, 29-32) and, instead, events relating to the contemporary world of the audience were suggested, as the Chorus said, ‘As from *our* wars’, continuing with the text at V, 0, 33: ‘How many would the peaceful city quit / To welcome him!’.

The use of the Chorus to deliver an alternative viewpoint on the action alerted the audience to regard the presentations of characters within the narrative as partial. The Captains scene (Act III scene 3) and the leek scene (Act V scene 1) were retained and played as knockabout comedy. Whilst actors assuming Welsh/Scottish/Irish accents and wearing stereotypical costumes (a tam-o-shanter for Jamy; a coat lined with sticks of dynamite for Macmorris) might be seen to be pandering to national stereotypes, the analytical framework of the Chorus’ interactions with the drama and the level of exaggeration at work in the costuming and acting encouraged the audience to recognise the English bias of these presentations.

What highlights the complexity of Shakespeare’s presentation of national identity in *Henry V* further is the nationality of the King of England. Disguised as an ordinary soldier and asked for his name by Pistol he puns ‘Harry *le roi*’ (IV, i, 50), asked whether this is a Cornish name the King responds, ‘No, I am a Welshman’ (IV, i, 52). The problematic assimilation of the British males that runs through *Henry IV* and *Henry V* reaches its apotheosis in the person of the King: the Welsh, marginalised by the English discourse of the exotic in the person of Glyndŵr, become legitimised by the dual nationality of Harry of Monmouth, ‘countryman’ of Fluellen (IV, vii, 96), and Henry V, King of England. Henry’s re-fashioning of himself as a Welsh soldier

and his re-invention of the various forces under his command as a 'band of brothers' (IV, iii, 60), which both occur before the 'wonderful' victory at Agincourt, work to assimilate the non-English males into 'English' culture.

Whilst Hytner's 2003 production used 'nationality-specific' casting to bring the experiences of the marginalised characters to the attention of the audience, his casting for the English and French courts revealed a narrative of ethnic inclusion at work in the NT's policies. Reynolds and White point to the significance of casting Peter Blythe (Exeter) and William Gaunt (Canterbury), who had spent most of their careers using RP to play 'quintessentially middle-class privileged white Englishmen', alongside the 'black British actor' Adrian Lester as Henry. Whilst they do not explicitly suggest that Lester's casting is 'colour-blind', they do use the term when noticing that the casting 'pairs a black actor (Cecilia Noble) as [the] Queen of France with a white actor (Ian Hogg) as [the] King'. Whilst Noble and Lester utilised RP, Jude Akuwudike who played Pistol, 'was encouraged to play the part with a strong Jamaican accent, and inflect his delivery with the speech rhythms and cadences of patois'.²⁶ John O'Connor recalls the effect of this on the moment when the disguised Henry is asked for his name by Pistol and the King responds 'Harry *le roi*' (IV, i, 50) (pronounced here, as has become usual in production, as 'le roy'): "'LEROY?!'" exclaims Pistol delightedly. The audience roar with laughter at this: both actors are black'.²⁷

²⁶ Reynolds and White, *A rehearsal diary of Henry V at the National*, p. 3.

²⁷ John O'Connor, *Shakespearean Afterlives: ten characters with a life of their own* (Cambridge: Icon Books 2003), p. 53.

The inclusion of the black stereotype of 'Leroy' drew my attention to the supposed 'colour-blind'ness of Lester's casting. The contrast between Henry's voice, which used the same RP accent as his white uncle Exeter, and Pistol's Jamaican voice pointed to the production's interest in signalling the differences of class rather than ethnic origin. Nevertheless, the use of a 'home video' showing the young Henry, Falstaff and his associates and watched by those characters present in Act II scene 3 problematised this approach. At the reported death of Falstaff (II, iii, 5), the video was paused and the image of Henry with dreadlocks momentarily became the focus of the audience's gaze as Pistol, Bardolph, Nim and the Boy observed the screen in silence. The cutting of Henry's dreadlocks could be read within the fiction of the production as a calculated decision (made by the character) to appear more formal on assuming his official identity as King (if one was to read the production in a 'colour-blind' way). In another way (which acknowledges Henry's blackness), the removal of the dreadlocks could be read as a character decision to renounce a signifier of black (specifically, Jamaican) culture in order for him to succeed as King in a predominantly-white England. In addition, reading the moment outside of the fictional events portrayed, seeing two Lesters/Henries, one with dreadlocks, one without, served to emphasize to me what occurs in so-called 'colour-blind' Shakespearean productions: despite casting actors of different ethnic origins, references to other cultures (both in appearance and voice) are reduced and 'neutralized' in the service of the dominant English discourse (whose accent is located as middle class home counties).

In thinking about so-called 'colour-blind' casting I want to turn finally to Michael Boyd's revival of *Henry VI* for the *Complete Works* in 2006 (originally

produced in 2000). In a press release Boyd, the RSC's Artistic Director, called the *Complete Works*: 'a national knees-up for the RSC's house playwright', which would 'celebrate the truly global reach of the greatest writer in the English language'.²⁸ Boyd's emphasis was on moving from an English artistic, cultural and political centre out.

Boyd frequently resurrects the ghosts of dead characters when not indicated by the script, e.g., in 2 *Henry VI* the ghosts of the Talbots made many reappearances after their disappearance in the text (as the vision of Margery Jordan in Act I scene 4, as shipmates at the murder of Suffolk in Act IV scene 1 and as part of Jack Cade's rebellion in Act IV scene 2). Watching the revival of *Henry VI* six years after viewing the production first-time round was my own encounter with theatrical ghosts, not just in the sense of Boyd adding extra appearances for some characters, but because this production seemed to me to be a palimpsest. Whilst relocated into a different auditorium in 2006, the set, the (vaguely Medieval) sombre costumes, music and blocking were familiar from 2000. The actor playing the lead role had changed, yet I felt that I was watching pretty much the same performance that I had seen in 2000. I did not notice how closely the 2006 revival echoed the original until I witnessed the same company's so-called revival of *Richard III*. In 2000 *Richard III* had been a conceptual continuation of *Henry VI*. But in 2007 the part of Richard had been re-cast and radical changes had been made to the concept of the production (which located it in the twenty-first century world of multi-media and automatic weapons): the set, costumes and blocking were all affected by this change. This *Richard III* was less of a

²⁸ RSC Press Office, 'RSC hosts first ever festival of Shakespeare's complete works', 11 July 2005, (http://www.rsc.org.uk/press/420_2145.aspx), accessed 5 August 2008.

revival and more of a newly-conceived production. I wondered why the RSC chose to preserve the production of *Henry VI* so closely and yet radically re-style *Richard III* – both had been critically and financially successful in 2000. It seemed to me that whilst the new concept allowed Jonathan Slinger the freedom to individually interpret the part of Richard without having to replicate Aidan McArdle's earlier interpretation, Chuk Iwuji who played Henry was encouraged to emulate the acclaimed performance of his predecessor, David Oyelowo (partly because the other elements were reproduced in such detail).

In 2000 Oyelowo received a high level of press attention, generated by the RSC's announcement of his casting. One article proclaimed, 'RSC casts black actor as English king for first time' and featured a quotation from Boyd, declaring that, "It is colour blind casting, his son will be white and there is no hint of illegitimacy".²⁹ The reaction to this casting forms part of the 'Shakespeare and Race' section on the RSC's own website.³⁰ Whilst the black British actor Geff Francis played Warwick (depicted in the centre of the photograph), it was only Oyelowo's presence as King Henry (on the right of the photograph) that prompted comments about 'colour-blind' casting. For the *Complete Works* revival of *Henry VI* Boyd sought to replace Oyelowo – a black African actor, educated in a predominantly-white environment (England) and a committed Christian – with Iwuji – a black African actor, educated in a

²⁹ Michael Boyd, quoted in Fiachra Gibbons, 'RSC casts black actor as English king for first time', *Guardian*, 19 September 2000, (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2000/sep/19/fiachragibbons>), accessed 5 August 2008.

³⁰ RSC Learning, 'Shakespeare and Race'. (<http://www.rsc.org.uk/picturesandexhibitions/action/viewExhibition?exhibitionid=9§ionid=7>), accessed 5 August 2008.

predominantly-white environment (the USA) and a committed Christian. Despite the uncanny similarity in the backgrounds of the two Henries, the percentage of ethnic minority actors within the ensemble was lower than in any of the other RSC productions produced for *The Complete Works*.³¹ The production employed a so-called ‘colour-blind’ strategy by using actors of different ethnicities to represent members of the same families, e.g., the white English actor Roger Watkins played Salisbury, whilst his son Warwick was played in the 2006 revival by Patrice Naiambana, a black actor who originates from Sierra Leone.

In a magazine interview Iwuji has cited Oyelowo’s casting as an inspiration for his decision to work with the RSC.³² The casting of a black actor as Henry for the second time seemed more significant than being a ‘colour-blind’ coincidence. It seemed to me that for *The Complete Works* (called the ‘Essential Year’ in the RSC’s marketing brochures), the RSC wanted to recapture both the media reaction that had greeted the casting of Oyelowo and the success of his performance – he won the Ian Charleson award for young actors in classical roles. Oyelowo and Iwuji do not look alike but their similar backgrounds and the production’s deliberate repetition of costumes, lighting, blocking and the selection of moments chosen for production photographs typify them as interchangeable black English Kings, rather than as individual performances of the same role. In contrast it is hard to read photographs of the two leads in *Richard III* as coming from the same production.

³¹ In the RSC’s *Complete Works* production of *Pericles* actors from ethnic minorities made up 45% of the cast. The percentage of ethnic minority actors was only 18% in the *Henry VI* plays, despite a black actor being cast in the title role.

³² Ann McFerran, ‘Best of Times, Worst of Times: Chuk Iwuji’, *Sunday Times Magazine*, 13 August 2006, (http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life_and_style/article700714.ece), accessed 5 August 2008.

In addition, I found it hard to see Naiambana's casting as Warwick as 'colour-blind' because, just as Boyd had substituted one black actor for another in the role of Henry, so the same pattern had occurred in the casting of Warwick (Francis in 2000, Naiambana in 2006). Naiambana's concern that he needed to sound less African and more English as Warwick (articulated at a Shakespeare conference) exposed 'colour-blind'ness and the use of RP as far from neutral.³³ In deliberately attempting to recreate a successful production (to the extent of casting actors from ethnic minorities in the same roles as their acclaimed predecessors), the RSC reveals anxieties about its own predominantly-white English performance history and in doing so, despite its claims to be 'colour-blind', the company actually limits the range of roles available to actors from ethnic minorities. I should add that I cannot read the casting of white English actors as 'colour-blind' either, for me their dominant presence serves to expose the limited use of ethnically-diverse performers within Shakespearean production.

Whilst 'nationality-specific' and 'colour-blind' casting are apparently liberal attempts to give verisimilitude to the diversity of nations represented and reflect an integrated, ethnically-diverse society, for me their positive intentions are tempered by certain consequences. In seeking to represent nations 'truthfully', 'nationality-specific' casting elides the often problematic representations of 'others' in Anglo-centric texts. Directors attempt to 'solve' these representations through extensive cutting and/or providing extra-textual motivations to justify characters' actions. By

³³ Patrice Naiambana, with Ben Crystal and Janet Dale, 'Speaking Shakespeare', convened by Paul Allen, *British Shakespeare Association Conference*, University of Warwick, 31 August 2007.

using 'colour-blind' casting productions present the dominant discourse of middle-class white English experience (as typified in the predominance of RP accents) as universal. Although it seems a long way off, I look forward to the RSC and NT increasing the diversity of its ensembles for Shakespeare. I suggest that if these national institutions cast actors of different ethnicities and nationalities in the leading (English) roles more frequently then the dislocations between the national and/or ethnic identity of the actor and the role that s/he plays will increase audiences' awareness of the English bias of both the texts and their performance history.