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Review of Shakespeare's Henry IV parts one and two (directed by Gregory Doran for the Royal Shakespeare Company) at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, on 23 August 2014, also Theatre Royal Newcastle on 1 October 2014 and Lowry, Manchester, on 22 October 2014

Gregory Doran's productions of Henry IV parts one and two were visually stunning and extremely well-paced, focussing on lucid storytelling, while presenting the complexity of the text and exploring the nuances in character portrayal.

Doran had said he wanted to look at Richard II, his first production since taking over as Artistic Director of the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC), independently of the other History plays. However, with the appearance of a ghost figure (Samuel Marks) at the edge of the circle dressed in a white gown and resembling David Tennant's Richard II, Doran made a direct reference between these two Henry IV productions and his production of Richard II. The casting of Sean Chapman as Northumberland and other actors from the Richard II Company (including Joshua Richards, Simon Thorp, Samuel Marks, Elliot Barnes-Worrell, Youssef Kerkour, and Antony Byrne), also worked to make associations with the earlier production, and brought together an ensemble that ensured the performances were well defined and solid throughout. The opening scene of part one started with the darkness lifting and revealing a prostrate King Henry IV who then stood and hesitated as he took the crown from an altar. The reference to the closure of Doran's Richard II made sense of Jasper Britton's Henry, who was an anguished sick king, tormented by his guilt that seemed to consume his whole being. His performance gave the impression that Henry wanted to demonstrate his authority as King and father, but he was unable to hide the pain of the rejection by his son (which was mixed up with the guilt from his part in the usurpation) from those around him.

Comment [Kate Wilk1]: Needs a reference

These productions highlighted the tension between the different father and son relationships. Hal/Henry/Falstaff, and Hotspur/Northumberland/Worcester were placed in contrast to each other, and made sense of Henry's declaration that Hotspur would make a better son than Hal (3.2.112). Alex Hassell played Hal's transformation from a youth who was sexually sure of himself when the audience first saw him awakening in the dawn in a room in the Eastcheap tavern (1.2) to a young man taking on the authority of the King at the end of part two. The "I do, I will" (2.5.486) moment was a commentary on the later meeting between Hal (Alex Hassell) and his father (3.2) as well as clearly foreshadowing Hal's rejection of Falstaff at the end of part two with the cutting "I know thee not" (5.5.47). Hassell's Hal was in control in the tavern scenes, delighting in mischief and the camaraderie found with the regulars at the tavern. On the other hand, his Hal also showed a self-awareness that in the future things would change, particularly in the "I know you all" (1.2.192) soliloquy. Early glimpses of Hal prepared the audience for the moment when they first saw him meeting his father: in this situation Hal was hunched and subservient. This made his transformation into the King at the end of part two more apparent as his whole

posture changed: he was upright as he strode through the streets of London during the coronation procession.

Particularly striking about Doran's approach were the narrative threads and visual tropes that followed through both parts: Doran's attention to detail brought a consistency to both productions; Stephen Brimstone Lewis' set in particular enabled this coherence between the two productions which, with minimal changes, could work for both exterior and interior scenes; Tim Mitchell's subtle changes of light and colours also presented a clear sense of place. For example, the silver wicker backdrop representing the streets of London at the start of part two, transformed into a golden screen representing the rural land of Gloucestershire after the interval. The court was represented by silvers, purples and mauves while rusts, oranges, ochres, and reds defined the Eastcheap scenes. In contrast, in part one Wales was shot through with a sky blue that defined it as a female space accompanied by Lady Mortimer's (Nia Gwynne) beautiful singing in Welsh. The light was used to bring the audience into scenes, particularly in the tavern scenes where the audience were lit with lanterns around the stalls.

The juxtaposition of scenes which melted into each other was often very effective as one scene ran into another. For example, as Hal entered the tavern (2.4 to 2.5) it looked as if he was toasting Hotspur as Hotspur left the stage. Although the two never meet until the battle at the end of part one, this moment made a connection between the two men. In part two, there was a lovely moment when 2.4 ran into the court scene 3.1 as King Henry entered the stage through the curtains of the room upstairs in the tavern (3.1) thus making the line, "How many of my poorest subjects/Are at this hour asleep." (3.1.4-5) extremely pertinent as Mistress Quickly slumbered in her chair. Here Henry was also draped in the map which had been worn by Owen Glendower in part one (3.1). This which also matched the pattern of the curtains in the tavern emphasising the play's exploration of what it was to be a citizen in Britain in Shakespeare's time.

The addition of a moment from The Famous Victories of Henry V in 2.5 facilitate is a clear through line in terms of Henry's trust in the Lord Chief Justice at the end of part two. The inclusion of Doll Tearsheet (Nia Gwynne) in the tavern scenes in part one gave a rationale for her appearance in part two.

In both productions there were some very strong performances. Antony Sher's Falstaff was able to charm the people around him such as Mistress Quickly (Paolo Dionisotti), Doll Tearsheet (Nia Gwynne) and Hal as ably as he seduced the audience. In his soliloquies, Sher was able to pick up on an audience member's laugh or gasp and work with it through the rest of the speech. Sher was also able to bring out Falstaff's dark side: the comedy in the recruiting scene in Gloucestershire in part two had a sinister overtone as we knew Falstaff was about to send his skeleton-like ragged recruits to their death as "food for powder" (4.2.65). Eliot Barnes-Worrell gave two clearly defined performances as Prince John and the hapless Frances constantly being teased in the tavern scenes. Joshua Richards played a quiet unassuming Bardolph, and his moments of comedy come as much from his glances and posture than his speech. Trevor White's portrayal of Hotspur was also fascinating. White had talked about playing Hotspur as if he was on the autistic spectrum and this made sense of his performance: his constant interruptions when others spoke, particularly in 1.3, and his

Comment [Kate Wilk2]: Can this be clarified? The plays are set in Henry IV's time not Shakespeare's - how did Doran make clear that he was exploring citizenship in Shakespeare's time and not Henry's or today? Are there any consequences to this?

Comment [Kate Wilk3]: This seems a little bitty and actually an important point that readers will be interested in - can you add more to this about Famous Victories or move Doll to another, more appropriate part of the review? Also, the sentence on Henry V needs clarifying.

Comment [Kate Wilk4]: This needs a reference and I would be more comfortable with some exploration of what 'on the autistic spectrum' means in this context.

arguments with Glendower in Wales (3.1) as well as his almost childish delight that he will fight with Hal worked well with this approach.

Although set on the thrust stage of the new theatre, the production design made use of the proscenium arch of the old Royal Shakespeare Theatre to frame many scenes. Both productions transferred with minimal obvious changes from this stage at Stratford to the proscenium arch stages at the Theatre Royal Newcastle, and the Lowry in Manchester. The vomitaria were no longer available for entrances and exits, and the trap representing the downstairs area of the tavern at Eastcheap disappeared. However, the stage worked well to frame certain scenes such as those in Gloucestershire and the Eastcheap tavern. All entrances and exits were from the wings; Rumour's (Antony Byrne) attempt at a selfie at the start of part two meant he had to perch on the edge of the stage, but other effects worked just as well as they had on the thrust. For example, Frances' constant entrances and exits were still as effective, even though he was no longer entering breathless from the trap.

Overall, Doran's productions worked well in different spaces, and avoided the clutter that might have been hard to resist with a Stratford run, a tour and a Barbican residency. The two productions have set things up nicely for Henry V, particularly with John's reference to possible wars abroad at the end of part two.