

Gregory Doran: Craft, Tradition, 'Shakespeare'

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PhD

University of York

Theatre, Film and Television

February 2016

Abstract

This thesis is the first study into the career, to date, of the current Artistic Director of the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC), Gregory Doran. My thesis commences by identifying that, although he is one of the most prolific and high profile directors of Shakespearean plays working in Britain today, there has been no attempt thus far to articulate or analyse what characterises his work, or how he makes it.

Acknowledging that he positions himself within a tradition of Shakespearean theatre directing that rhetorically locates the source of Shakespearean meaning and authority within the Shakespearean text, I argue that this locates him in critical territory at odds with performance critics who reject this paradigm, but rather see the theatrical event as a contested site of meaning(s) that are neither universal nor immanent in the text. His personal identification with Shakespeare, and his lengthy association with the RSC, a site of production identified as hegemonic and imperialistic by many scholars, has led to critical dismissal of Doran by some as a blandly conservative director.

In this thesis I argue that Doran's theatre-making craft, as he defines it, is an enabling one. His process, which draws on Stanislavskian ideas of character that are commonplace within British theatre, has distinctive elements that promote ensemble building, clarity and textual understanding. It is democratising in intent, opening up pathways for performance outcomes that are accessible to an audience without foreknowledge of the play.

I further argue that Doran's aesthetic negotiates tradition, design and space in ways that cannot be reductively dismissed as conservative, and that his work exhibits authorial traits linked to his sexuality and Catholic upbringing that are Doranian, not Shakespearean, in origin. I also argue that he has made an important contribution to the staging of lesser-known plays from the early modern repertoire.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Professor Michael Cordner for all his advice and support, and Dr Tom Cornford and Dr Varsha Panjwani for their assistance and encouragement. I would also like to thank Dr Ollie Jones and Dr Tom Cantrell for their assistance, and all other members of staff at the University of York who have helped me with the completion of this thesis. I would like to thank Professor Martin White for a chance conversation that provided inspiration for the direction of the thesis. I would particularly like to thank the staff at the Shakespeare Centre library in Stratford upon-Avon for their patience, help and support, without which this PhD would not have been possible. I would also like to thank Tom Wright and Jasper Britton who were so generous with their time and recollections, Jane Tassell at the Royal Shakespeare Company, and, of course, Gregory Doran. Lastly, I would thank my wife Cath Doman for her help and support over the last five years, as well as other members of my family and friends who have provided encouragement.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as References.

Introduction

Introduction

On 22 March 2012 Gregory Doran was announced as the Artistic Director Designate of the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC), replacing the outgoing Artistic Director Michael Boyd. He was the sixth person to assume this role since the RSC was created out of the former Shakespeare Memorial Theatre company under the leadership of Peter Hall in 1961. As well as Hall and Boyd the other holders of the post have been Trevor Nunn, Terry Hands and Adrian Noble. Doran greeted the announcement with the words:

I am delighted to be appointed as Artistic Director of this great company. I joined the RSC 25 years ago, first as an actor, then as assistant director and then Chief Associate, so I guess if my appointment represents something, it represents a long term commitment to the disciplines and craftsmanship required to do the astonishing plays of our 'Star of Poets', William Shakespeare.

(Doran, in Royal Shakespeare Company, 2012)

This thesis is a study of the achievements of the director Gregory Doran at the RSC since 1987 and a contextualisation of those achievements within a wider critical and institutional narrative. A quick examination of the director's curriculum vitae¹ shows that, since the mid-1990s, he has directed almost exclusively for the RSC, and that his reputation is built almost entirely on a career spent directing plays from the early modern repertoire. Between 1992 and 2012 Doran directed forty four full productions, not including revivals, of which thirty two were for the RSC. Of those forty four productions, twenty-seven were of plays written by Shakespeare and/or his contemporaries (twenty five of them for the RSC).² It is thus as a Shakespearean director that he is primarily known and it is for his Shakespearean productions that he has attracted most critical attention. My study, then, will focus almost entirely on his direction of texts from the early modern era within the RSC, enabling a very specific examination of the questions, problems and opportunities raised by the production of plays by Shakespeare and his contemporaries at a particular time and in a particular place and by a particular director.

Doran's rhetoric in the above quotation foregrounds two concerns which will underpin much of this thesis. The first one is his immediate and public display of loyalty to the company's house

¹ See Appendix one for a list of Doran's productions as a director at the RSC between 1992 and 2014.

² I've included the hybrid play *Cardenio* in these figures, although it is, of course, a largely speculative reconstruction of a play rather than an extant text.

playwright, implying he is a committed servant of Shakespeare and thus the company will be safe in his hands. In one sense this is an entirely uncontroversial statement from the Artistic Director of the Royal *Shakespeare* Company, but it is also one of many similarly themed statements made by Doran during the course of his career. I will explore Doran's positioning in relation to 'Shakespeare',³ and how this sits within a field of Shakespeare Studies and performance criticism that tends to problematise such rhetoric, in Chapter One of this thesis. Put simply, the kind of rhetoric seen here, unashamedly adopting Ben Jonson's memorable phrase reconfiguring Shakespeare as a celestial body, has created a critical context that presents difficulties when attempting, as this study will, a serious engagement with Doran's practice and aesthetic. The rhetorical deification of Shakespeare as a universal 'good', especially when aligned with such a dominant and culturally loaded site of production as the Royal Shakespeare Company, invites suspicion from performance critics who often see themselves in ideological opposition to such an institution. It is inevitable, therefore, that this can sometimes lead to a dismissiveness and even hostility to Doran's work from scholarly critics that has contrasted on a number of occasions with the generally favourable reception from Stratford audiences and the popular press, pointing to a division between theory and the stage which is a key concern of this thesis. As Shakespeare and Performance Studies has evolved from the stage-centred criticism of Alan Dessen and analysis of Shakespeare-as-performance in J.L. Styan's *The Shakespeare Revolution* (1977), through the cultural materialism of scholars such as Alan Sinfield, Graham Holderness and Jonathan Dollimore, to Terence Hawkes' deconstructions of Shakespearean meaning(s) and the work of W. B. Worthen, Barbara Hodgdon and many others, a theoretical tradition has arisen which in seeking to displace, deconstruct and reconfigure dominant ideologies has come to view a culturally hegemonic institution such as the Royal Shakespeare Company with some scepticism, if not outright opposition. This study, whilst acknowledging the kinds of critique that such a theoretical perspective presents, argues for a reappraisal of Doran as an important and distinctive theatre director worthy of scholarly consideration.

³ By this I mean not just the man and the plays that he wrote, but 'Shakespeare' as a conceptualised ideal.

The second element of the statement with which I opened this introduction that I wish to highlight is Doran's stated dedication to the craftsmanship of staging Shakespeare. By drawing on the rhetoric of the craftsman, Doran is, I argue, positioning himself within an artisan tradition. This simultaneously implies he is lesser than Shakespeare (a humble tradesman serving the playwright's artistic genius) whilst also acknowledging (and reminding us of) his not inconsiderable achievements as a director in this field. By employing the language of a trade, however, he invokes the tradition of that trade. He is validating what he does when he makes Shakespearean theatre by placing his practice and aesthetic within a historical framework. The craft that he has acquired, which he has learned through a lengthy apprenticeship at the RSC, is by implication a necessity for the role that he performs.

He is also suggesting, however, that there is a rigorous, professionally sanctioned tradition of staging Shakespeare in a particular way. This tradition, or inheritance, I will argue, encompasses not just the mechanics of moving people on and off stage, but how characters are cast, the manner in which they move, the world that is constructed onstage and, crucially for the RSC, the way in which they *speak*. I will explore the nature of this craft, which, as Doran conceives it, places enormous emphasis on the process of working with actors in a specific and structured rehearsal process that differs little from production to production, as well as considering the tradition(s) in which this process sits. Although he works largely within a Stanislavskian framework that projects notions of character and psychology onto the Shakespearean text as universal, I will argue that he also has rehearsal strategies which are democratising in instinct and open up the potential for distinctive and accessible performance outcomes. These are potentially enabling to the actors, not rooted in literary or Shakespearean authority and, I argue, provide compelling reasons for Doran's particular success in directing lesser-known works by Shakespeare and his contemporaries and in opening up Shakespearean meanings for new audiences.

In his statement, above, Doran stresses both his dedication to Shakespeare and his experience and expertise as a Shakespearean craftsman. In so doing he is not only presenting himself as the best candidate for the position of Artistic Director, but implying that with such a unique record and

pedigree at the RSC he is the *obvious* candidate. His rhetoric suggests that he has earned the right to hold this position through a lifetime of dedication and hard work in the service of Shakespeare, to which his own particular talent is subservient, and that this is as it should be in a company dedicated to the work of a playwright, the ‘Star of Poets’. The nature of his experience, his long association with the company and his rhetorical identification with its ethos make it difficult to conceive of a comparable candidate for the role, or of any comparable director who enjoys such a strong identification with an equivalent theatre company.⁴

Doran’s appointment was received enthusiastically across most of the national press; he was the clear favourite for the job in many eyes, particularly newspaper critics who saw in him a director who seemed to share their enthusiasm for Shakespearean productions in which directorial intervention is largely unobtrusive (to them) and which demonstrates appropriate (for them) respect for the conventions of performance tradition. For Michael Billington in *The Guardian* he was ‘the right choice for the Royal Shakespeare Company’ (Billington, 2012a) and for Charles Spencer in *The Telegraph* he ‘was the obvious choice for the role’ (Spencer, 2012). Later, upon hearing of the incoming director’s plans, Robert Gore-Langton concluded in *The Spectator* that ‘Doran is the right man for the job’ (Gore-Langton, 2013).

The suggestion of ‘rightness’ for the job implied a kind of critical sanctioning of his appointment and the critics, many of whom had written speculatively of the merits of likely candidates, had done much to shape the context in which the appointment would be made. The suggestion that he might therefore be a safe choice for the role immediately caused Doran to distance himself in an interview from the suggestion that being safe automatically meant being dull:

[Doran] said he did not resent the term “safe pair of hands”, but suggested that it was an inaccurate cliché. “I don’t think it implies that the work is dull or boring. I’m about to direct *Julius Caesar* with an all-black cast set in post-colonial Africa – that doesn’t sound too safe to me.”... He cited a forthcoming RSC production of a Chinese play published in 1615, during Shakespeare’s lifetime, as an example of the kind of drama the company should explore. “If that’s safe, then that’s ok with me.”

(Malvern, 2012)

⁴ Barrie Rutter has perhaps a similar level of identification with the theatre company of which he is Artistic Director, *Northern Broadsides*, but he was its founder and is to date the only holder of that post. Doran’s position at the RSC is different because this organisation has existed for two decades longer than he has been directing, and he has emerged from within it rather than creating it.

Doran is here rejecting the accusation that his appointment is a risk-averse one by giving examples of what he sees as radicalism of both concept (*Julius Caesar*) and programming (*The Orphan of Zhao*, the Chinese play referred to here, which he staged later in 2012). The director has frequently found it necessary to make assertions of this nature in interviews, distancing himself from a narrative of conservatism which has attached itself to him throughout his directing career. In this thesis I will explore what conservatism might mean in the context that Doran inhabits, arguing that whilst his productions are rooted in a text-based Shakespearean performance tradition which, when linked to his often universalising, essentialist rhetoric around Shakespeare, allows for criticism⁵ of this nature to be made, considering a director's work in terms of its relative conservatism and/or radicalism in such a context as the RSC has become a problematic and potentially reductive critical tool. In Doran's case, such an approach has allowed much about his process and work to be overlooked, or commented upon from a politically hostile perspective which underplays its merits and/or significance.

The tension identified above, between a figure seemingly defined by the institution he represents and a practitioner who rejects that characterisation, makes him a compelling figure. It also gives rise to a contradiction regarding his appointment; he is so aligned with the RSC that he appears to represent its supposed creative inertia. His very 'rightness' for the role makes him an unsurprising, even 'dull', choice. As I have already suggested, this thesis presents an argument that in attempting to view his work through such a limiting series of dichotomies (dull/exciting, conservative/radical, traditional/innovative), it is difficult to make an effective appraisal of his work, or why it might enjoy such popular and mainstream (as opposed to scholarly) critical success, a distinction noted, but not elaborated upon, in this review of the director's 2014 production of *The Witch of Edmonton* from the academic journal, *Shakespeare*:

Most reviewers praised the production, but denigrated the play. In *The Guardian*, Michael Billington acknowledged the "sombre beauty of Gregory Doran's production" and the "brooding presence of Eileen Atkins as the titular witch", but doubted "the quality of the play itself". In *The Observer*, Kate Kellaway found more to like, but also suggested that "too many playwrights spoil the plot" and that the dramatists "seem not to have agreed on whether they were writing a comedy or a tragedy". Watching Doran's characteristically competent but comparatively unadventurous production, I am tempted to say just the opposite: this is a very fine play – partly because of the tonal shifts which Kellaway found

⁵ This, of course, assumes that conservatism is a term applied in a pejorative way, which I do.

confusing – which was not especially well served by the production; moments of excellence were achieved, but this was largely because of, rather than in spite of, the quality of the play.

(Price, 2015, p. 459)

I draw particular attention here to the line ‘characteristically competent but comparatively unadventurous production’, partly because a negative value appears to be attached to competency, but also because it appears to suggest a more ‘adventurous’ production would have yielded, for this reviewer, greater critical rewards. The point of reference is here left frustratingly undeclared, as this is a play with relatively few modern productions with which to compare Doran’s, and one is left with the conclusion that the critic is comparing the production to a notional, more adventurous, *Shakespearean* production rather than another production of the same play. The critic therefore fails to recognise that to stage this play in the first place represents a kind of ‘adventure’ for the director and the company. Instead, the criticism of the production is located in an ideologically loaded discourse which valorises art (adventure) at the expense of craft (competency), and, as the critic notes, places his assessment in critical territory distinct from most reviewers in the popular press. This thesis presents an argument for remapping this territory in relation to Doran’s work, suggesting that in order to meaningfully appraise what it is that the director actually does do, it is important to look beyond criticising him for what he, and the institution which he now leads, clearly do not do. In other words, by situating his work, and considering its merits, within the context in which it is produced, we can begin to elucidate a greater understanding of its impact and worth.

I will therefore examine in detail the way he works, his influences, his approach to working with actors and texts, verse-speaking, and the aesthetic trends that are evident in his work. In short, I will analyse the qualities and efficacy of his craft. I will also examine the critical reception of the productions he has directed and the artistic identity with which he has become associated. In doing so I will consider whether he has been able to forge a distinctive style and agenda of his own whilst working within an identifiable Shakespearean performance tradition for which there is a clear lineage, and, offer a challenge to a tradition of Shakespeare and Performance criticism, which, for ideological reasons with which I have some sympathy, has often failed to give proper critical

recognition to directors working within the popular mainstream of contemporary British, and particularly English, Shakespeare production.

Searching for the ‘Doran-ian’

Reviewing Doran’s production of *Richard II* in autumn 2013, Peter Kirwan attempted a brief summary of the defining characteristics of Doran’s aesthetic:

Richard II is the most ‘Doranish’ production one could imagine, from the gorgeously conceived lighting design to the sensitive treatment of male-male relationships, from the meticulous attention to detail in the tiniest roles to the playful but respectful approach to history, from the star actor to the intuitive feel for a good ‘gasp’ moment. This was Doran at the height of his powers, and a deliberate attempt to show the RSC at the height of its.
(Kirwan, 2013)

It is difficult to dispute much of this; homoeroticism, attention to detail across the whole ensemble and effective use of *coups de théâtre* are all frequently evident in Doran’s work and shall be explored in what follows. I would add to these a recurrent use of ritual and religious (especially Catholic) imagery and a sense of community and camaraderie often expressed through music and dance as distinctive recurring features of Doran’s aesthetic.

Richard II was the first production that Doran directed after assuming the artistic leadership of the company. The traits evident within it though, as suggested by Kirwan, had long since come to characterise Doran’s work. More than two years earlier, on 14 April 2011, the director’s production of *Cardenio* opened in the Swan Theatre, with the accompanying detail on the publicity material: ‘Shakespeare’s ‘Lost Play’ Re-imagined’.⁶ The play, as a reconstruction of a text which is no longer extant, employed Lewis Theobald’s *Double Falsehood* (Theobald et al., 2010) as a template, then supplemented it with passages lifted from the presumed original source of the story (Thomas Shelton’s translation of *Don Quixote* (Cervantes, in Theobald et al., 2010, pp. 336-419)), a smattering of other sources, chiefly other plays by Fletcher (see Doran, 2012, pp. 109-112), and a substantial amount of Doran’s own invention.

Documenting the evolution of the eventual performance text in detail is beyond the scope of this study and, in any case, would require access to Doran’s unpublished drafts of the script. What is apparent, however, is that beyond three lines of verse that Doran covertly copied from *Hamlet* (see

⁶ The frontispiece to the published version of the play has a much lengthier acknowledgement of its various sources (Doran et al., 2011, p. 3).

Doran, 2012, pp. 191-192), there is nothing in the text that was performed that can be absolutely identified as by Shakespeare.

The production was, therefore, only speculatively ‘Shakespearean’. It was, however, unambiguously ‘Doran-ian’. The rehearsal period for the production employed largely the same methodology that Doran uses for all his theatrical work, with a particular focus on textual detail, paraphrasing and research. The only exception to this was the way in which the performance text evolved through rehearsals,⁷ in partnership with the acting company, in a democratic process. The aesthetic exemplified many of the characteristics that I will identify herein as recurring tropes in Doran’s work. Set in Catholic Spain, it invested heavily in the imagery of Catholicism. The play undoubtedly invites such an aesthetic, but seen in the wider context of Doran’s overall body of work, the rituals, requiems and smells of incense, and the actors’ investment in those rituals, were typical of the director. There was a meticulously constructed sense of the world of the play, richly detailed and visually stunning. The central dynamic between Cardenio and Fernando (played by Oliver Rix and Alex Hassell respectively), was touching and sincere, a mutual love of horsemanship underpinning the sensitive relationship between them (at least until Fernando’s betrayal of Cardenio). Doran interpolated a scene of carnival at the beginning of 1.6 (Doran et al., 2011, p. 28), a nightmarish ritual of devil masks and drunken lechery, which recalled similar scenes in other Doran-directed productions, such as 1997’s *The Merchant of Venice* in its lustful and diabolical vision, and 1999’s *The Winter’s Tale* in its bawdy celebration of community through ritual. There was also a moral ambiguity to this production, a refusal to condemn or condone Fernando’s behaviour, but rather each moment was invested in for its own sake so that we, as audience members, were allowed to make our own judgements.

Both Kirwan’s review of *Richard II* and my own observations about *Cardenio* draw clear and converging conclusions about an identifiable Doranian aesthetic, yet a number of public statements by Doran have demonstrated his reluctance to characterise himself as a director with a strong and

⁷ In a private conversation with Christopher Chilton, who played the Priest, he described to me how company members were heavily involved in the process of developing and rewriting the performance text throughout rehearsals.

consistent visual aesthetic. For instance, he states that ‘I think my style changes with each play, because each play has different requirements’ (*Focus* magazine, May 2002). If we take changes in style to mean a variance in performance *outcomes* rather than a change of *process*, then such a statement seems to deny an aesthetic commonality across the body of his work, as well as suggesting that the play itself has a set of ‘requirements’ which, as director, he should defer to. In fact, as my analysis will make clear, there *are* a series of recurring tropes in Doran’s aesthetic, though it is also clear that they are not usually the defining characteristic of each performance but rather a series of motifs which emerge repeatedly from production to production. They also tend to be thematic or located in action rather than purely visual elements of staging. For example, Doran frequently places scenes of ritual at the heart of his productions, but the specific nature and context of that ritual can be vastly different depending on the needs of the play concerned and the production’s specific design conceit.

Similarly, in the statement below, Doran recoils from the idea of directorial imposition, suggesting that

I’m not a director who imposes a series of ideas. I get the best casting that I can, and that is a fairly major part of interpretation of the play... There’s no definitive production of Shakespeare. What I like to do is make the production a sort of collaboration in which we are all contributing ideas and I am editing those ideas.

(Sheldrake & Forrest, 2013)

Despite his resistance to imposing ‘ideas’ upon the play, displaying a rhetorical distancing from obvious directorial intervention which is common in his public utterances, Doran does hint here at an openness to recognising his theatrical work as something distinctive from the Shakespearean work itself. Suggesting that there is no such thing as a ‘definitive production’, he implies that ‘Shakespeare’ is not fixed in perpetuity. However, as we will see, much of Doran’s rhetoric demonstrates a sense of a universal Shakespearean authority, drawing on an essentialist perspective towards the text that ultimately sees theatrical production as a means of releasing meanings codified in the Shakespearean text, rather than generating a new set of meanings through the act of theatrical production. Thus, from this viewpoint, staging the play is a purely interpretative act, releasing, in W.B. Worthen’s phrase, the ‘latent potentialities of the words on the page.’ (1997, p.4). To a critic such as Worthen, who is significant in this field and will be discussed and

referenced at some length in this thesis, this subservient relationship to the text, which leads to ‘stage directors talking about letting the stage release the intentions of the author’ (p. 5), is characterised as a ‘literary perspective’ (p. 4), and is to be resisted. Yet Worthen also complicates what he situates as the opposite perspective, a ‘performative’ one, where

stage production is, in a sense, the final cause for the writing of plays, which are fully realized only in the circumstances for which they were originally intended: theatrical performance.

(Worthen, 1997, P. 4)

In fact, to Worthen, authority may be contested critically between the two perspectives, literary and performative, but both are defined by their relationship to a printed text, rather than considering performance as an iteration of the Shakespearean work⁸ that is the site of its own meaning(s) and separate from any prior attempt to fix that work as a printed text; the performance may or may not pursue a claim to authority from its proximity to the notional work, but should not be judged in relation to it. To Worthen, the stage is ‘but one site among many where “Shakespearean” meanings are produced in contemporary culture’ (p. 38) and both literary and performative perspectives are limiting. I will explore this critique, which can clearly be applied to the ways in which Doran talks about staging Shakespeare, in more detail in Chapter One. For the moment, it suffices to note that although Worthen’s opposition to rhetoric that seeks to derive some measure of authority from a notional ‘fidelity’ to the text clearly places him in terrain hostile to Doran and the RSC, it is useful to observe that he also problematises the radical/conservative dichotomy that I have already highlighted;

Yet where most traditional literary approaches to performance are most misleading (and, incidentally, where they most prefigure the “text-based” understanding of dramatic performance common in Performance Studies), is in conceiving dramatic performance as itself a form of reading, or *interpretation*. “Interpretation” is a regulatory principle, one that enables us to locate properly “Shakespearean” productions and set aside those that are merely “experimental”; my own eccentric interests are said to be “more in experimentation than in Shakespeare”. Predictably enough, I suppose this strikes me as a false distinction: all productions are experimental.

(Worthen, 2006, p.212)

Whilst acknowledging his own particular enthusiasms as experimental, the logic of Worthen’s argument, which recognises every performance as both an iteration of the Shakespearean ‘work’

⁸ Worthen distinguishes the Shakespearean work as intangible and the sum of all its iterations, whereas a text is an iteration of that work (Worthen, 1997, pp6-.25)

and as a site of meaning(s) in its own right, leads him to conclude that all performances, including those that boast of their attachment to the text on which they are based, are ‘experimental’.

In the case of Doran, there are also tensions to be unpacked between rhetoric and practice, not least because in doing so it is possible to understand Doran as a director who, whilst engaging in the kind of phrase-making that is commonplace in both Stratford and the wider English theatre industry, is actually engaged in a potentially more interesting project than such rhetoric seems to allow for. As later chapters will explore, the combination of a process that is rooted in a democratic, ensemble-based exploration of the play, which seeks to reconfigure and refresh the Shakespearean play for its audience, and, an aesthetic which, if not radically differing from Stratfordian performance traditions then certainly demonstrates an authorial voice, has given rise to a theatrical body of work which deserves greater scrutiny.

In considering Doran’s aesthetic, I will employ the term *mise en scène* on a number of occasions throughout this thesis. In this I am mindful of Pavis’ definition, which understands the phrase as encompassing the totality of what appears on stage, informed by the process that produced it, rather than a simple description of what can be *seen* and *heard* at any given moment. Patrice Pavis defines the term *mise en scène* as follows:

Mise en scène is thus a performance considered as a system of meaning controlled by a director or a collective. It is an abstract, theoretical notion, not a concrete and empirical one. It is the tuning of theatre for the needs of the stage and audience. *Mise en scène* puts theatre into practice, but does so according to an implicit system of organisation of meaning.

(Pavis, 2013, p. 4)

This provides a useful definition for the consideration of Doran’s work, allowing us to consider *mise en scène* as the ‘organisation of meaning’ whilst acknowledging that meaning is the result of a collective process, albeit led by Doran. In Doran’s case such meaning is (usually) the *implicit* result of an organised process rather than the *explicit* imposition of meaning. As Chapter Three will argue, this is a director whose decision-making is informed by research, detailed textual work and rehearsal process, and whose engagement with other practitioners, including designers, is highly collaborative, even if the way in which he organises that process is highly likely to produce a very particular set of performance outcomes.

When viewing historical performances and writing about them I will therefore consider what is produced onstage (and consumed by the audience) alongside the acting and narrative decisions that have informed it, such as the interpolation of extra non-textual material or the adaptation of the source text (or conflation of multiple texts). My observations will range in scope from an examination of small moments of local detail to considering the realisation of large scale and highly theatrical sequences.

Through examining Doran's work across a range of productions, I have also detected commonalities in the acting style which I will argue are directly linked to his process. Although each play might present its own particular challenges and provokes a range of different design responses, the character of the acting is shaped by the methodology used in rehearsal, which remains a constant feature of every production.

I began this section by highlighting Doran's resistance to being identified with a particular 'style' or aesthetic. By both considering *mise en scène* in the broad terms that Pavis suggests rather than the purely visual, by examining the specificity of Doran's practice, and, by assessing the cumulative impact of an acting style and a set of tropes that recur and develop across multiple productions, I consider that it *is* possible to identify the dominant characteristics of a Doranian aesthetic. The complex interactions of rehearsal process, conceptual decision-making and performance choices, I will argue, define Doran's aesthetic in the very detail and complexity that make it so difficult to locate.

The RSC

This thesis is not a history of the company in which Doran has made his reputation, but I have already highlighted that the institution inhabits a critical context through which the director and his work must be viewed, so it is necessary to consider the cultural, historical and industrial site of Doran's work. There has been no significant study of the company in recent years, although the early decades of the Royal Shakespeare Company have been recounted in histories such as those by Beauman (1982) and Addenbrooke (1974). Adler (2001) engaged more fully with the process of making theatre in his more recent monograph, considering the practices of a range of different types of personnel within the company, though it only slightly overlaps with Doran's ascendancy and hardly mentions him. Colin Chambers' account of the politics of the RSC (2004) runs to the turn of the millennium but similarly finds little space for either Doran or his predecessor Boyd, and only discusses the company under previous artistic directors Terry Hands or Adrian Noble in order to draw a largely unflattering comparison with the RSC's founder Peter Hall. Chambers' book also has little to say about many of the issues that will be under scrutiny here – rehearsal processes, acting methodology and stage aesthetics. If this is not the place to attempt a wider critical history of the company over the last couple of decades, which takes more account of the act of actually making theatre, then I am certainly identifying it as a productive area for future scholarship.

My analysis of Doran's work will therefore be contingent upon the industrial, as well as the critical and cultural, context(s) within which it is created and received. A company on the scale of the RSC has its own conventions and traditions, and how Doran's theatre productions conform to or reject those traditions will be a recurring theme throughout my analysis.

Mainstream directors and their *absence*

Doran's status at the head of one of the largest subsidised theatre companies in the world, and that company's role in the theatrical production and reproduction of Shakespearean plays should be reason enough to suggest that the director is a figure worthy of examination. He has been an almost constant presence for twenty five years in a company that has often lacked consistency or artistic unity, and, been personally responsible for a substantial quantity of the RSC's output during this time. His appointment to the artistic leadership of the company therefore provides a useful stimulus to judge where the values, aesthetic and culture of the RSC might actually be now, and where it might be headed. Yet it is remarkable how little has been written about him.

Although Doran's productions are well documented in some ways – their high profile ensures a wide variety of press coverage and he has frequently recounted his processes in print – there is yet to be an overarching study of his work. Some of his individual productions have aroused a certain amount of scholarly interest, usually because of high profile casting (Judi Dench in 2003's *All's Well that Ends Well*, David Tennant in 2008's *Hamlet*),⁹ or because Doran has written about them first (see below), but also sometimes because the particularities of a specific production make it in some way noteworthy. For instance, Doran's production of *Titus Andronicus*, co-directed with his partner Antony Sher at the Market Theatre in Johannesburg in 1995, attracted a significant amount of scholarly interest, much of it focussing on the controversies the production encountered due to its confused and confusing relationship with an immediately post-Apartheid South Africa, creating a problematic 'post-colonial knot' (Seef, 2008-9, p.1) which perplexed and irritated both Doran and Sher.¹⁰ Such academic consideration is by its nature sporadic, however, and tends to focus on a few, high profile productions, rather than considering an individual production within the context of a wider *corpus* of work.

⁹ For instance, see 'Time Lord of Infinite Space: Celebrity Casting, Romanticism, and British Identity in the RSC's "Doctor Who Hamlet"' (Hartley, 2009a) and 'Writing about [Shakespearian] Performance' (Dobson, 2005b) (on *All's Well that Ends Well*).

¹⁰ See Seef, 2008-09; Silverstone, 2009; Thurman, 2006; and Holmes, 2002. See also Doran and Sher's written account of the production, *Woza Shakespeare* (Doran & Sher, 1995). I will give a fuller account of this in the relevant section in Chapter One.

A glance at John Russell Brown's 2008 edition *The Routledge Companion to Director's Shakespeare* similarly reveals that this sizeable volume encompasses profiles of some thirty-one Shakespearean directors, but offers no space for Doran. In fact, Russell Brown sets criteria which would appear to exclude him from consideration in his foreword, by laying out three conditions for inclusion which Doran could not possibly pass. The first is that they should be 'innovative in their time, a requirement that tended to tell against inclusion of some who worked within an already established tradition, for example at Stratford, Ontario or Stratford-upon-Avon, England' (p. x). This would seem to disqualify Doran, as a director within an established tradition, and for that reason there is also no room for Adrian Noble or Michael Boyd. Peter Hall, Trevor Nunn and Terry Hands are included, appearing to suggest that the RSC has not evolved in any meaningful or useful way since the days of Hall or Hands. Boyd in particular has a clear aesthetic and set of preoccupations which he revisits throughout his Shakespearean productions, and when viewed in conjunction with his Russian training and European sensibility he surely must be placed in a different category from Peter Hall.

The second qualification is that their productions 'had to span a number of years' (p. x.) and the third that 'the productions had to influence other directors or the expectations of later audiences' (p. xi). Russell Brown suggests that directors who are still early in their careers might feature in a later volume, but Doran had been working at the company for more than fifteen years at the time of publication and had been Chief Associate Director for much of that time. As for the third condition, Doran's importance as a director is largely due to his high profile position in the mainstream of Shakespearean production. By occupying such a prominent space he therefore arguably helps to shape where that tradition situates itself at present, influencing, if not other directors, then certainly the expectations of audiences.

Russell Brown's conditions do not necessarily exclude directors working in the mainstream, but they certainly marginalise those working within a tradition in favour of those he considers innovative, terms of inclusion that are frustratingly subjective; there are, indeed, inclusions which could be easily challenged under these criteria. Such blunt tools, and it could be argued that they

are necessary for a project such as his, do not allow us to consider what it might be to be innovative within a tradition or institution, or to be influential because of the authority of the institution or tradition in which a director works, either of which might be ways in which you could characterise Doran. Of course, all directors, whether or not they are associated with a particular tradition or not, are subject to tradition(s), and innovation seems to be characterised here as working in opposition to that tradition rather than existing in ahistorical independence from it.

Russell Brown aside, there have been only sporadic attempts within the disciplines of Theatre and Performance Studies to profile specific directors working within the mainstream of English Shakespearean production. There are some collections of interviews with directors (see Luckhurst & Giannachi, 1999, Delgado & Heritage, 1996, for instance), but these necessarily privilege the subjective viewpoint of the director over analysis and cover a wide range of practitioners in relatively little detail. There are, of course, complications with achieving a greater depth of analysis; the collaborative nature of theatre makes it challenging to attribute any one element of a production to directorial agency. The difficulty in procuring access to a specific theatrical process and its participants makes writing about the role of its director similarly problematic. I would argue, however, that the ideological resistance I have already highlighted plays a role here, as it necessarily configures directors working within the Shakespearean mainstream as part of a cultural hegemony which, some critics suggest, should be opposed. Theatrical work by figures such as Doran thus becomes subject to a radical/conservative critical dichotomy which is reductive and disabling to serious criticism, and in doing so further distances mainstream theatrical practice in England from performance theory and criticism.

There is also distance between the exigencies of making theatre and what is written about it, one of the difficulties described by Anthony B. Dawson in his article 'The Impasse over the Stage'.

Dawson, though writing about the perils of imposing political meanings on Elizabethan theatre, draws a distinction which is useful here, defining the theatre as a

...material institution, depending on physical plant, actors' bodies, real objects such as hats, boots, swords and tables' and the presence of a live audience. Tied irrevocably to the economic and material culture in which it is embedded, the theater is inescapably practical, concrete, anti-theoretical.

Theory, particularly of the new historicist and cultural materialist persuasion, will, according to Dawson, always have ‘difficulty savouring the pungent untidiness of the actual theatrical practice of the time’ (p. 311). A practical/theoretical opposition therefore begins to open up, in which decisions taken as part of the production process, which could be for any number of practical reasons, bear the weight of a critical interpretation that presumes a greater level of premeditation than may have actually occurred. I am not suggesting that any production staged at the Royal Shakespeare Company does not bear the ideological stamp of both the institution and the cultural space it inhabits, and that any practices rooted within the traditions of that institution cannot be considered without their political implications - theatre-making of any kind is ideological and practical considerations are often ideologically coded – but rather that individual productions are often made to bear the critical weight of the institutional context. The practical considerations of the individual production bear a structural imprint, whether it be budgetary priorities, lack of rehearsal time, or casting restrictions, yet the individual production is critiqued without that structural contextualisation, leading to assumptions of intent when, in reality, there has rather been a failure to challenge that context. For instance, the practical exigencies of RSC ensemble casting led to Doran staging the aforementioned Chinese play, *The Orphan of Zhao* (2012), with only three East Asian actors in the cast, a decision which caused considerable controversy and prevented any meaningful consideration of the merits or otherwise of the eventual production. Whereas in many respects the criticism aimed at the production reflected understandable frustration at the under-representation of East Asian actors at the RSC, and I make no attempt to defend the production, the company stated by way of justification that the casting had been done ‘colour blind’ across three productions for a season of international theatre, including a Russian and a German play. As such, the acting company for all three shows reflected a reasonable diversity of performers and longstanding RSC policy on diversity of casting; yet when *Zhao* was considered, as it was, in isolation, it was accused of casting Caucasian actors in roles that should have gone to East Asian actors. This was further exacerbated by the roles that the three East Asian actors played, which included a maid and a ‘dog’,¹¹ and by the then recent RSC productions of *Julius Caesar* (also

¹¹ The actor concerned actually operated a large puppet mastiff.

directed by Doran in 2012) and *Much Ado About Nothing*, which featured all-black and an all-Asian casts respectively; why, therefore, could *Zhao* not have adopted a similar model and in doing so begun to address the historic under-representation of East Asian actors at the RSC? Instead the production appears to have been considered by many to be a provocative and inappropriate act of cultural appropriation by the company.

The controversy inspired a dedicated issue of the journal *Contemporary Theatre Review* (24:4) that sought to navigate the terrain in which the production found itself. Much of the discourse recognised the difficulties and contradictions that the production had inadvertently raised, particularly the tension between a desire to provide opportunities for actors to perform roles written for ethnicities other than their own, and a perceived need to cast ethnically specific actors in cases such as *Zhao*.

Many BEA actors want to be colour-blind cast in meaty roles to which they cannot lay claim via their racial-ethnic heritage. To increase their visibility in British culture, BEA actors therefore find themselves at the centre of a paradox, demanding roles that are racially determined as part of a broader project of profile raising, whilst at the same time arguing that race should be irrelevant in casting.

(Rogers and Thorpe, 2014a, P. 433)

Sita Thomas (2014, pp. 475-85) in the same journal provides an effective yet critical contextualisation of the casting of the production, and the RSC's Head of Casting, Hannah Miller, also defends the decision-making process (Rogers & Thorpe, 2014b, 486-93). I will not dwell further on *Zhao* at this stage, but, to return to my original point, the wider structural and cultural discourse obscured any consideration of the merits or otherwise of the production – an extreme example of the phenomenon I describe, perhaps, but exemplifying a trend that can be perceived in criticism of much of Doran's work. The status of the RSC, as a dominant cultural power, changes the meaning(s) of the productions staged there, and when challenges of this nature to the institution are inevitably made, often the focus of criticism tends to fall, as it did here, on individual productions rather than the structural biases which are the cause of any complaint. Thus, in this case, *The Orphan of Zhao* was criticised, not for its qualities as a piece of theatre, but because of the politics of its casting, and a production which Doran had earlier held up as an example of his programming radicalism had been characterised as a deeply problematic and reactionary piece of work.

Such discourses have a tendency to assimilate the craft of the individual theatre-maker into wider arguments and not allow the theatrical work to be examined within the context in which it was made. The relative merits or otherwise of that practice, its specificity within the given context, remain largely absent beyond reviews, which do not, and cannot, root an individual production within a practitioner's body of work in anything other than the most simplistic terms. As such, meaningful criticism of directors working within such a context is lacking.

If an absence of meaningful criticism of many mainstream, institutionally-based, English Shakespearean directors has therefore arisen, then this vacuum has largely been filled by accounts from practitioners themselves, either in the form of legislative 'How to...' books and articles¹² or biographies, all of which are by their nature partisan. These publications in turn appear to invite further commentary.

The most widely published living theatre director is, of course, Peter Brook.¹³ The key Brook text on directing, *The Empty Space*, has long since had its canonical status assured by its inclusion on many university and school drama department reading lists,¹⁴ allowing a wide-ranging critical commentary to develop around the director and his work. Brook would undoubtedly have attracted critical attention regardless, but by writing so prolifically and accessibly he has enabled much of the discourse that has followed. I have already alluded to the controversy surrounding Doran's production of *Titus Andronicus* (1995) and the scholarly interest it attracted, but the staging was also given a critical afterlife by Doran and Sher's subsequently published account of the experience (Doran & Sher, 1996), which exposed both details of the production and the directors' thinking behind it to a wider audience. Through the act of publication the practitioner gains a material

¹² For example, see *Playing Shakespeare* (Barton, 1984); *Speaking the Speech* (Block 2013); *Performing Shakespeare* (Davies, 2007); *Shakespeare's Advice to the Players* (Hall, 2003); *How to Do Shakespeare* (Noble, 2010).

¹³ See *The Empty Space* (Brook, 2008), *Evoking Shakespeare* (Brook, 1997), *The Shifting Point* (Brook, 1987), *There are no Secrets* (Brook, 1993), *The Quality of Mercy* (Brook, 2013)

¹⁴ In *Utopia and Other Places* (Eyre, 1994) the former National Theatre director Richard Eyre suggests four books that every young and aspiring director should read. The third is *The Empty Space* by Peter Brook. Similarly when *Guardian* critic Michael Billington was asked to choose five essential books for understanding twentieth century theatre, *The Empty Space* is one of them (Billington, 2011a).

presence for the academy for the academy¹⁶ that is far more satisfying to engage with than their difficult-to-quantify directorial presence in the theatre.¹⁷

If Doran's presence in printed form allows a measure of access to his thinking then actors too have provided invaluable accounts of his rehearsal process. The *Players of Shakespeare* series of books, with its focus almost entirely on RSC productions, features a number of chapters written by actors playing roles in Doran-directed productions.¹⁸ The director himself also contributed a chapter to this series based on his own experience as an actor playing Solanio in Bill Alexander's 1987 RSC production of *The Merchant of Venice* (Doran, 1993). Other accounts that have been invaluable in my research include Keith Osborn's diary of rehearsals for Doran's 2008 Courtyard Theatre season (Osborn, 2010), Harriet Walter's book on playing Lady Macbeth for Doran (Walter, 2002), and articles written and interviews given by actors in the popular press. All these sources of information offer a vital insight into the actor's perspective on what it is like to be directed by Doran, though they are by their nature highly partial and unlikely to be critical of a director upon whom they might rely for future employment.

Examples of the kind of endeavour this study is attempting then are few and far between. Mark Leipacher's monograph detailing the collaborations of director Sam Mendes and Simon Russell Beale (Leipacher, 2011) provides a model of one sort for how this kind of study might be structured, based around a series of case studies of the productions for which the two practitioners have collaborated.¹⁹ It is, however, based on a partnership rather than one figure alone and so doesn't always have to wrestle with the knotty problem of attributing specific moments or ideas to the actors *or* the director, as Russell Beale highlights below in this account of their production of *The Winter's Tale*:

¹⁶ In *Shakespeare and the Authority of Performance* (2007), Worthen makes a virtue out of this, arguing that by taking the rhetoric of actors at their word in published accounts he is able to discuss how Shakespearean authority is assigned and contested (see pp. 41-43).

¹⁷ For Doran's other publications (not including play texts) see *The Shakespeare Almanac* (Doran, 2009) and *Shakespeare's Lost Play: In Search of Cardenio* (Doran, 2012).

¹⁸ See the relevant chapters in *Players of Shakespeare* Volumes 4-6 (Henry, 2004, Hunter, 2004, Stone-Fewings, 2004, Gilbreath, 2003, Pennington, 2003, Sher, 2003, Jesson, 1998)

¹⁹ *Taking stock: the theatre of Max Stafford-Clark* (Roberts & Stafford-Clark, 2007) is another strong example of this kind of study, for a director working largely outside the classical sphere, though, again, it is largely dependent on intimate access to, and the co-operation of, the director concerned.

...though you never know with Sam whether or not he had that idea long ago. He can be quite shrewd in keeping back information and releasing it at the right point which is a great directorial skill, allowing the actor to discover it, yet I remember that being an absolutely collaborative decision that Mamillus should be on stage with Leontes all the time.

(Russell Beale in Leipacher, 2011, p. 29)

There is a rhetorical vagueness here, an unwillingness to credit a particular decision to one person (the director) and, perhaps, a reluctance to suggest any manipulation on the part of that director.

Instead, the idea is de-personalised and attributed to the process, yet Russell Beale also recognises the director's skill in facilitating the process that allows the decision to emerge. It is a denial of one kind of directorial agency yet an affirmation of another – the director as facilitator who creates the conditions for creativity rather than the autocratic leader who prescribes them in advance. The creativity that will emerge is, of course, contingent on the parameters prescribed by the director, though from Russell Beale's description it would appear that, in this case, such hidden autocracy is relatively benign. Either way, it illustrates an issue apparent in writing about rehearsal process - the singular contribution of a director to a production can seem intangible and often difficult to locate. Leipacher's study is also heavily contingent on access to rehearsals and lengthy interviews, and on a close personal relationship with the subject(s) under consideration. The level of detailed observation of rehearsal that this allows carries obvious advantages, though there are also potential difficulties, not just in maintaining critical distance, but because the scholar's very presence in the rehearsal room begins to affect, and change, the process that they are observing. As Robert Shaughnessy notes,

...the presence of outsiders in rehearsal can often inhibit performers (or conversely, encourage exhibitionism), and shift the work away from the experimental and the exploratory and towards performance...

(Shaughnessy, 2009, p. 247)

Many directors are reluctant to allow outsiders into their rehearsal space, for fear their presence will distort the balance and priorities of the work that goes on there.

David Selbourne's critical account of Peter Brook's 1974 production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Selbourne, 1982) provides another example of a compelling account of the rehearsal process, in this case of a landmark production, but, again, this is based on close and intimate access to the rehearsal room and is anyway configured around a single production. Also, as Shaughnessy notes (p. 247), Brook became unwilling to entertain outsiders following the publication of

Selbourne's book, suggesting a dislike of critical analysis may play as much of a role in denying access as concern that the delicate process of rehearsal will be disturbed.

Difficulties such as these may be considered reasons why the kind of study attempted here is not undertaken more often, but difficulties are not the same as insurmountable barriers. In the course of researching this thesis, I did procure limited rehearsal access and an interview with Doran which proved extremely useful, though it fell short of the kind of relationship with their subject(s) that writers like Leipacher were able to establish. This proved to be less limiting than might be supposed, however, for all the productions concerned are not only well documented but available to view as archive videos at the Shakespeare Centre Library, and, as already noted, there are extensive accounts of Doran's rehearsal process written by collaborators already in the public domain. The study that has emerged is therefore one that relies less on partnership with its subject, but instead balances the rhetoric of public pronouncements and documented accounts of process against an assessment of what meaning(s), and their critical reception, were achieved in performance. It is a study which will, at least partially, begin to redress the *absence* to which I have referred to above.

Methodology

In order that the particular concerns that I have highlighted thus far can be effectively explored, this thesis will focus almost exclusively on Doran's work within one, dominant site of theatrical production, the Royal Shakespeare Company in Stratford-upon-Avon. If previous scholarship about the director and his work has focussed exclusively on discrete productions, then in order to characterise the nature of that work across a career it is necessary to look at multiple productions over a considerable span of time. A more comparative study, looking at directors working in other institutions and comparing them with Doran, would not allow for the granular detail that I have provided herein and, although there are other centres of Shakespearean authority in English theatre, notably the Globe, there are not equivalent figures associated with those institutions with which such a study might be made. As I have argued, Doran's association with the RSC is in many ways unique, and, as I will consider in Chapter One of this thesis, his predecessors at the institution provide a more meaningful reference point for comparison than the directors of other companies and/or buildings. A study with a wider remit would perhaps enable examination of the ways in which different sites of production lend meaning and Shakespearean authority to the work produced therein, but the focus would necessarily switch to the sites of production themselves, the buildings, rather than the individual practitioners. By focussing instead on a single director across a twenty year period in one institution it is possible to chart the development of that director's work far more meaningfully, and therefore challenge the assumptions applied to that work with greater rigour. It also enables a greater focus on the specifics of that director's craft and what it might entail.

My approach for this thesis is therefore built around an analysis of the context(s) within which Doran directs, the process he employs and the productions that result from them. The research I have undertaken for each production under consideration comprises the following elements:

Detailed and repeated viewing of the archive video of each production to be considered,²¹ which are held in the RSC archive at the Shakespeare Centre in Stratford-Upon-Avon, as well as examining all supplementary holdings, such as prompt copies, programmes and production photographs.

Researching all critical material surrounding each production, including reviews in both the popular and academic press, in order to gain an understanding of the production's critical reception and the climate in which it was received.

Researching the production history for each of the plays being considered. The sheer volume of historic productions of many of these plays makes a selective approach necessary. My main focus has therefore been on English and primarily Stratford-upon-Avon performances,²² as that is the tradition within which Doran makes theatre, and I would argue, most informs his work.

In addition, I have conducted a small number of interviews for this thesis, the most central of which was with Doran himself. My decision not to seek a wider selection of interviewees was partly dictated by circumstances; I had always intended to speak to some of Doran's key collaborators after I had interviewed the director himself. In the event, it took more than two years of negotiations to secure an interview with him (which finally took place in June 2014), making further interviews impossible within the timescale of this project. The other interviews I have been able to conduct were with the actor Jasper Britton and the assistant director Tom Wright. It is my intention to build on this and conduct further research of this nature as I develop this study for publication.

²¹ This included every production that Doran directed for the company between *The Odyssey* in 1992 and *Richard II* in 2013, though only productions of plays drawn from the early modern repertoire were subject to multiple repeated viewings and detailed study. For a full list see Appendix One.

²² The RSC Archive holds complete archival records of all Stratford performances, within the period under consideration, including video recordings, but holdings on tours and transfers of those productions are extremely limited.

I was also able to gain access to a rehearsal for Doran's 2014 production of *Henry IV Part I*. Although this was limited in scope, it still provided a valuable insight into the rehearsal dynamic that Doran creates, and allowed me to observe his approach in action. Having seen the production that eventually resulted from this, it also enabled me to identify clear examples of how work done in rehearsal later underpinned what was performed in front of an audience.

Terms such as 'work' and 'text' are contested and unstable ones, so for clarity I will adopt the following definitions during the course of this thesis, unless citing secondary material which employs them differently: *text* will be used to denote a printed form of the play being produced; *performance text* will relate to a specific document that has been adopted for a specific production and will usually be a bespoke acting script that has been derived from more than one source; *play* will be used to refer to the original source of the text in its abstract rather than material form; *work* (if referring to Doran's work) or *performance* denotes the temporal performative event that has occurred, usually on more than one occasion, and is the primary object of scrutiny; *process* will refer primarily to the various processes (including rehearsal) employed in order to make the performance; *production* is the totality of all the elements that work in conjunction to make the performance.

Doran frequently creates a bespoke performance text, but also consults a wide variety of published versions of the play in rehearsal. For clarity and consistency, I will use act, scene and line numbers throughout from the RSC Shakespeare (eds. Bate & Rasmussen), for which Doran serves on the Editorial Advisory Board. The individual volumes in this series take a performance-centric approach, devoting a large amount of their editorial material to each play's production history. As befits a series of RSC-branded editions, much of this production history is dedicated to RSC stagings of each play and they feature a number of interviews with RSC directors about their individual approaches, including several with Doran himself. Where my focus is on a play not published as a text in this series, because it is a play not written by Shakespeare, then I will identify the edition used with a footnote in the appropriate place. My preference here will be for a text that

is as close to the performance text used as possible, particularly if there are multiple versions of the play available.

Archival recordings, memory and subjectivity

In researching this thesis I am indebted to the Shakespeare Centre and the archive they hold containing video recordings of every RSC production since the early 1980s. Their resources have enabled me to conduct a viewing of every production that Doran has directed for the company. It has also enabled me to identify suitable candidates to examine in further detail, which exemplify particular aesthetic choices or concerns, and from which conclusions might be drawn about the nature of Doran's wider aesthetic preferences.

The vagaries of deteriorating tape, low light sensitivity and a distant single camera viewpoint all combine to make this an imperfect experience, however, where it is frequently unclear who onstage is doing what to whom, and it is only through keeping a careful eye on the text itself that it is always clear who is speaking at a given moment. I have consulted prompt copies to support my analysis when the recording proves defective, but there are sadly certain productions where faults in the tape or DVD mean that effective scrutiny in the detail required becomes problematic. (In perhaps the most extreme example the recording of the 2003 production of Fletcher's *The Tamer Tamed* has no sound at all in the second half). In such cases I will have corroborated my viewing experience with other sources as far as is possible and take care to avoid unjustified assumptions.

I have been fortunate enough to see a number of Doran-directed productions live,²³ though many long before commencing this thesis. At this juncture it is appropriate to include the mandatory qualifications necessary when writing about live performance. By its very nature, this is not done at the time the object of the analysis is actually being performed. That my analysis is subjective is self-evident;²⁴ I can only write about what I experience when watching the play, and can no more speak for the other audience members that were watching that day than I can know what the actors

²³ These are *Cyrano de Bergerac* (1997); *All's Well that Ends Well* (2003), *Sejanus: His Fall* (2005), *The Rape of Lucrece* (2006), *Merry Wives – The Musical* (2006), *Hamlet* (2008), *Written on the Heart* (2011), *Julius Caesar* (2012), *The Orphan of Zhao* (2012), *Richard II* (2013), *Henry IV Parts I and II* (2014), *The Witch of Edmonton* (2014), *Death of a Salesman* (2015).

²⁴ Writing about video recordings is similarly subjective, but at least has the advantage of allowing details to be checked through repeated viewings, and notes to be taken at leisure rather than in the restrictive environment of a theatre audience during a live performance.

performing thought of a particular performance on a particular night. I generally avoid taking detailed notes during a production in order that my focus remains on the onstage action rather on the notebook in front of me, and my original viewing of many of the productions written about herein predates this project by a number of years, so the distance of time, and the varying circumstances surrounding my attendance at a given performance are bound to result in an occasionally faulty memory. My conclusions are therefore never wholly reliant on memory, but are always corroborated by video evidence.

For those productions viewed exclusively on an archive video, I am mindful of Pavis' distinction that

...analysis, in the strictest sense, can only occur if the analyst has personally witnessed a live performance, in real time and in a real place, unfiltered by the distorting mediations of recordings or secondary accounts. In this way analysis differs from the *reconstruction* of past performances.

(Pavis, 2003, p. 3)

However, in this case such a qualification is an idealistic one, considering the live nature of the work being studied and the duration of the period under review. The study of historic performances is entirely dependent on the kind of documentary evidence of which the archive videos available for more recent productions form a major part. To limit oneself to writing only about performances at which you have been present would be to severely limit the scope of what can be achieved.

As my research has progressed and I have identified those strands of Doran's aesthetics that are both clearly identifiable from production to production and of significance to my argument, I have developed a questionnaire that I have completed for each production, in addition to extensive scene by scene notes. A completed example of this can be found in Appendix Two. Although influenced by the discussion regarding the use of questionnaires in Pavis' *Analyzing Performance* (2003), I have resisted the urge to adopt an existing model but rather developed a bespoke proforma in order that my particular concerns might be more usefully recorded. I am of course both indebted to and influenced by those who have performed similar exercises before me.

I can, and do, draw on a wide selection of criticism when writing about a production, and I will try to highlight where consensus lies, and when there are disagreements between major critics. In drawing conclusions about critical reception I have generally limited myself to commenting on elements of the production that are referred to by more than one prominent critic,²⁵ either through identifying particular descriptors (or their synonyms) that have received multiple usage, or moments in performance or staging that have been given critical prominence. The reviews collected in *Theatre Record* have proved indispensable in this process.

When considering specific productions I have drawn on diaries and accounts of the work given by those involved, but I do not make any assumptions about actors' and directors' intentions stated therein being explicitly or competently realised onstage. As I am attempting to determine causal links between the agency of the director and the resultant *mise en scène*, such testimony is central to my project, but I take care throughout to distinguish clearly between participants' accounts and the performance I am analysing. I therefore privilege what I have seen and heard, be it on stage or screen or both, above what a participant in the production has claimed has been done, and where appropriate draw attention to any discrepancy between the two. I also take care to allow for situations which inform the testimonies of differing participants, ranging from the relentlessly positive pre-show publicity interview to the self-justifying after-the-fact reflective rehearsal account. This does not mean such material is not useful, even vital to this project, but merely that its subjectivity must be recognised and allowed for.

I have also consulted programmes and other published material surrounding the production where appropriate, not because I am under any illusions about such material bearing a particularly close relationship to what is seen onstage, but because consumption of such material evidently has the potential to shape how it is perceived. For example, if a production of *Othello* (as Doran's did) raises questions in the programme about whether the depiction of the eponymous 'hero' is racist or

²⁵ I define 'prominent' here as a critic whose reviews are published either in one of the major national newspapers, or in a peer-reviewed academic journal. I generally (though not always) exclude regional newspapers and exclusively online journalism such as blogs because of the enormous variance in quality of such criticism, and because when using reviews to identify trends through a body of theatrical work it is logical to limit oneself to a select pool of publications and critics, so that the prejudices, knowledge base and political agendas of the critics concerned can be more clearly identified.

not, then it substantially affects my understanding of the production I am watching and how I evaluate the central performance.²⁶

Directorial agency in the production of programme material at an institution like the RSC can vary enormously, but there often seems, in Doran's case, to be remarkable consistency between the content of the programme and the tone of the production, including regular contributions from the director himself, implying that the programme's potential importance in both shaping pre-show perceptions and post-show reflections is not lost on him. For instance, in a programme article for the 2003 *All's Well that Ends Well* Doran argues that Shakespeare may have based the character of Bertram on William Herbert,²⁷ and that the writer is identifying with both Helena's unrequited desire and Parolles' platonic companionship in the play. Earlier that year, in the programme for *The Tamer Tamed* Doran recounted his visit to the grave of John Fletcher, finding him buried with collaborator Philip Massinger, and identifying closely with the playwright's assumed homosexuality. In both articles Doran's tone is highly personal and revelatory, and in both the director explores the sexuality of the respective playwrights and connects it with his own. This suggests a director who is not just intimately involved in programme content, but who, when possible, uses the opportunity of writing editorial matter to explore his own relationship with both play and author.

²⁶ For Doran's production of *The Merchant of Venice* in 1997, an article in the programme foregrounded Henry Irving's interpolated scene showing Shylock returning home to find his daughter missing. As I describe later in this thesis, Doran's production featured a similar, though more elaborate, additional scene. Those members of the audience who had read the programme note prior to viewing the play would therefore consume this textual departure secure in the knowledge that it had a prestigious theatrical lineage.

²⁷ The 3rd Earl of Pembroke (1580-1630) and one of the dedicatees of the 1623 Folio, William Herbert is thought by many to be both the 'W.H.' to whom Shakespeare has dedicated the sonnets and the 'fair youth' which many of them concern.

Outline of Structure

My thesis then, seeks to firstly contextualise Doran's achievements by creating critical space in which to meaningfully analyse them, and then to analyse the director's work itself. In doing so I will argue that his is a body of work worthy of critical consideration, which has been hitherto unappreciated because of the institution, and traditions, within which he works. In order to do this I will adopt the following structure:

Chapter One of this thesis will commence by examining the biographical, critical and institutional context(s) from which Doran has emerged and the key influences and pressures that inform his work. Initially, I will outline his early career including his brief time as an actor at the company, and draw conclusions as to how it shaped his later work. I will consider the effect his partnership, both on and offstage, with the actor Antony Sher has had on the way he works. I will set out his critical reputation, consider the rhetoric he employs in greater detail and examine what is known about his stated political beliefs. I will then consider his 1995 Market Theatre, Johannesburg/National Theatre production of *Titus Andronicus*, the only production of his that I examine which was not produced under the auspices of the RSC. This, I will argue, despite the controversy that surrounded the production, secured his critical reputation as an emerging Shakespearean director of note, yet employed a substantially different aesthetic from the one that has become associated with him throughout his career.

I will then proceed to develop the points raised in the Introduction regarding the critical context that Doran, and the RSC, inhabits, arguing that as performance criticism has developed in recent years it has often been informed by an ideological opposition to the tradition of Shakespearean production in which Doran works which, at times, occludes meaningful critical engagement.

The chapter will then move on to the specific institutional inheritances that Doran is subject to, with a particular emphasis on his predecessors as Artistic Director, and key figures that have informed the history and pre-history of the company.

I will follow this with a case study of Doran's 1996 production of *Henry VIII* in the Swan Theatre, which in many ways is an exemplar of the Doranian aesthetic, yet I will also argue that the ironic perspective of the staging problematises the notion that this can be read as a blandly conservative approach.

In Chapter Three I will examine Doran's rehearsal process, and the nature of his craft, with a particular focus on the way in which he works with actors. Commencing with an analysis of his approach to verse, I will argue that there are substantive differences between his rhetorical priorities and his practice, which draws much more heavily on Stanislavskian analysis than he otherwise acknowledges. I will examine his self-declared approach to ensemble-building and the techniques that he models to create a 'democratic' rehearsal room, and will also consider his use of the 'crossroads' technique, and its potential outcomes in performance.

This will be followed by a case study of Doran's 1999 production of *Macbeth*, demonstrating how the methodology examined in Chapter Three was deployed in a specific context, then considering the performance outcomes and aesthetic decisions that resulted.

Chapter Five explores the director's aesthetic and will include an examination of his use of stage space, as shaped by the various auditoria of the RSC; the ways in which he negotiates a series of institutional and 'Shakespearean' traditions; and the recurrent visual tropes and motifs that his work exhibits, particularly the ways in which ritual, religion and masculinity manifest themselves in his aesthetic. Whilst acknowledging that he does not radically challenge the context(s) in which he works, I will argue that there is still much that is distinctive and authorial within his work. I will close this chapter by arguing that perhaps his most distinctive contribution to the company to date, and to the wider British theatrical ecology, has been his role in the production of plays from the early modern repertoire that are, ironically, not written by Shakespeare.

Chapter Six closes the thesis with a case study of two productions which were performed in repertoire in 2003, *Taming of the Shrew* and *The Tamer Tamed*, which brings together the Shakespearean and non-Shakespearean (though early modern) strands of the director's work.

These have been selected for the following reasons:

The productions demonstrate many of the arguments put forward throughout this thesis.

The productions exemplify Doran's approach to making theatre, aesthetic and priorities.

The productions represent a particular achievement in Doran's career.

If much of this thesis is an argument for considering the specificity of a director such as Doran's work, reclaiming it from a critical perspective that would seek to marginalise it as insufficiently resistant to dominant ideologies, then I will conclude by making a wider case for further studies of this nature. My intention is, therefore, to trouble some of the assumptions about Doran and the RSC's work, and, in so doing, propose that there is as much merit in examining the mainstream of British Shakespearean theatre as there is in the study of those working in opposition to it.

Chapter One

The Great Shakespearean: contexts, influences, inheritances

The Great Shakespearean: contexts, influences, inheritances

This chapter will seek to define the contexts in which Doran makes theatre, which I will broadly categorise as biographical, critical and institutional.

I will commence by considering how rhetorical tropes deployed both by and about the director have conflated his 'Shakespeareanism' with his supposed conservatism, and develop my argument that in order to critically assess his significance as a director it is first important to understand both what conservatism might mean in this context and why it is a reductive and misleading label. I will then go on to outline the key markers of Doran's early career, including his time as an actor and assistant director at the RSC, a consideration of his politics, religious upbringing and sexuality, followed by a case study of the production that first brought him to national critical prominence, *Titus Andronicus* (1995). Co-produced by the National Theatre rather than the RSC, this was an unusual production which nevertheless demonstrated a number of Doranian concerns as well as provoking an informative critical response.

This will be followed by a fuller consideration of the critical field in which this study is situated, examining discourses on Shakespearean performance criticism and writing about Shakespearean performance, considering how models of theatrical criticism have developed which either consider Doran's work ideologically problematic and/or blandly conservative. I will then consider how such criticism frames both Doran and the RSC as a reiteration of Shakespearean authority which reproduces hegemonic meanings rather than allowing for new ones to be created.

From this, I will examine the institutional authority of the RSC, through a brief history of the organisation and its leadership prior to Doran's appointment. Central to my argument here is that the institution's authority resides not just in its location, Stratford-upon-Avon, but in its leadership and that leadership's approach to Shakespearean verse. The company therefore becomes an authorising agent for a series of approaches to verse that actually originate in the tastes and practices of the leadership at any given moment. As the most visible focus of leadership at the

RSC has always been the Artistic Director, and that is the position Doran now occupies, I will briefly outline the main achievements of each of the men²⁸ who have occupied this position and the artistic and organisational legacy they have bequeathed to their successor(s). I will also examine two other figures that I perceive as key to the artistic continuity of the company, John Barton and Cicely Berry, and a third, Peter Brook, who did so much to establish its early reputation for daring theatrical brilliance.

In 2009 Hutchinson published *The Shakespeare Almanac*, compiled by Gregory Doran (2009).

The sleeve bore the biographical note:

This book has been lovingly compiled by Gregory Doran, Chief Associate Director of the Royal Shakespeare Company, described by the *Sunday Times* as ‘one of the great Shakespeareans of his generation’.

(Doran, 2009)

From the outset we are reminded of Doran’s status as it then was; the inscription foregrounds his job title which asserts his position both as a director of note and one who occupies a high status role at the RSC. The note goes on to endorse a portrait of him as something more, though, for here he is no longer just a director of Shakespeare, however successful, but has become a ‘Shakespearean’. This vague and unquantifiable term (the OED lists two spellings as if to underscore the ambiguity of its meaning²⁹) implies he has engaged in a kind of mimetic act, embodying the perceived characteristics of Shakespeare within himself and by extension his work. One prominent journalist wrote upon Doran’s subsequent appointment to the artistic directorship in 2012:

His immersion is almost supernatural. At times in his conversation I get the feeling he is almost shamanistically becoming one with the bard.

(Appleyard, 2012)

The term ‘Shakespearean’ may be an ill-defined and idealised description, but when applied to Doran it seems to suggest that he is not just a virtuoso director of Shakespeare, but one whose work

²⁸ The historical lack of female directors running major British theatre companies has been criticised by commentators and practitioners alike. In 2011 the actor/practitioner Lucy Kerbel established Tonic Theatre to address the under-representation of women in the theatre, leading to the Advance programme, which is specifically designed to address the gender imbalance at artistic director level and had its first symposium in 2014 (see Ellis-Petersen, 2014). In 2012, the year of Doran’s appointment, the director Elizabeth Freestone of Pentabus Theatre and the National Theatre also produced research on this issue (see Higgins, 2012); in this context, Doran’s immediate appointment of Erica Whyman to the newly created post of Deputy Artistic Director was a positive step.

²⁹ I will adopt the spelling ‘Shakespearean’ rather than ‘Shakespearian’ throughout this thesis for consistency, though the two variants are often used interchangeably.

and words carry a sense of Shakespearean authority. To Appleyard he is ‘a high priest of the bard, a steward of the Swan of Avon’, and a succession of laudatory profiles in the national press over the past decade have added to this perception, lending him titles such as ‘The Bard’s Biggest Fan’ (Billington, 2000) and ‘Shakespeare’s Stalker’ (Hemming, 2003).

Doran is clearly complicit in this; he has allowed the ‘Great Shakespearean’ title to be reprinted on the inside cover of his book and has supplemented it with a series of Shakespeare-centric statements which often border on the idolatrous, or in George Bernard Shaw’s term, were guilty of ‘Bardolatry’ (see Shaw, 1934, p. 718). When Doran’s appointment was announced, for instance, he was quick to proclaim ‘I’m a Shakespeare nut’ and ‘Shakespeare is absolutely at the centre of my life’ (Doran, in Royal Shakespeare Company, 2012).

His agency in contributing to this representation, as a ‘Shakespearean’, suggests that he is perfectly comfortable with the identity, although the term itself is an unstable one. Doran clearly receives the description as a compliment and a confirmation of his Shakespearean authority, a phenomenon that W.B. Worthen argues is common to directors of Shakespeare, who

...consistently work to authorize their own efforts by locating them under the sign of “Shakespeare.”

(Worthen, 1997, p. 39)

For Worthen, whose work on Shakespearean authority raises questions about the ways in which Doran’s work might be considered, the director functions as a site of meaning for the performances they direct, with rhetorical invocations of ‘Shakespeare’ used to bestow Shakespearean authority upon their theatrical decision-making. Such rhetoric is commonplace in the English theatre. For instance, former RSC artistic director Peter Hall took ‘Shakespeare’s Advice to the Players’ as the title of his published guide to verse-speaking (Hall, 2003), and framed his argument with constant references to Hamlet’s guidance in Act 3 Scene 2 of the play (lines 1-30). Of course, the legislation offered within the book is derived from Hall’s own practice and prejudices, based on his not inconsiderable experience of Shakespearean production, to which Hamlet’s, or Shakespeare’s words, provide an authorising presence throughout; Shakespeare’s own views on the matter are entirely subsumed by Hall. Hall’s evidence that Shakespeare might agree with him comes from the

director's views on the form of Shakespearean language, which he believes offers insight into the playwright's intentions and instructions for performance, telling us that

...verse is not necessarily 'poetical' or 'purple'. [...] The main purpose of his verse is to represent ordinary speech and tell a story lucidly. At its best, it is quick and clear. And if it is delivered with five accents as written. And with a tiny sense break (not a stop) at the end of each line, communication with an audience is immediate. That is why Shakespeare wrote in iambic pentameters; he didn't want to be 'poetic', he wanted to be understood.

(Hall, 2003, p.12)

Hall's rhetoric, informing us of Shakespeare's 'purpose', and 'want's', his confident declaration of what is 'in Shakespeare' thus co-opts the writer to his cause and legitimatises the director's approach to verse-speaking as historically sanctioned.

Similarly, Doran's rhetorically embraces 'Shakespeare', but for him it does not just appear to be in justification of his theatrical practice, but rather suggests an act of identification with the playwright on a more personal level. If "Shakespeare" can be an authorising agent for the director, then to enjoy such a strong level of identification with "Shakespeare" is to potentially accrue greater Shakespearean authority. Being seen as 'Shakespearean' therefore allows Doran to become a site of Shakespearean authority in his own right.

Peter Holland characterises a 'Great Shakespearean' director in his 2013 collection as follows:

...those figures who have had the greatest influence on the interpretation, understanding and reception of Shakespeare, both nationally and internationally.

(Holland, 2013a, p.vii)

For Holland, the phrase implies a transformative understanding of, and influence on, Shakespearean production. The figures included are Peter Hall, Peter Brook, Yukio Ninagawa and Robert Lepage; in the case of the first two the justification for inclusion is compelling if the impact on British theatre is one of the parameters. The other two directors clearly reflect a more internationalist agenda on Holland's behalf, which broadens the scope of his project substantially to include the radical and the heavily interventionist. I wish to argue, though, that in Doran's case the term is applied less to imply a transformative agenda than a reassuring one, based on proximity to a notional 'Shakespearean-ism' that is particularly English, and therefore more parochial in nature.

Worthen observes that theatrical value is sometimes seen as relative to its sense of ‘proximity’³⁰ to ‘Shakespeare’:

...the value of theatrical representation is measured not by the productive meanings it releases or puts into play, but by the “proximity” it claims to some sense of authorized meaning, to something located in the text or, magically, in “Shakespeare.”
(Worthen, 1997, p. 37-38)

In Doran’s case, his rhetorical proximity to Shakespeare is clear, but what other meanings might be in play? What else is it about Doran that might make him a ‘Great Shakespearean’? He has a scholarly side to his work which undoubtedly adds Shakespearean value, a facet of his character recognised by his appointment to the position of Honorary Senior Research Fellow at the Shakespeare Institute in January 2013. This, ironically, manifests itself most visibly in his championing of plays written by Shakespeare’s contemporaries, which I will explore later in this thesis.³¹ Worthen implies more than just rhetorical proximity - there is clearly the implication of an aesthetic proximity, a sense that the work of a director claims to, or is interpreted as having, put meanings into play that are proximate to a particular set of Shakespearean values. Such meanings could presumably include a historicism of approach to the production of Shakespearean plays which draws on assumptions of early modern contexts and meanings to justify artistic decision-making; or a fidelity to Shakespearean texts and a resistance to radical adaptation; an ability to stage said texts skilfully within a particular set of ‘Shakespearean’ parameters; a tendency to employ a *mise en scène* that locates the world of the play in the period in which it is set, the period in which it is written, or a period which has a precedent in the play’s performance history; a rhetoric that treats Shakespeare as a secular saint and his writings with a near religious sanctity; and a perceived understanding of the importance of form in the staging of Shakespeare, particularly with regard to verse and how it should be spoken. As will become clear throughout this thesis, these are certainly all characteristics that are found in Doran’s theatrical work, though there are plenty of individual exceptions to the general trends.³² Setting aside the internationalism (and

³⁰ Worthen is deploying Gary Taylor’s use of the word ‘proximity’ here (see Taylor, 1991)

³¹ He has also been awarded Honorary Doctorates by the University of Huddersfield, the University of Nottingham, the University of Bristol, the University of Warwick and the University of Birmingham, and was the 2012-13 incumbent of the Humanitas Visiting Professor in Drama at Oxford University.

³² For instance, Doran’s modern dress production of *Macbeth* (1999) or his African-set *Julius Caesar* (2012) both run against the grain of an aesthetic which is usually located in a particular historical period other than our own.

implied radicalism) suggested by Holland's categorisation, in these definitions of 'Shakespearean' we appear to have found a series of broadly *conservative* assumptions underpinning it.

The term 'conservative', however, also raises the possibility of multiple meanings that need to be addressed. There is a conservatism of process which positions the practitioner's approach in relation to historical precedents; there is an aesthetic conservatism in which the *mise en scène* of a production is inflected by the play's performance history, either through the adopting of performance tropes that have accumulated to a play's meaning over time, by dint of their repetition, or, more generally, through an aesthetic that recalls the performance priorities of earlier theatrical fashions;³³ there is conservatism in the production's relationship to space, form and the actor-audience relationship; and conservatism in the handling of the text and whether or not it should be adjusted, emended or adapted; there is also institutional conservatism, as expressed or demonstrated by allegiance to a company aesthetic; and political conservatism. Finally there is conservatism in being guided by the idea of 'Shakespeare', the idealised representation of the writer as a purveyor of universal truths which speak to us trans-historically, an attitude enshrined in Ben Jonson's memorable phrase from his dedication to Shakespeare in the Preface to the 1623 Folio, 'He was not of an age, but for all time!'. With the exception of political conservatism in the narrow party political sense, all of the above variations on conservatism have been applied to Doran, either directly or by implication.

As I have outlined in the introduction to this thesis, conservatism is a description that Doran largely rejects whilst being content with the title 'Shakespearean'. Throughout this study I will draw attention to occasions when Doran's rhetoric or work has strayed into one of the territories identified as conservative above. However, I also wish to problematise the recurrent assumption that the term is a useful one to apply to Doran's work. If, as I have observed in the Introduction, Doran's work has been at times critically assimilated into an institutional and cultural space that is *de facto*, conservative, from which he could only have distinguished himself as 'not conservative'

³³ The pictorial tradition of Victorian, proscenium arch theatre, for instance, was still dominant in theatre at Stratford-upon-Avon until the 1950s, a trend that Peter Hall was consciously trying to disrupt when he created the Royal Shakespeare Company at the start of the 1960s.

by establishing himself as a clear site of resistance to that space, then it will be more useful to rather consider the ways that he operates within that particular context. I will therefore read Doran's process and work as a constant series of negotiations within the parameters he occupies, and acceptance and/or resistance to those parameters as highly specific and relative. If I resist the word 'conservative' it is not because it cannot be applied to Doran's work - clearly there is a case to be made that it sometimes is, based on the definitions supplied³⁴ - but rather that to do so is to reductively dismiss that work; the term has become a pejorative shorthand for lack of originality, a backward-looking aesthetic and a reactionary ideology. Doran's work may exhibit some of the signifiers of conservatism identified above, but that does not mean that it should be understood solely as conservative work. The intention, therefore, is to create critical space in which a meaningful critical engagement with the director and his work can take place.

If a narrative of conservatism is one that the director rejects, however, his rhetoric frequently places his aesthetic in that territory. For instance, he firmly distances himself from what he describes as 'concept' directing:

I'm not a director who believes greatly in concept – certainly not concept with a capital K and an umlaut. That's just ego to me. I think the plays are great in themselves. You've got to find a way to serve them up and be accessible. But accessibility is not about packaging them so that they are dumbed down. It's about allowing all the greatness and complexity to be available.

(Doran, in Appleyard, 2004)

To the interviewer in this case, Bryan Appleyard, such an artistic creed is enthusiastically praised as being 'very, very conservative'. Appleyard instantly qualifies the statement by suggesting that it rankles with Doran, indicating the director's clear disagreement with the proposition. Doran's words here, however, appear to support Appleyard's view, and reveal tensions in the director's rhetoric towards the plays that he directs. For instance, there is a need identified to 'serve them up', but then he subsequently denies that he wishes to package the plays or dumb them down. In essence, I understand Doran to be suggesting that there is not a contradiction between accessibility for the audience and the complexity of the meaning(s) received; in his eyes accessibility is often best served by simplicity of staging, as that allows the complexity of the play to emerge,

³⁴ See the subsequent sections in this thesis on *Henry VIII* and *All's Well that Ends Well* for a more detailed discussion of when this has taken place.

unhindered by the distraction of conceptualisations. It is rhetoric that draws on a particularly English literary tradition, assigning innate worth to the play ('great in themselves'), that can be revealed, or made 'available', through Doran's direction. He is thus positioning his own contribution as non-interventionist, unobtrusive and in a subservient relationship with the play, suggesting that the play's power in performance is immanent in the play itself. This offers a clear challenge to those critics, such as Worthen, who see such assumptions as ideological, reinforcing cultural hegemonies rather than deconstructing and resisting them through more interventionist directorial strategies.

Fidelity to Shakespeare clearly marks the theatre's participation in the reproduction of hegemony: the theatre's strategies for producing Shakespeare's plays are inflected by the necessity of producing visibly "Shakespearean" meanings.

(Worthen, 1997, p.55)

Furthermore, by defining 'Konzept' by its foreign-ness he appears to be creating distance between a Teutonic, conceptualised approach to theatre-making and the English theatrical tradition of which he is a part. The inaccurate addition of an umlaut to the word 'Konzept' only adds to the sense of an unwelcomely alien approach to making theatre. The picture becomes more complex, however, when we examine a similar statement by Doran made some years later:

I'm less interested in what Adrian Noble used to call 'Konzept with a capital K and an umlaut' in the Teutonic sense of concept.³⁵

(Doran, 2014)

Suddenly it becomes evident that the earlier statement was actually made by one of his predecessors, and that Doran is appropriating both the attitude to conceptualisation and the false assigning of an umlaut that accompanies it, and aligning himself with it. It is also apparent that Doran's attitude towards 'Konzept' is less confrontational now than it once was. He develops the distinction between his own text-based approach and what he sees as a European, conceptual one further in the same interview:

The interesting thing about watching Shakespeare in productions which come from abroad, or seeing Shakespeare abroad when they're in translation is that you have less responsibility to [the text] and therefore what happens is that the productions tend to become more of a conceptual nature because they're not chained to the responsibility of the text. I don't feel chained, I feel liberated by it but I can see why some people feel chained.

(Doran, 2014)

³⁵ I cannot locate an instance of Noble using this phrase, but I assume he positions himself towards 'Konzept' in a similar manner to Doran.

From the description above, a more conceptualised approach is a by-product of performing Shakespeare in translation rather than in English, and therefore at one remove from the text as he defines it (the play rather than a specific printed text), and released from the literary tradition with which Doran clearly identifies. Framing his stance in this case much more relativistically, he defends his own approach as a logical one for him, and appears to embrace the ‘responsibility of the text’ as an entirely appropriate choice for someone of his background. He also couches it as liberating rather than restricting; for Doran the ‘text’ is a foundational, enabling force rather than a restrictive, conservative one. However, the naturalising implications of Doran’s rhetoric, that his approach is a culturally specific one, imply that his practice is also appropriate for other English theatre directors, eliding much contemporary English theatre practice in the process and suggesting that ‘Koncept’ is the product of foreign influence.

But what is meant, in Doran’s case, by concept, or ‘Koncept’? He uses the term loosely in ways which make precise definition difficult, but it appears to suggest that some form of directorial or design conceit is evident in the staging which disrupts stable meanings, which Doran believes to be educible from the text. It is also a clear and visible sign of directorial agency, the opposite of the unobtrusiveness that Doran appears to valorise:

Setting the play – determining the visual and even gestural environment in which the dramatic action will take place – is at once the most visible dimension of the director’s work and a mark of how the “director” becomes a functional site for the attribution of meaning...

Worthen (1997, p. 63)

Again, proximity to a notional ideal appears important here. ‘Koncept’ may involve the relocation of the play to a substantially different time or place from the one in which it is normally set, a transformative adaptation and/or alteration of the published text(s), or employing a theatrical form or aesthetic that is disruptive to generic norms, as Doran sees it. At the time of writing the RSC has just announced that Doran will direct a production of *The Tempest* which will feature three-dimensional, computer generated avatars on stage, a clear experimentation with theatrical form which is not in itself disruptive to the theatrical work’s relationship with the text. His production of *Cardenio*, however, showed he was no textual conservative, and he has situated a number of productions in period and conceptual frameworks that are markedly different from the ones in

which the plays are set. Doran's rhetoric provocatively argues for one type of Shakespearean production against another type of Shakespearean production; his practice and aesthetic are altogether more nuanced.

I will consider this more precisely in Chapter Five, but it is worth noting that there is also institutional contingency to be considered, as whether to define a production as conceptualised is a decision inevitably shaped by trends in performance history within a specific site. As that history accumulates, so the production's status in this regard shifts and evolves; modern dress Shakespeare was rare when the director Komisarjevsky updated *Macbeth* to a broadly First World War setting at Stratford in 1933 (see Beauman, 1982, pp. 130-132), but such conceits are now commonplace. The boundaries of 'Shakespeare' are mutable, contested and negotiated within the traditions of both the institution and the wider default settings of contemporary practice.

It seems pertinent at this stage to consider what is known about Doran biographically, firstly by considering the origins and development of his particular and seemingly total engagement with 'Shakespeare', which he describes as initially inspired by two experiences:

I had always been a huge fan of the Royal Shakespeare Company since I first came as a member of the audience in 1973 to see Eileen Atkins in *As You Like it* and the bug bit for me very early, and it had bitten as far as Shakespeare was concerned because we did a Shakespeare play every year at my senior school and I started doing them myself... I was a completely obsessive nut about Shakespeare so that I had seen every Shakespeare play by the time I came of age.

(Doran, 2014)

He has often recounted in interviews his trip to see Atkins and its impact on him as a crucial formative influence. It is also, however, the act of performing itself that is at least as important, inspired by a teacher at the Jesuit school he attended who

...got the boys to perform the plays: 'I never looked at Shakespeare academically; I was always thumbing through the text thinking, "Which part am I going to play?"'

(Hemming, 2003)

Thus it is the opportunity to perform as well as the example of others that first connects him with Shakespearean texts. The experience of playing a succession of leading roles was also formative in other ways. He has movingly described his experience of playing Lady Macbeth at the age of 16, relating it to his own emerging homosexuality:

Lady Macbeth's invocation to the spirits that tend on mortal thoughts to "unsex me here" sounded dangerous, intimate and private... She dares to articulate her innermost cravings for power. I was confessing my longing for forbidden love. She is obsessed by her ambition. I felt isolated by my sexuality... Speaking her lines seemed subversive, and erotically charged. For the first time, but not the last, Shakespeare gave me words where words failed me, to articulate those moments when the extremity of emotional experience in my life required words I didn't have.

(Doran, 2006a)

Although we must always be wary of hindsight loading this experience with more significance than it had at the time, it appears from a very early age Doran sought a personal connection to the material. This is significant because much of his methodology as a director revolves around encouraging his cast to seek similar connections.

The young Doran quickly developed an enthusiasm for all things Shakespearean:

By 21, he had seen all the plays and acted in many of them. This gave him confidence with Shakespeare; it also encouraged him to make the actors the basis of his productions, rather than external factors such as concept or design.

(Hemming, 2003)

That Doran had access to so much Shakespeare at an early age has undoubtedly shaped him and his approach, not just in the way that Hemming observes above. When he was appointed to the Artistic Directorship one of the first policies that Doran announced was that over the following six years every Shakespearean play would be performed only once in the RST, placing regular inclusions in the company's repertoire on an equal footing with seldom-seen plays such as *Pericles*. When Doran was young, he 'could see it at Bolton Octagon, Lancaster Duke's Playhouse or the Royal Exchange in Manchester and everywhere' (Doran, 2014); now he recognises that such exposure to the entirety of the Canon has become virtually impossible, something he wishes to rectify.

After studying English and Drama at the University of Bristol, Doran was subsequently to train as an actor on a two year course at the Bristol Old Vic. He had already established himself as an entrepreneurial director by this time, having 'founded his own theatre company called the Poor Players and even managed to secure £30,000 in sponsorship for a play he wanted to stage' (Bristol University Press Release, 2011).

With a group of friends, we set up the Poor Players Theatre Company and, like Shakespeare, we toured all the stately homes in the region performing *Twelfth Night* and *Comedy of Errors* with money from Chorley District Council.

(Lancashire Life, 2012)

Soon after graduating from drama school he was invited to join the acting company at Nottingham Playhouse, yet it was his directing talent that was almost immediately recognised and having assistant directed a couple of productions he was soon directing for them, including stagings of *The Norman Conquests* and *The Rose and the Ring*.

By the time he joined the RSC as an actor for the 1987/88 season, he had already decided that his true abilities lay offstage:

I had decided it was very difficult to juggle two careers, as director and actor. Though I had been associate director at the Nottingham Playhouse, assistant and then associate, I suppose I had decided to stick to directing and of course as happens in life, as soon as I made that decision I got an invitation to come and audition for the RSC, as an actor of course.

(Doran, 2014)

His time at the RSC turned out to be the pinnacle of his acting career and of huge importance to him both personally and professionally. Not only was he directed during this year by Terry Hands, Bill Alexander, Barry Kyle (twice) and John Caird, but whilst playing Solanio in Alexander's production of *The Merchant of Venice*, he began a relationship with the actor Antony Sher, the details of which are humorously related in Sher's autobiography (2001, pp. pp. 187-189) and by Doran in *Woza Shakespeare* (Sher & Doran, 1996, p. p. 27). Although their personal relationship may not seem immediately relevant, their subsequent professional one has had huge impact on both men's development as director and actor respectively, which I will expand upon later in this chapter.

The RSC at the time of Doran's arrival was undergoing a period of critical hostility, and Terry Hand's sole artistic directorship of the company³⁶ did not have the most auspicious of starts with that director's widely pilloried production of *Julius Caesar* (1987), in which Doran featured. Reviews for the other plays that Doran performed in that season were not as bad as *Julius Caesar*,

³⁶ He had previously been Joint Artistic Director with Trevor Nunn.

but neither were they much better. *Hyde Park* was broadly successful, but *The Jew of Malta*³⁷ and *The New Inn* received mixed notices, and *The Merchant of Venice* was praised mainly for Antony Sher's performance as Shylock. Irving Wardle's review was typical in characterising Sher as 'the overwhelming reason for seeing this production' (Wardle, 1987).

Doran's own contribution was a collection of relatively minor parts that did not in themselves attract much attention, and certainly he is not mentioned in any of the major reviews of the season, but it undoubtedly influenced the young actor when he later began to work with the company as a director. Terry Hands had a reputation for being 'condescending and autocratic in the extreme' (Beauman, 1982, p. 297), a perception that led to him being characterised as an austere and remote figure, and Doran later observed: 'I was frightened by Terry Hands, he was quite a frightening person' (Doran, 2014). This led him to retrospectively draw conclusions about his own engagement (or lack of):

I suppose I didn't feel as connected to that production, or that my perspective was relevant and now that I'm doing the job that Terry was doing... I now realise why he perhaps wouldn't give himself the time to embrace everybody's perspective... what I realised was that if you have a process whereby you can really engage your entire company you'll get a much richer experience.

(Doran, 2014)

Doran's rehearsal methodology, which I will explore fully in Chapter Three, places a strong rhetorical and structural emphasis on inclusivity and democracy, and seems a clear attempt to create a very different environment from the one he experienced with Hands.

Other than his Octavius Caesar in the Terry Hands production discussed above, probably his most high profile role was Solanio in Alexander's *Merchant*, though this has possibly attracted attention after the fact for two reasons: firstly, his relationship with Sher, and secondly, because Doran has written his own published account of the experience of playing Solanio for the *Players of Shakespeare* series (see Doran, 1993). His contribution here is unusual in that it is the only one in that volume written by an actor playing a small role, and its inclusion must surely be attributable to his then burgeoning career as a director. Certainly the biographical note which commences the

³⁷ *Hyde Park* and *The Jew of Malta* were both directed by Barry Kyle, *The New Inn* was directed by John Caird and *The Merchant of Venice* by Bill Alexander.

chapter emphasises his success offstage, drawing attention to his work at Nottingham Playhouse and the Young Vic, as well as his (by the time of publication) emerging directorial career at the RSC. The chapter largely concerns his extensive research for the role, and questions whether such research is actually a distraction for a character such as Solanio, who, he concludes, plays an essentially choric role.³⁸

If Doran's experience with Hands had been a largely negative one, then Alexander had provided Doran with a much more engaging experience during *Merchant of Venice*. Like the director Doran was subsequently to evolve into, Alexander is a director who encourages his cast to do detailed research into their roles. He had a similar experience with John Caird on *The New Inn*:

I also did a production of *The New Inn* with John Caird and John got us all researching Caroline London for that play, and I realised just how if you engage the performers it's going to make the maintenance of the show much better.

(Doran, 2014)

Following the end of the season, Doran was soon to return, this time as an assistant director:

At the end of that year I went to see the casting director... and she said 'we think you should direct' so I thought well, if the casting director's telling you that I probably should heed the advice. I became an assistant director.

(Doran, 2012)

During the 1989-90 season Doran assisted on *Romeo and Juliet* (directed by Hands), *Cymbeline* (directed by Bill Alexander), *Doctor Faustus* (directed by Barry Kyle) and *Have* (directed by the South African director Janice Honeyman). These productions generally fared better critically than those that Doran had acted in. For Doran, the experience over these two seasons was crucial to his development, taking the opportunity to observe directors he respected in rehearsal, and to be directed by them:

I also realised that as an actor you get to see lots of other directors work and as a director you never do – you do if you've been an assistant – but you rarely get the opportunity of being in another director's rehearsal room so you rarely understand what their techniques are or how they do it or whatever, so I suppose I was very informed by the approaches of different directors.

(Doran, 2014)

At Adrian Noble's invitation, Doran's directorial debut at the RSC finally came in 1992 with an adaptation of *The Odyssey* by the Caribbean poet and playwright Derek Walcott. The production

³⁸ I will discuss the content of Doran's article in Chapter Three, as it contains a lengthy analysis of the role of research and its usefulness for Doran in the construction of Shakespearean character.

was generally well-received with several good notices, and it is intriguing when set against his later reputation. An irreverent staging, it began life as a radical version of *The Odyssey* by the poet Walcott which Doran then proceeded to cut and alter substantially during the course of rehearsals (with Walcott's blessing). The staging was rough and often tongue-in-cheek, the humour coarse and the storytelling robustly staged, using simple props creatively and with actors playing multiple roles. It was imaginative, theatrical and defined by its own theatrical terms rather than fidelity, or proximity, to the classical source material; even the text from which the production did claim authority was emphatically Walcott's, not Homer's. As one critic described it, this 'debut production breaks all physical decorum, sometimes marvellously, sometimes ridiculously' (Hewison, 1992). Given Doran's later reputation for respectful deference to Shakespearean authority, it was a surprisingly flippant debut.

Doran's next production at the RSC was the first play by Shakespeare (and Fletcher) that he directed for the company: *Henry VIII* performed in the Swan in 1996. This was a substantial critical success and led to him becoming an associate director at the company soon after. Since then, barring a brief year-long residency at Century Theatre (now Theatre by the Lake) in Keswick in 1999 and the occasional freelance job, Doran has worked almost exclusively at the RSC, and it is the body of work that he directed there between 1996 and 2014 that will be the focus of much of the central analysis in this thesis.

Personal contexts: politics

Other than his public identification with Shakespeare, Doran is frustratingly vague in his political pronouncements, and the frequency with which certain anecdotes (for instance, seeing Eileen Atkins perform in 1973) are repeated in interviews suggests that he takes reasonable care to control how much personal information enters the public domain. He is far too discreet a figure to be publicly identified with a political party and he has generally preferred to keep his counsel on his voting preferences. He appears to be broadly humanist and internationalist in outlook and moderately left of centre in his political positioning, but he rarely involves himself in ideological debates publicly unless they concern his particular field. The exception to this is regarding matters of sexuality, reflecting his status as a high profile gay man. His partner, Antony Sher, has publicly identified his support for the Labour party in the past, but I am not aware of any similar statement from Doran.

Doran does appear fascinated by political process, and the drama of politics, and regularly seeks parallels between contemporary politics and the plays that he directs, although in arguing Shakespearean analogies that resonate politically, his rhetoric has a tendency to effectively de-historicise both the play and the political phenomena he is drawing upon. For instance, when I observed a rehearsal for *Henry IV* Part I, I noted that Doran framed the discussion that took place during a session working on 4.4 with a comparison of the build up to the Iraq war. Citing a social function that he attended at Downing Street immediately before the crucial Westminster vote that was to sanction British involvement in the 2003 invasion, Doran observed at close quarters the then Prime Minister Tony Blair at the centre of events of global magnitude and under immense pressure as a result. In 4.4 Doran saw the Archbishop as facing similar pressures to decide on a course of action which has potentially enormous implications. Doran's observation was interesting because it did not seem ideologically motivated or judgmental of Blair, but rather it became a specimen of human behaviour that was applicable to the production he was directing, decontextualized from politically partisan (or committed) implication. The two situations are barely analogous, other than that they feature men occupying high status positions that are facing a pivotal moment; it rather

seems a rhetorical attempt to justify a particular piece of direction to the actor concerned which in the process depoliticises a significant, and controversial, moment in recent political history and assumes a parallel with early modern behaviour.

A second observation further demonstrates his desire to seek analogies within his own experiences, and the experiences of those with whom he comes into contact. In a private conversation I had with Doran in 2014 we discussed the Prince of Wales' attendance at the previous evening's performance of *Henry IV Part I*. Doran's royal guest had been moved by the parallels he found between his own life and that of Prince Hal, but Doran also recounted how watching it alongside the Prince enabled him to see the play afresh, and the character of Hal, much more clearly.

Both these examples suggest a subjectivity in Doran that is largely sympathetic to the establishment, couched in a language that supposes objectivity, yet in both case the examples he gave, Tony Blair and Prince Charles, carried substantial ideological baggage. In the first example, this was marginalised, in the second, it was treated sympathetically. In both cases, Doran's primary interest appeared to lay in theatrical efficacy rather than being politically motivated,

A more overt and critical political meaning was evident in Doran's production of *King John* in 2001, which he saw as a satirical piece exploring political manipulation and deception, an element of the play that the programme foregrounded with an article linking Machiavellian amorality with modern political 'spin'. Most critics were alert to the contemporaneous political parallels and more than one compared Cardinal Pandulph to New Labour's perceived Machiavel, Peter Mandelson. Charles Spencer in the *Telegraph* went further than most, illustrating his newspaper's broader anti-New Labour political stance, by using his review to mount an aggressive political attack, directly comparing King John to the then Prime Minister Tony Blair, 'whose fine words conceal a devastating lack of conviction' (Spencer, 2001).

Doran detected a shift in the play halfway through, which caused a transition from a purely satirical piece to a more sombre one. The focal point for this change to a darker mood was the tragic death

of Arthur, shockingly staged with a sickeningly loud thump as his ‘body’ hit the Swan stage after falling from the balcony above. This perception was heightened for the company, according to Doran, by the tragic killing of a Palestinian boy as opening night approached, ‘who was shot while he crouched behind his father during a gunfight in a street in the Gaza strip’ (Doran in Sewell & Wright, 2012a, p. 149). This was an event the company discussed and compared to the play and Doran encouraged the cast to contribute further photographic material that responded to Arthur’s death in other, similar ways.³⁹ Company members soon found that Arthur’s untimely fate echoed other famous recent images:

I’m thinking, for instance, of the girl running, burnt and screaming, from the flames of an American attack in Vietnam, or the boy standing in front of the tanks in Tiananmen Square. Despite the hundreds – thousands, no doubt – of boy soldiers who would have been maimed or killed in the skirmishes between France and England that are depicted in *King John*, it is Arthur, the pawn in the middle of the political game, who is just such a focus of outrage in our play...

(Henry, 2004, p. 32)

Doran appears to reference such specific, historical and political events in a broad, universalising way rather than as a route to making theatre that is a more provocative act of protest against such events. The director has also spoken of what it meant to perform the play on September 11 2001 both during and immediately after the Al-Qaeda attacks in America, which he connected with events on stage:

Somehow the play grew from being a satirical portrait of politics into a devastating account of how human lives can be affected by the absurdity of politics and people’s individual agendas. Shakespeare is like a magnet for the iron filings of contemporary events. Our respect deepened throughout the run and the play emerged for us anew.

(Doran in Sewell & Wright, 2012a, p. 150)

That the company shared this connection is evident in both Guy Henry and Kelly Hunter’s essays on the production for the *Players of Shakespeare* series (Henry, 2004) (Hunter, 2004), where they also describe how it affected their performances and subsequent understanding of the play.

However, the director’s rhetoric here is passive and lacks political agency. Rather than an explicitly political reading of the play, meanings accrue like ‘iron filings’ to the production as though by accident, rather than by dint of the particularity of that performance. Again, the meanings assigned are universal, ahistorical ones, but Doran also seems to suggest that they are immanent in the text, waiting to be revealed, rather than created in the moment of performance in

³⁹ This rehearsal device is referenced by both Doran in the RSC edition of the play and by Stone-Fewings in his contribution to *Players of Shakespeare 6* (Stone-Fewings, 2004)..

the minds of the acting company.⁴⁰ Thus, the meanings created by the acts of September 11 2001 become meanings that were already in the play. Locating contemporary political events in the Shakespearean text and mapping them onto an essentialist meaning is a common rhetorical trope amongst actors and directors (see Worthen 1997, pp. 135-141), and in Doran's case, the Shakespearean 'magnet' becomes capable of providing a liberal humanist commentary on them. As Worthen adds, in rhetoric of this nature, "'Shakespeare" finally stands for a just vision of human nature and action.' (1997, p.137)

Another example of political engagement came during Doran's 1999 production of *Macbeth*, when the director encouraged Stephen Noonan as the Porter to extemporise extra-textually around his Porter's speech, varying the length of the monologue extensively depending on the audience response from night to night. Taking the repetition of the word 'equivocation' as a starting point to impersonate and satirise the then Prime Minister Tony Blair, Noonan followed this by asking individual audience members for their profession, usually responding with an insult as appropriate. The two differing performances I have studied on archive video clearly demonstrate the improvisatory nature of this monologue, with the earlier performance also featuring an extended impersonation of the television presenter Loyd Grossman, playing on his status as the then presenter of the light entertainment programme 'Through the Keyhole'.⁴¹ Although the inclusion of Grossman appears to indicate that the rationale behind the impersonations was primarily performative and comedic rather than political, the caricature of Blair resulted in substantial laughter from the audience in the archive recordings(s), suggesting that it was hitting its satirical target. Of the examples cited above, this is the only one where there is no attempt to historicise the politics of performance with an early modern reading of the text; the meaning created is primarily a contemporary one, embodied in, and produced by Noonan and the audience's understanding of Blair.

⁴⁰ There is no particular suggestion that the audience made a similar connection between Arthur's death and the events of September 11th 2001.

⁴¹ The production was filmed in the Swan on 8 November 1999 and 23 November 1999. The Grossman impersonation appears only in the first recording whereas Tony Blair appears in both.

The above gives the impression that Doran is a man of broadly humanist, establishment values, who locates those same values in the writer with whom he so publicly identifies, but not one who seeks to produce work that is ideologically provocative or urgent. He is, however, undoubtedly alert to the dynamics of the political process and fascinated by politicians, and often uses contemporary political events as inspiration for his theatrical work, using them as a lens to inform his own reading of Shakespeare.

Doran undoubtedly also subscribes to a doctrine which Sinfield has characterised as ‘culturalist’, defined as follows:

The belief that wider culture through society is desirable and that it is to be secured through public expenditure.

(Sinfield, 1994, p. 188)

As Sinfield argues, the RSC is a culturalist institution, so it is in many respects unsurprising that Doran aligns so forcefully with this ideology. Doran’s rhetoric and actions have unequivocally positioned him as an advocate of Shakespeare as a moral ‘good’, arguing that access to, and education of, Shakespeare’s plays should be a cultural and political priority. If Sinfield goes on to argue that in following a culturalist agenda the RSC is being contained by the very capitalist system it should be critiquing, and that the company is a mechanism for redistributing tax revenue from the poor to a predominantly middle class audience, then at least Doran could reply that the company’s education and outreach programmes have expanded substantially since Sinfield’s chapter.⁴² The company in recent years has embarked upon a series of regional partnerships with schools and other education providers, aimed at cascading knowledge and techniques through a network of specially trained teachers, and, has an ongoing and well-developed CPD programme for teachers and other interested adults. It has also begun to work in partnership with a number of amateur companies through the *Open Stages* programme, and, more recently, through its 2016 touring production of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, programmed by Doran but directed by the Deputy Artistic Director Erica Whyman, which cast a different group of non-professional actors as the ‘mechanicals’ for each region to which the production toured. Through these and other mechanisms, which largely began under Michael Boyd and have expanded since Doran’s

⁴² See www.rsc.org.uk/education for details of current initiatives and programmes.

appointment, the institution's level of public engagement and dissemination of its theatre-making practice have become wide-reaching and pervasive, both within the theatre industry and without. If the RSC is an essentially imperialist agent of hegemonic values, then it exports them more aggressively than ever in a series of programmes with which Doran is closely ideologically aligned.

Personal contexts: Religion

Doran was raised within a staunchly Catholic family and attended a Catholic college in Preston. His uncle was the Abbot of Douai Abbey, which he still maintains links with. He is also in regular contact with the Catholic priest of St. Gregory's in Stratford, which falls under the auspices of Douai. Although he now claims to have lost his faith, his upbringing was steeped in the rituals of Catholicism and he still identifies with Catholic culture, even if he no longer believes in its central tenets:

There is a kind of rigour which I don't think I have which the Jesuits, it's always sort of there in my head to some extent... Father Alex [Priest of St Gregory's] always says oh yes that's your Catholic upbringing coming through. Michael Boyd always used to say he was a puritan Northern Irish and I was a sort of Cavalier to his roundhead or I was the rock Catholic to his puritan aesthetic. I'm not entirely sure that is accurate...

(Doran, 2014)

I will examine how Doran's lapsed Catholicism may have informed his aesthetic in Chapter Five.

Although Doran's belief in the supernatural is no more, playwright David Edgar provides compelling evidence that the director's Catholic upbringing still inflects his decision-making.

When Doran directed Edgar's play *Written on the Heart* (2011), about the compiling of the King James Bible, Edgar observed:

More surprising were increasingly passionate disputes about the doctrinal questions that the King James Bible was intended to resolve. I was brought up in what I realise in retrospect was a sternly Protestant school (its motto the monosyllabic 'God Grant Grace'), while my director Greg Doran was educated by Jesuits and named after a Benedictine abbot. As we worked on the play... jokey disputes about the relative merits and sufferings of the Protestant and Catholic factions hardened into real dissension about the fundamental questions of the time.

(Edgar, 2011, p. 109)

Even if he no longer *believes*, he still retains an attachment. The political nature of this should not be overstated, however; his production of *King John* was gleefully cynical in its portrayal of Cardinal Pandulph and the machinations of Rome.

If religion was once central to his identity, then the director provides his own, bardolatrous theory as what might have superseded it: '...perhaps I've replaced God with Shakespeare' (Doran, in Appleyard, 2004).

Personal contexts: Sexuality

I have already identified how Doran was able to explore his initial sense of difference as a young gay man when performing Shakespeare at school. Doran has been 'out' as a gay man far longer than he has been in the public eye; he first came to prominence as the partner of Antony Sher and as such has always been identified publicly as homosexual. Occasionally, this was a source of frustration for a director attempting to forge a career in his own right. Visiting South Africa as part of a group from the National Theatre in 1994, he found that when there was a formal dinner to attend with Prince Edward at the Royal High Commission (Sher & Doran, 1996, p. 7), it was Sher who got the invitation and not Doran. Doran was neither considered important enough in his own right, nor did he get invited as Sher's partner, unlike the partners of the other members of the group. At another, later event, Doran was seated with the wives of the dignitaries (p. 20). The casual homophobia demonstrated here is of course part of the wider political context in 1994. Although the dinner took place in South Africa, the prejudice was as much English as South African and it is worth briefly considering the discrimination that existed in this country when Doran first came to prominence. This was shaped by the moral panic about AIDS that had dominated 1980s discourse, and by the infamous piece of Conservative legislation known as Clause 28. This section of the 1988 Local Government Act stated that:

A local authority shall not—

- (a) intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality;
- (b) promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship.

(Local Government Act 1988)

The climate for gay artists was inevitably affected in a country that legislated in this manner. Although the legislation itself was largely restricted to schools and council funded Theatre in Education (TIE) companies, it undoubtedly inhibited visible expressions of homosexuality and the exploration of that sexuality through artistic endeavour. It was a climate that necessarily politicised gay people:

I was partially politicised because of Tony. Back in 1987 you didn't mention if you were gay, so when he came out it was a very political act. He began writing in the press and whatever the article was about – sexuality or not – he would say, "Me and my

partner Greg..." to make it as ordinary as any [straight] writer might. By the time civil partnerships came about, it was clear that we'd [get one] on the very first day we could, so if the press didn't get Elton and David [for a quote] they got Tony and I. It was an important political gesture. For our honeymoon, we went to a famously homophobic regime, Uganda, to go and see mountain gorillas.

(Doran in Jacques, 2012)

Doran was too young to have been involved in the agitprop Queer Theatre movement of the 1970s, and has never subsequently identified himself or been identified artistically with queer or gay theatre movements. Doran has always worked within the mainstream of English theatre, whilst

Most queer work has occurred alongside other alternative theatre, in urban fringe venues and on the college and arts-centre touring circuit.

(Sinfield, 1999, p. 338)

Of course this is not the whole picture and Sinfield goes on to describe how gay theatre has crossed over into the mainstream (pp.340-46), problematizing its identity as a purely subcultural genre.

Sher did emerge as part of that movement, however, even though he was not officially 'out' at the time:

When Antony Sher started acting with the pioneering Gay Sweatshop theatre company in the 70s, he managed to stay in the closet. "I look back and blush," he said. "We all agreed to do it on the basis that it was stated that not all the performers were gay so you didn't know who was and who wasn't.

(Needham, 2012)

Even with a company dedicated to exploring gay issues through performance, there was a lack of openness which reflected the climate of the age.

In Chapter Five I will argue that although Doran's work does not exhibit a distinctive Queer Theatre aesthetic, he does have both an agenda and aesthetic that is as strongly informed by his sexuality as by his Catholicism. He also perceives an identity for Shakespeare that is analogous to his own and incorporates both these dominant elements of his character:

As every age has re-invented him, so I have cast him in my own private image. As I am a gay man brought up in a Catholic family in Lancashire, so Shakespeare for me is a gay Catholic who spent some of his time in Lancashire. Others may dispute the facts of this biography, but throughout his plays I perceive the vivid perspective of a man who could empathise with outsiders, whether black, Jewish, female or gay. That could come from a necessity to conceal his own identity, and perhaps his religion, and adopt a different point of view.

(Doran, 2005)

Just as he used contemporary political events to make meanings in *King John*, here Doran blends speculation with deeply personal subjectivity to project a personality onto Shakespeare that is analogous to his own. As I will argue in Chapter Five, his theatrical work explores similar concerns, which he locates in the Shakespearean text(s) rather than acknowledging any authorship of these concerns in himself. His rhetorical displacement, therefore, of a distinctive ideological agenda informed by his upbringing and belief system, appears to rob him of political agency. Factors that help to make his work aesthetically distinctive rather than blandly conservative are credited to Shakespeare, rather than to him.

Doran on film

This thesis has a particular concern with the theatrical production of plays by Shakespeare and his contemporaries, so I will not discuss herein the many filmed versions of Doran's productions.

However, it is worth at this point considering briefly what role they play in Doran's and the RSC's wider mission.

Other than the archive recordings available at the Shakespeare Centre in Stratford of all Doran's RSC productions there are eight widely available filmed versions of productions directed by him, which broadly fall into two categories: *Titus Andronicus* (1995), *The Winter's Tale* (1999) and *Richard II* (2013), *Henry IV Part I & II* have been filmed live using a multi-camera setup, whilst *Macbeth* (2000) and *Hamlet* (2009) were filmed on location subsequent to the productions on which they were based. *Julius Caesar* (2012) was a hybrid, with more intimate scenes of dialogue being filmed separately in close up, then spliced into a live performance and broadcast on the BBC. *Henry V* (2015) has also been screened live in cinemas though at the time of writing the DVD has not yet been released.

The filmed versions appear to form a key part of Doran's wider project as much as a desire to preserve some vestige of his work beyond its theatrical life. Just as he has recently determined that the RSC should perform every one of Shakespeare's plays only once during a six year cycle, and that they will all be in the RST rather than relegated to smaller spaces, so it looks likely that they will all receive an RSC Live⁴³ cinema screening (and presumably a DVD release).⁴⁴ In this it is easy to predict how the Shakespeare productions of the Doran era could serve the same educational purpose as the BBC Television Complete Works did for previous generations:⁴⁵

⁴³ The National Theatre began live streaming a number of their productions to cinemas under the banner of NT Live in 2009, but the RSC only adopted the practice in 2013 once Doran became Artistic Director. To date these have been produced by a distinct organisation from the RSC, Live from Stratford-upon-Avon, and branded as RSC Live.

⁴⁴ This trend has been followed consistently so far since Doran became Artistic Director, with cinema screenings of all RST Shakespeare productions (including those not directed by Doran) followed some months later by a DVD release.

⁴⁵ Originally broadcast between 1978 and 1985 this television series encompassed adaptations of all of the plays from the First Folio plus *Pericles*. Many of the films were poorly received when first broadcast, apparently constrained by the educational pressures placed on the productions and the aesthetic demands

If Shakespeare is a passport through life, then the arts are essential to the health of the nation. From classroom to auditorium, up and down the UK, I see the value of theatre everywhere. It is important that we make the case for culture and shout loudly about the impact it has on individuals, communities and regions.

(Doran, in RSC, 2013a)

Doran's culturalist credentials are clearly signposted here, and his assertion that Shakespeare is a 'passport through life' once more maps a set of universal values onto 'Shakespeare', suggesting that 'he' provides a template for any given situation that might arise. Of course, such rhetoric cannot be separated entirely from the institutional imperative to argue relevance to wider society at all times. One way in which the RSC's ongoing campaign for funding and charity manifests itself is through such assertions of impact and usefulness, exemplified by Doran here.

When Doran's production of *Hamlet* starring David Tennant and Patrick Stewart was adapted for television and screened by the BBC over Christmas 2009, the then Controller for Knowledge Commissioning, George Entwistle, made it clear that the filmed production, which was to be supported by a complete online pedagogical package, was a key element in fulfilling their educational remit:

We hope we can use our experience in building compelling online sites to encourage a large TV audience to pursue their interest in *Hamlet* and Shakespeare as far as possible, off the back of a superb TV version of the play.

(BBC, 2009)

Thus the prime time broadcasting slot, full educational support of the BBC and the status of the RSC brand conferred an almost canonical status on the production, aided by David Tennant's high profile as the outgoing *Doctor Who*.

Doran has even suggested that the RSC and school examination boards might collaborate more closely to ensure that set texts and the RSC's programming synchronise:

But because I have instituted a six or seven-year plan to go through all of the Shakespeares and we hope to do live broadcasts of a substantial number of those every year...the logic would be to suggest to the examination boards that, if they know far enough in advance that they have these plays at these particular times, why not answer the questions on them?

(Doran, in Masuda, 2014)

made by the series' American backers (see Willis, 1991). The whole collection now looks badly dated, partly due to the studio-bound video format, occasionally mixed with location footage shot on film, and to the conventionality of the productions, though there were some individual films where directors attempted a more innovative approach.

For Doran, the RSC Live screenings would appear to form a substantial part of the RSC's culturalist mission.

Aesthetically, the filmed versions of Doran's productions have represented a diverse range of aesthetic styles; *Titus Andronicus*, for instance, which I will discuss in more depth shortly, was a very particular case, created in post-Apartheid South Africa and filmed for South African television, whereas *The Winter's Tale* employed a Russian-inflected Victorian aesthetic. *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* were broadly modern dress, and *Julius Caesar*, which was a production for the 'World Shakespeare Festival', was set in a contemporary African country with an all-black cast. By contrast, Doran's more recent productions of Shakespeare's History Cycle have been broadly located in the historical context in which the plays are set. Doran's stated resistance to conceptualised stagings, allied to his previous decisions to present *Henry VIII* and *King John* in this way, suggest the director has a preference for approaching History Plays in this manner, and there is no evidence to suggest that the decision to film the more recent productions had any impact on considerations of staging. It is worth noting, however, that an interesting array of pressures was brought to bear on this particular group of productions; the productions, through filming, were exported, hopefully to new audiences, in a series of cinema and school screenings and later DVD releases; *Richard II* in particular was in the early stages of Doran's tenure as Artistic Director and levels of critical scrutiny were high, especially given David Tennant's high profile casting as Richard; there is a historical tendency for RSC artistic directors to be defined by their History Cycle⁴⁶. Each play, once performed, under Doran's artistic policy, will not be revisited for several years by the company. Any or all of these could lead to a desire to be definitive – to be appropriately 'Shakespearean'.

⁴⁶ For instance, Hall & Barton's 'Wars of the Roses' (1963-4), Adrian Noble's 'Plantagenets' (1988-9), Michael Boyd's 'This England' (2006-7) were all highly acclaimed, and in Boyd's case, defining, productions.

Doran and Sher

As I recounted earlier, Doran and Antony Sher met in 1987 and formally cemented their relationship with a civil partnership in 2005. They have worked together, with Doran directing and Sher acting, on the following productions for the RSC: *Cyrano de Bergerac* (1997), *The Winter's Tale* (1999), *Macbeth* (1999), *Othello* (2004), *Henry IV Part I and II* and *Death of a Salesman* (2015).⁴⁷ *Titus Andronicus* (1995), which Sher co-directed, is the only other Shakespeare play on which they have collaborated, but that was a National Theatre/Market Theatre of Johannesburg co-production.

Sher's RSC reputation had been established by a notable Fool to Michael Gambon's *Lear* (1982) and an iconic Richard III for director Bill Alexander in 1983, and by the time Doran worked with Sher in 1987 on *Merchant of Venice* (with Sher playing Shylock) Sher had already performed a series of substantial roles for the company. As Martin White observes in his chapter for the *Routledge Companion to Actors' Shakespeare* (White, 2012), Sher's initial reputation was for a series of dazzling performances built around physicality, from his scene-stealing Fool in *King Lear* (1982) to his Richard III on crutches. Becoming more confident with Shakespearean language only later (see Sher, 2001, pp. 329-329), the actor credits his productions of *Macbeth* and *Winter's Tale* in 1999, both directed by Doran, as being crucial to this breakthrough. After a string of successful collaborations between the two men, by the time of *Othello* (2004) it was plausible for a journalist to ask 'Is Antony Sher the greatest living interpreter in Shakespeare?' (Myerson, 2004).

Though the professional partnership between Doran and Sher has been hugely productive it has not always been the easiest working relationship – in *Woza Shakespeare* (Sher & Doran, 1996, pp. 167-171) there is an account of crockery throwing during rehearsals for *Titus*, when “plates did fly, glasses did smash” (2001, p. p. 266). He goes on to describe how they decided to prevent it from happening again in the future.

⁴⁷ They have also collaborated on *Mahler's Conversion* at the Aldwych Theatre in 2001, London and *The Giant* (written by, rather than starring, Sher) at Hampstead Theatre in 2007.

We hadn't yet learnt to leave the play in the rehearsal room. Nowadays there's a strict rule: you're not allowed to discuss work at home.

(Sher, 2001, p.266)

When Sher and Doran first collaborated on *Titus*, Sher was a hugely successful actor and Doran was relatively unknown. That imbalance in status may have contributed to tensions between them, but it is worth noting that since then many of Doran's most successful productions have featured Sher in the lead role, so the collaboration between them is clearly productive professionally as well as personally.

Between 2004, when the pair collaborated on *Othello*, and 2014 when they worked together again on the *Henry IV* plays, there was a decade spent working apart. During this time Sher has continued to work selectively but at a high profile whilst Doran's reputation has increased enormously. If their working relationship began in 1987 with Doran playing a bit part to Sher's leading role then, by the time they reunited in 2014, there could be no doubt that it was now a relationship of equal status.

Sher describes Doran in glowing terms as a director, stating that even if it can bring tension into the domestic relationship, it brings 'trust, trust, trust' (Sher, 2001) into the working one. He defines at length in his autobiography the qualities that he believes it takes to make a good director of Shakespeare, all of which he attributes to Doran;

A passion for the language [...] An ability to teach as well as direct [...] A strong visual sense [...] A compassionate, all-embracing fascination with human nature.

(Sher, 2001, p. 267)

I will examine in further detail Sher and Doran's collaborations at the RSC over subsequent pages. For the present, it is sufficient to acknowledge that Sher recognises Doran's importance to his relationship with Shakespeare:

Greg has, in a way, given me Shakespeare. He made me feel that Shakespeare can be mine as much as anyone else's.

(Sher, 2001, p. 266)

For Sher, Doran bears such Shakespearean authority that he can bestow ownership of it on another. It is worth considering though, that this is, as Sher seems to be mean it, an enabling authority. For the actor, the type of ownership being transferred is not proprietorial, but rather an empowering

force. This is an important distinction, as it is in part what nuances the culturalism of Doran from what we might term the ‘Shakespearean’ establishment that scholars such as Worthen and Holderness critique, the institutional sites of Shakespearean authority. Doran’s rehearsal process, as I will argue in Chapter Two, is constructed from an enabling, democratising methodology which might in some respects lead to a reiteration of the traditions and assumptions of the institution of which he is so much a part, but it is also envisioned as an empowering framework for exploring (and staging) Shakespearean texts.

Titus Andronicus

Doran's 1995 production of *Titus Andronicus*, staged as co-production between the Market Theatre of Johannesburg and the British National Theatre in 1995, bears more detailed examination here, partly because it achieved a much higher profile than any production he had directed previously and partly because it was an aesthetically adventurous and overtly political production, both of them being descriptions that are rarely applied to Doran's subsequent directorial output. It was also not without controversy, which may explain why it stands as a distinct production within his overall body of work.

This production also illustrates the centrality of Antony Sher, and RSC Advisory Director John Barton, to Doran's career at this point, and challenges the perception that I have already identified, that his aesthetic sits solely within a limited genre of Shakespearean performance, defined by its proximity to Shakespearean staging traditions. In the case of *Titus*, Doran cut, adapted and rearranged the Shakespearean text in a production that was alert to the contingencies of performance, even if in some respects it misread them, yet Doran still drew on a rhetorical Shakespearean authority for artistic justification. Through a study of the production, and of Doran and Antony Sher's published account of the process, *Woza Shakespeare* (1996), it is also possible to establish some of his attitudes towards Shakespearean verse and language at this point in his career, although I will deal with his approach to verse-speaking more fully in Chapter Three.

It is significant that although Doran was an established presence at the RSC by this point, having directed a production in 1992 (Derek Walcott's adaptation of *The Odyssey*), his first major Shakespearean production for a national company was ultimately co-sponsored by the National Theatre, and not the RSC. As Doran and Sher's first professional collaboration as actor and director, it was important professionally for both of them, boosting Doran's profile and reputation substantially and providing Sher with a first opportunity to perform as a professional actor in his homeland after the lifting of the anti-apartheid cultural boycott.

The production of *Titus* came about following a National Theatre Studio visit to the new post - Apartheid South Africa in 1994. Richard Eyre, Ian McKellen and other high status figures from British Theatre went to the Market Theatre as part of a cultural exchange programme to mark the political changes that had occurred, and Sher was invited as a South African actor who had achieved considerable success in England. Doran was invited as Sher's partner, although he also participated as a practitioner in the workshop programme organised as part of the exchange. The production that arose from those workshops would undoubtedly not have happened without Sher's participation, and his level of engagement in the project was reflected in a co-directing credit.

Titus Andronicus opened at the Market Theatre in Johannesburg in March 1995 before returning to the UK for a short tour. Proving controversial when it debuted in South Africa, it prompted a vigorous, and, at times, acrimonious public debate over the low level of audience support it attracted on its initial run, and the cultural politics of the production, particularly the decision to stage it with the cast performing in South African accents (see Sher & Doran, 1996). The production and its reception also raised wider issues around cultural imperialism, apartheid and the violence and brutality associated with that regime, and the lasting impact of the cultural boycott. What happened in South Africa and the way in which the production was received has attracted substantial scholarly attention (see Silverstone, 2009, Seef, 2009, Thurman, 2006, Holmes, 2002), and I shall briefly attend to some of the criticisms and observations that have been made.

The chief source of attack from mainstream critics on its initial run in South Africa was the production's use of indigenous accents, of which the following provides a typical example:

Why, oh why, is every performance hobbled, nay, mangled, by the use of offensively exaggerated South African accents?

(Ricci, 1995)

Doran and Sher link the negative response exemplified here to the conservatism of the South African critics,⁴⁸ who are perceived as desiring to see a 'Shakespeare' within which they identify the appropriate Shakespearean authority, a white, English-accented colonial Shakespeare, and there is a full (and partial) account of the debate that followed in *Woza Shakespeare* (pp. 205-9). For

⁴⁸ Seef notes pointedly that the critics 'were all white commentators.' (2009)

scholars engaged in the more ambitious project of untangling in full the ‘great knot of post-colonial cultural reflexes’ (Kustow, 1995) the production created, the South African dialect formed part of a wider critique of the production’s *mise en scène*, which in seeking political and cultural engagement with the post-Apartheid society in which it was to be performed,

...did not offer a sustained allegorical reading in which the action of the play was straightforward analogy between the narrative of Shakespeare’s text and South Africa.
(Silverstone, 2009, p.49)

Doran and Sher were accused of appropriating signifiers of cultural identification without explicitly mapping them onto the production or the play, so the meanings created were confused and lacked the specific reference points that were needed. Directing in a culture other than his own and collaborating with an actor who had a passionate and very personal engagement with South African politics, but had been absent from the country for many years, Doran and his designer Nadya Cohen took a number of opportunities to draw parallels with contemporary South Africa and the Apartheid regime from which it had only just emerged, whilst remaining in very broadly allegorical territory. For instance, the production was in modern dress, and much of the second half drew visually on shanty towns for inspiration, and the casting explicitly commented on the Apartheid regime by configuring the Romans as white Afrikaners and the Goths as *tsotsis*, or black township gangsters. Sher, with his square beard and hair bleached white, appropriated the appearance of the white supremacist leader Eugène Terre’Blanche. This created a confusing set of meanings, however. When Sher entered as Titus near the start of the play and came to the line, ‘To re-salute my country with my tears’ (1.1.75) the significance was lost on neither actor nor director (Sher and Doran, 1996, p. 38), as both saw parallels with Sher’s return to South Africa as an actor following the lifting of the cultural boycott, which Sher had supported. This personal, celebratory moment for the actor, though, contrasted with an audience who saw Sher assuming the appearance of a white supremacist icon returning to his country in triumph.

Similarly, Doran restructured the end of the play, moving several lines to create a more upbeat portrayal of a society rather than the bleak, concluding image the play normally finishes with. In Doran’s *Titus*, the play climaxed with Marcus speaking the following lines which have been

relocated and rearranged from earlier in Act 5 Scene 3. (I have inserted the actual line numbers at the start of each block of lines):

88-92 My heart is not compact of flint nor steel,
Nor can I utter all our bitter grief,
But floods of tears will drown my oratory
And break my utterance even in the time
When it should move you to attend me most.
67-69 You sad-faced men, people and sons of Rome,
By uproars severed, as a flight of fowl
Scattered by winds and high tempestuous gusts,
73 Let Rome herself be bane unto herself,
75-76 Like a forlorn and desperate castaway,
Do shameful execution on herself!
70-72 O let me teach you how to knit again
This scattered corn into one mutual sheaf,
These broken limbs again into one body

Climaxing the play in this way suggests reconciliation and was intended to give hope, as Doran argues:

These words hold such resonance in South Africa, where the new political orthodoxy is reconciliation. But in order for this unifying idea to be meaningful, justice must be done, and be seen to be done.

(Sher & Doran, 1996, p. 179)

The image that the audience saw, though, was of a restoration of the previous regime, a white Roman/Afrikaner taking command; the ending was a reassertion of an imperialist past. The play itself does not contain an ending that can work as an allegory for South Africa, and Doran's adaptation is too minor to produce a more politically satisfying meaning. There is, after all, no Truth and Reconciliation Commission in *Titus Andronicus*, but bloody, violent retribution. According to Dessen, this 'rescripted ending packed a strong punch' (Dessen, 2002, p. 126), but it also entrenched a sense that the production was careless in its use of imagery and the creative team had not thought through the implications of some of their decisions. Doran's aims appeared universalising, and his revised ending seemed to follow a liberalising, humanist agenda that misunderstood its audience. For Holmes, this agenda meant that the specificity of the context was reduced to a Shakespearean universalism which, allied to the 'cathartic aim of tragedy' (2002, p. 272) encoded in the generic form of the play, led to

...an abandonment of agency in favour of fate that lends itself strongly to autocratic ideologies. Sher and Suzman⁴⁹ attempt to appropriate the universalist humanism of the

⁴⁹ The production discusses similar concerns regarding Janet Suzman's production of *Othello* (1987), also staged at the Market Theatre.

Shakespearean logos in the name of a revolutionary action, the aim of which is to disturb a strikingly similar humanistic universalism at work within a political system.

(Holmes, 2002, p. 272)

According to Holmes, in the case of both productions any attempts at political resistance that might have been intended by the directors were assimilated by the universalising impulse into a disabling argument against political agency. The imperative for the production, and the adaptations that Doran made to the script, were clearly political, however, even if the outcome was occasionally confused. Despite the criticism of Holmes and others, this production was informed by a number of decisions made by Doran and his creative team that were explicitly contingent on the site of performance. The Shakespearean text, in this example, was de-prioritised by Doran in favour of the specificity of the South African context, implying a more complex negotiation with the political context than Holmes suggests. Doran, as the outsider, misread the politics of a society to which he didn't belong, but that is not quite the universalising approach implied by Holmes.

Holmes also notes that Doran acts as an authorising agent of Shakespeare, who seeks to transmit universalising Shakespearean values:

Yet [Doran] assumes an identity within the world of Shakespeare, a world he has just identified as being equally as alien as that of the country he's working in, but to which he assumes the position of fascinating oracle. Once again the paradox is explained by positing the universalism of Shakespeare, and particularly of tragedy, which effects a continual sublimation of disparity.

(Holmes, 2002, p. 278)

Again, I would argue that although Doran's rhetoric displays universalising tropes throughout *Woza Shakespeare*, this perhaps does a disservice to the goals of the production, if not the performance outcomes.

Perhaps a more precise example of political specificity occurred when Sello Maake Ka Ncube as Aaron declared 'Zounds, ye whore, is black so base a hue?' (4.2.73). Doran had directed Ka Ncube (Sher & Doran, 1996, p. 161) to make sure he gave the line sufficient weight so that it achieved the required political resonance. There was therefore a deliberate attempt on the part of actor and director to represent the cruelty of Aaron as being the product of a society where he himself has been oppressed and brutalised, in order to encourage a complex and even sympathetic reading of the part – a proto-Shylock in effect. This is not in itself unusual; Aaron has often been heroically

portrayed, most notably by Ira Aldridge in the 1850s in a version of the play heavily adapted by Aldridge and C A Somerset (Metz, 1977). Thurman accused the production of lacking sensitivity to the particularities of the context, arguing that this reading carried unfortunate connotations in a transitional society where fears of revenge for the atrocities of Apartheid were widespread:

In South Africa, 1995, however, these were not intellectual abstractions; they were understood directly in racial terms, an alignment inextricable from South Africa past and present – white people had violently oppressed black people, and it was feared that this would be reversed.

(Thurman, 2006, p. 31)

Seef, Thurman and Holmes all make compelling observations on the cultural clumsiness of the production, but it is worth pausing to note that all of them have a particular focus on the rhetoric that surround the production, and all draw very heavily on *Woza Shakespeare*, rather than close analysis of the performance itself.⁵⁰ Seef goes as far as to admit that she has not seen the video of the show, as ‘the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust in Stratford-upon-Avon owns the only known extant copy’ (Seef, 2009), a situation that problematises her account of the meanings made to some degree. Of course, I didn’t see the original production either, though I have studied the video recording to which Seef refers. The nature of such analyses is, therefore, heavily contingent on Doran’s rhetoric, which as we have seen is often of a universalising, essentialist nature, rather than the performance itself. As I have argued, though, in the case of *Titus*, the production, whilst perhaps lacking the cultural and political sensitivity to produce the meanings that Doran and Sher clearly sought, did not seek relevance through universal assumptions about human nature, but through specific attempts to make particular meanings that were relevant to the contingencies of production.

If the primary source was *Woza Shakespeare* rather than the performance itself or a recording of the performance, then we should note Cary M. Mazer’s argument that the nature of any actor or director’s account of a rehearsal process is inherently self-dramatising and couched in the vocabulary of the theatre:

...these journeys constitute the stories that mainstream theatre people tell one another, and that mainstream audiences want and expect to hear about how the performances they have come to see were made...

(Mazer, 2009, p. 348)

⁵⁰ Only Thurman attempts to describe the performance in any detail.

For Mazer, accusations of essentialism when reading accounts such as *Woza Shakespeare* miss the point that the purpose of them is, in part, to draw out universalising narratives. The rhetoric within them, therefore, may not always reflect the actualities of the production's process or performance.

The production may have received substantial criticism in South Africa for its adoption of indigenous accents, but there was also a strong reaction when it was subsequently performed at British theatres. Charles Spencer, later to be a staunch supporter of Doran amongst mainstream critics, was especially vociferous, calling the play 'a revolting piece of work' (Spencer, 1995) and going on to state 'that Shakespeare sounds ugly in South African accents, and some of the verse-speaking is lamentable'. Michael Church questioned the purpose of the exercise in the first place, suggesting that he would rather see a piece of indigenous South African theatre than Shakespeare, and one suspects he sees the spectre of cultural imperialism hovering about the production, and that this informs his critique:

Nor are South African speech-rhythms suited to Elizabethan English (as has been alleged). If Shakespeare's English is a foreign language to present-day Britons – not even the RSC can cope with it – it must be doubly so to present-day South Africans. Watching these talented actors struggling with the verse, I had a heretical thought: if they want their message to reach beyond the ranks of the cognoscenti, why not ditch the text and replace it with a contemporary version of their own?

(Church, 1995)

Church also takes the opportunity to draw attention to the RSC's perceived deficiencies in verse-speaking, an unusual observation given that the production was not actually produced by the RSC, but a telling one too, given the criticisms that particular institution was facing at that time.⁵¹

When the production opened at the National Theatre there was an event held in the Cottesloe to discuss the staging of the play and a member of the audience strongly criticised the decision to use South African accents. The audience member vigorously asserted that the accents 'got in the way'.

Doran's response was strong, even belligerent in tone:

The assumption underlying your response there is that Shakespeare should be done in an English accent. Now Shakespeare was never done in an English accent because Shakespeare didn't have what we would now describe as an English accent and John Barton, who is the world expert on Shakespeare, defined it for us.

(Doran, in National Theatre Platform discussion, 1995)

⁵¹ See the section on Adrian Noble's leadership of the RSC later in this chapter.

As well as exhibiting the world weariness of someone who had defended his position a number of times before, Doran reached for two forms of authority to bolster his own, nascent Shakespearean authority. The first is Shakespeare; the second is John Barton from the RSC, whose status as the ‘world expert’ was asserted with considerable force. Doran went on to quote a piece of Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* with an approximation of Middle English pronunciation to prove his point that performing Shakespeare in modern received pronunciation is a meaningless concept in performative terms, drowning out the protestations of the questioner in the process. Barton’s authority here provided a refuge for an under-fire director at a public event; but Doran was not just being defensive, he was identifying himself through Barton with the tradition of the RSC and all the authority that gives him, even though this was not an RSC production.

Doran and Sher maintain in their published account of the production that the decision over accents was taken after having workshopped the South African actors and encouraging them to use their natural speaking voices (see Doran and Sher, 1996, pp. 13-15 for a description of the genesis of the idea, which came initially from Sher). The intention was to move them away from an appropriated ‘Shakespeare’ voice in order to help them find a more direct connection with the language. This is rhetorically in keeping with both Cicely Berry’s work at the RSC, and with that of the National Theatre Head of Voice Patsy Rodenburg, who accompanied the original party to South Africa and whose teaching likewise stresses freedom and the ‘natural’ voice.⁵² The decision in the case of *Titus* was characterised as a way towards finding a mode of performance that best met the needs of the actors by enabling them to feel confident in performing it, rather than a political statement. This, however, elides the ideological implications of using a Received Pronunciation dialect, with its colonial associations, and the use of the South African dialect, which proved so provocative. The decision to use South African accents was, in the kinds of rhetoric used by Doran in the Platform discussion, justified by drawing on Shakespearean authority and arguing that there was no historical reason for using an alternative dialect. The decision was not configured, at least by Doran, as an act of political empowerment, through which the South African actors were appropriating Shakespearean authority for themselves. As a result, much of the commentary in the

⁵² Itself an example of universalising rhetoric which I discuss later in this chapter

mainstream press, and Doran and Sher's defence against it, were concerned with the aesthetics of the decision, the relative 'beauty' of the delivery of the Shakespearean language, and the productions' perceived transgressions against 'appropriate' ways to perform Shakespeare.

After the initial visit to South Africa and before rehearsals began, Doran arranged for the cast to come to the National Theatre Studio for a series of workshops on the play, where, as Doran alluded to above, John Barton was invited to work with the company, many of whom were performing Shakespeare for the first time (1996, pp. pp. 94-100). Barton's status resides in his reputation as an RSC director of considerable note; he was instrumental alongside Peter Hall in establishing the critical reputation of the company in the 1960s and 1970s. Although he has not directed in many years he retained the title Advisory Director until recently, and, at the time of writing, still retains close links with the company as an Honorary Associate Artist. His views on verse-speaking, which are documented in the book *Playing Shakespeare* (Barton, 1984), have undoubtedly informed much RSC orthodoxy over the last fifty years, and he has frequently provided workshops on performing Shakespearean language for other directors at the company, including Doran. As the workshop for *Titus* closed he asked his students to compile a summary of what they had learnt in ten points, suggesting the headline for the list should be 'TO MAKE THE AUDIENCE LISTEN' (Sher and Doran, 1996, p. 99). It was the climax of the session; so these are the thoughts that Barton wished the actors to take away with them, and they provide a useful barometer of Barton's own views at this time and therefore the views espoused in one of his verse classes at the RSC. As such, they are worth quoting in full here (the names are the actors participating in the workshop):

'Tell the story,' says Jennifer.
'Aim for the full stop,' says Tony.
'Own the words,' says Ivan.
'Go for the antithesis,' says Dan.
'Play the argument,' says Sello.
'Surf the verse,' says Martin.
'Fresh-mint the images,' says Oscar.
'Ask the question,' says Gys.
'Decide who you are talking to,' says Charlton.
'Respect the monosyllables,' says Dotty.

(p. 99)

The concepts of 'antithesis' and 'fresh-minting' recur frequently in the *Playing Shakespeare* workshops and text, and other suggestions such as 'own the words' are well within acting

orthodoxy. ‘Aim for the full stop’ is an interesting inclusion, partly because it comes from Sher, the co-conceiver of the project and star and therefore a voice that would carry considerable authority in the room; it also appears to align him with the views of previous Artistic Director Terry Hands in privileging thought over line, rather than Peter Hall or Adrian Noble who would prefer more attention be paid to line endings. It is a simplification of Barton’s actual advice (p. 98), however, which refers merely to following the argument through to its conclusion. By focussing on punctuation Sher also ignores the editorialising through punctuation evident in published editions of Shakespearean texts, though Doran usually works from his own prepared rehearsal text, as he explains below:

We decided to prepare our own text long before the workshop, with the cuts removed. Otherwise the censored lines lurk on the page, tantalising the actors. We also removed the footnotes. I don’t like footnotes in a working copy; as someone once said, reading them is like having to run downstairs to answer the door on the first night of your honeymoon.
(Sher and Doran, 1996, p. 111)

Thus, the text that Doran compiles for rehearsal becomes an assertion of directorial authority, with punctuation, adaptation and meaning stabilised by the director’s textual interventions before the actors begin rehearsals. Sher’s instruction, therefore, acts to reinforce Doran’s editorial and directorial authority.

Since *Titus* was a NT/Market Theatre co-production, Barton would not have come as part of the structure of training for the production automatically, as he might have done for an RSC production. Doran would have had to arrange for him to come. As Doran appears generally informed with regard to matters of prosody it does not appear to be because he needs the knowledge that Barton brings, but rather he appears to be co-opting Barton’s authority to impose a structure and approach on the company’s collective approach to verse. He was therefore identifying himself within an RSC tradition, embodied in Barton, and accumulated the authority of that institution and transferred it, with himself as the agent of transmission, to the production in the process.

In the recording of the production both the strengths and pitfalls of a clear approach to verse with an inexperienced cast are vividly demonstrated. At its best the uniformity of approach works well,

with a clear, muscular delivery carrying the sense and using the iambic pulse to maintain energy and pace throughout. This is a cast with little Shakespearean experience, however, and occasionally actors become trapped in a delivery that becomes repetitive. This is particularly the case for Sello Maake Ka Ncube as Aaron, who attempts to observe the metre consistently but has a downward inflection on the end of each line which robs his speech of forward momentum. This is especially true of his lengthy speeches in 5.1 (99-145), where his pitch goes downwards on the end of every line leading to a performance that can become monotonous and devoid of vocal energy. Alastair Macauley's mixed review of the production commented that the actor has '...a tiresome habit of hitting the first iamb of every line or phrase loud and then tracing a descending diminuendo' (Macauley, 1995). Ironically, this is a quality which I have also observed in recordings of Doran's early performances as an actor at the RSC, especially in *Julius Caesar* (1987).

Jonathan Bate also noted the difficulty some cast members had with the verse, although for him the production was an altogether more positive experience:

Doran's young multiracial company consists predominantly of actors unaccustomed to Shakespeare; the resultant over-deliberation in the line-endings and occasional lack of clarity in the speaking are a price well worth paying for the freshness and commitment which they bring to their work.

(Bate, 1995b)

For Bate, the actors' attempts to perform verse 'correctly' have resulted in a clumsy marking of the form at the partial expense of the clarity and fluency of the delivery.

There was also a tension between the psychological detail that Doran and Sher sought to incorporate into the performances and the dramatic needs of the production. Sher's Titus was old and slow to move, he adopted a thick-set, heavy physicality which constrained him yet allowed him to place more emphasis on the words and the thoughts behind them. He records enjoying the sense of freedom performing in his native dialect gave him:

The accent feels like a gift. It's allowing me to do things with my voice which more typically, as an actor, I do with my body. It gives me new muscles. It lets me flip through the air.

(Sher and Doran, 1996, p. 117)

Sher's verse is not spoken 'trippingly on the tongue', though, and his pace is sometimes constrained by his normal standards, although according to Doran this is a conscious choice in order to justify Andronicus' behaviour psychologically, which is proving problematic for Sher in rehearsals:

A solution is emerging for Tony. It's very basic and simple. Titus is old. He *is* one step behind.

(Sher and Doran, 1996, p. 115)

Thus a trade-off seems to be occurring which I will explore further in Chapter Three. A tension begins to emerge between Sher's post-Stanislavskian privileging of character, supported in this case by Doran, and the pace of the performance; Sher's delivery was potentially compromised so that the actor could construct a psychologically plausible character. Elsewhere, pace was also a concern as other actors made similar discoveries which caused them to slow down:

There is a danger that as the actors make more and more discoveries about their characters the text can become colonised by a host of irrelevant emphases, quirky stresses or empty pauses. Everybody does it.

(Doran in Sher and Doran, 1996, p. 124)

For Robert Hewison the decision by Sher to play Titus' decrepitude 'slows down his delivery painfully' (Hewison, 1995), but generally Sher's performance was highly praised in a production of which any criticism of the vocal delivery tended to focus around the use of South African accents rather than verse-speaking *per se*.

There was one other notable example of Doran and Sher's privileging of character that bears scrutiny here. At the beginning of the play, Titus' murder of his son, Mutius, is cut. Doran justifies this as follows:

It's a tricky one. How do you find the journey for Titus to go, if he's barking mad to start with? From a close study of the text, it seems that the death of Mutius might have been an afterthought, a late rewrite.

(Sher & Doran, 1996, p. 111)

Doran cites a textual authority here, arguing that there might have been a late revision by the author, a matter about which there has been some critical speculation (see Bate, 1995a, pp. 103-105). The Shakespearean authority that Doran claims, however, is problematised by the collaborative nature of the writing of many of Shakespeare's plays, including *Titus*, of which parts were written by George Peele. In such cases, reaching towards notionally 'Shakespearean'

revisions as a justification for cutting the text is speculative at best. It seems, however, more plausible that this is a justification after the fact by Doran and that the reason is psychological when we consider Sher's resistance to staging the killing. Once it is removed Sher finds that constructing a coherent portrayal is made easier:

Now we've cut his hysteria in Scene 1, killing his own son, I think I can map out an interesting journey for him.

(Sher & Doran, 1996, p. 117)

The 'journey' is given priority here, a focus on internal consistency at the expense, perhaps, of more political meanings. The death of Mutius is a significant moment, and provides evidence in performance of Titus' unbending rigidity as a soldier who is locked in a pattern of unquestioningly obeying orders. In the 1987 Deborah Warner production in the Swan, which was completely uncut, it was a powerful demonstration of Titus' unbending will and limited worldview. Likewise in the Jane Howell BBC version (Howell, 1985) the killing is left in, and in the Julie Taymor film (Taymor, 2006), it provides a poignant and telling moment in Anthony Hopkins' portrayal of the Roman general, where even as he kills his son he doesn't quite appear to understand the reasons why he is doing it.

In the case of Doran's production, the killing is removed in order to make it 'playable' for his leading actor(s), suggesting that there is a rehearsal imperative at work here which prioritises support for the actor's subjective process above an alternative reading of the work. The director is not consistent in this respect though; in *Woza Shakespeare* Doran relates how Sher wishes to cut the 'ludicrous squabble' in Act III between Titus, Lucius and Marcus over who should cut their hand off (Sher & Doran, 1996, p. 149). Doran realises that the humour, and absurdity of the situation, are central to the destabilising meanings the scene might generate;

...I think if we get it right, they should laugh. It's daring writing, teetering on the brink of absurdity. Shakespeare makes you laugh, then he undercuts it, pulls the carpet from under your feet.

(Sher & Doran, 1996, p. 149)

Although Shakespeare's literary authority is once more the referent for Doran's decision-making, his own more provocative reading is the one articulated. Doran suggests that Shakespeare means what Doran is thinking, but it seems more compelling to reason that Shakespeare is here *made* to mean what Doran is thinking. Doran believes that by trusting the text, as he perceives it, and

responding imaginatively to it, the dividends will be rich. What he is assuming that text to *mean* is, of course, the director's own interpretation.

Titus Andronicus was, from my own viewing, anarchic, blackly comic, gruesomely violent and theatrically adventurous. It was undoubtedly provocative and its scattergun, broad-brush approach to post-Apartheid South Africa inevitably backfired occasionally, though it was more positively received by many critics when it was performed in the UK.⁵³ Here, reviewers tended to read the allegorical *mise en scène* much more broadly, as a pathway to opening up a difficult play for contemporary performance (Doran's production 'confirms Titus's status as Shakespeare's first masterwork' (Billington, 1995), for example). Devoid of the specific political reference points that so troubled some South African audiences and critics, here the emphasis was on an act of restoration, restoring the play's previously troubled status. Those critics who did provide a more negative perspective concentrated almost exclusively on the accents, like their South African counterparts; again, many of the objections were characterised as aesthetic, rather than political ones.⁵⁴

The few negative reviews in the UK may have largely focussed on the dialect, but the production was also criticised for stylistic inconsistency and even childishness (Saturninus performing his speech at the start of 4.4 whilst on the toilet being a possible example of the latter). The overall aesthetic was broadly realist, if garish, rough and fiercely contemporary, with Titus arriving on a jeep and a black bin liner used for Marcus' severed hand. However, Doran staged the rape and mutilation of Lavinia using a shop window mannequin, with Chiron and Demetrius enacting a series of violations on it as Jennifer Woodburne, playing Lavinia, danced a waltz nearby. On the version filmed for television the precise *mise en scène* is unclear as the television director has used vision mixing to juxtapose the two images in a way that could not have occurred on stage, but even so it is clear this is a stylistic departure in a production which is heightened, coarse and energetic in its staging, but never elsewhere departs from realist staging conventions to such a degree.

⁵³ For example, see Wainwright, 1995; Billington, 1995; Tinker, 1995; Hagerty, 1995

⁵⁴ For example, see Spencer, 1995; Church, 1995

Despite the criticisms, the production undoubtedly brought Doran a much more visible public profile; the South African element, the controversy over accents, the violence of the play, Sher's involvement, the UK tour and Sher and Doran's subsequent book detailing it all ensured the production's visibility. Doran finally had a Shakespearean credit at a national theatre company, even if it wasn't at the RSC, and even if it was with a production like no other he has directed since. *Titus* was both politically provocative and theatrically contingent on the particularities of production. Doran and Sher's rhetoric may have dramatised the production at times as a work illustrating the universality of Shakespeare, but it was actually generated by a very specific engagement with the time and place in which it was being performed. Fidelity, or proximity, to 'Shakespeare' was a rhetorical trope rather than a driving imperative behind the work, used to assert directorial authority, but also confusing and even eliding the, arguably misjudged, political and cultural negotiations the production was engaged in.

If *Titus* now seems unusual and a departure for Doran, both politically and aesthetically, it is also worth noting that it was not produced in the institution in which Doran has built his career, and that he expresses considerable discomfort throughout *Woza Shakespeare* at the lack of resources available to him. The production's roughness and anarchy may in part be a result of this; it may also be because working outside of the RSC in a remarkably unusual context demanded innovative directorial responses. Since *Titus*, however, Doran's Shakespearean work has been produced exclusively at the RSC, and much of the rest of this chapter will consider the critical and institutional contexts in which his work is sited, and therefore the lens through which his work should be understood.

Shakespearean authority, universality and performance criticism

He somehow has a universality where he sees us from 360 degrees [...] he transcends all those boundaries. I think I've directed Shakespeare in Japan, Nigeria, in America and the West Indies and people always say he's talking about us and I can't define what that is but that is his extraordinary genius.

(Doran speaking on *Antony Sher and Greg Doran in conversation with Sue MacGregor*, 2015)

I have already highlighted that Doran often employs rhetoric which both identifies with and celebrates 'Shakespeare'; the quote above from a television programme broadcast in late 2015 provides another example of language that is essentialist and universalising with regard to Shakespearean works. I have also suggested that such language is problematic for many scholarly critics, who identify it as ideologically coded with a conservative agenda that is politically disabling. When sited within a dominant institution such as the RSC, such an approach to making and talking about Shakespeare becomes hegemonic and the reiterating force of a certain set of cultural values, which characterise themselves as 'Shakespearean', but actually reinforce entrenched, establishment meanings. At this point it seems appropriate, therefore, to expand on my argument regarding perceptions of the RSC, and outline how critical perspectives have evolved in recent decades that position themselves in opposition to the company, to the performance traditions that are embodied there, and to the notions of literary authority and humanistic universal 'truths' that frame so much of the rhetoric and animating philosophy underpinning the company's work.

By the 1990s, after years spent reviewing Shakespeare productions for *Shakespeare Survey*, Peter Holland was able to conclude that so great was the RSC's Shakespearean authority that 'at this point, Shakespeare in England still substantially meant the RSC' (Holland, 1997, p. 21). Holland in fact goes further, suggesting that the institution has an authority far beyond Stratford:

From one perspective the RSC's position is dominant and imperialist, a cultural institution whose significance in the perception of Shakespeare in performance is out of proportion to values that might be ascribed to its productions.

(Holland, 1997, p. xiii)⁵⁵

⁵⁵ It is worth noting that Holland is essentially well disposed toward the company, following the remark quoted above with the observation that 'Although, throughout this study I am sharply critical of many RSC productions, I am unashamedly an RSC fan.' (Holland, 1997, p. xiii)

Holland is suggesting that the authority of the RSC exerts a power to shape perceptions of what a Shakespearean play looks like in performance, and more importantly, how it *should* look, and then it exports that as a model form. The company's own productions are, therefore, assessed by how they relate to a notional 'Shakespearean' aesthetic, but so are other productions produced elsewhere; even if they are not like RSC productions they are defined by their similarity to or difference from RSC productions. Similarly, if productions are seen to diverge too completely from a normative RSC aesthetic or the ideological positioning that underpins it, then they can be, as Sinfield argues, 'easily set aside as "not Shakespeare"' (Sinfield, 1994, p. 202). As Holland goes on to assert,

Of course the RSC is the inheritor of a long tradition of English Shakespeare production, a tradition that it has rarely sought fundamentally to radicalise. It has become the embodiment of that tradition, the cultural epitome of the centrality of Shakespeare in British theatre.

(Holland, 1997, p. 23)

This suggests that the RSC has assimilated and in turn developed a theatrical tradition which, over time, brokered by the authority of its location as well as the achievements of the institution itself, has come to be seen as a 'Shakespearean' tradition. Holland's observation that it has rarely sought to radicalise that tradition contrasts illuminatingly with Peter Hall's argument that he envisaged the company as a radical institution, here quoted by Sinfield;

'I am a radical and I could not work in the theatre if I were not. The theatre must question everything and disturb its audience' – so said Peter Hall in 1966. This became the image of the RSC:

(Sinfield, 1994, p. 155)

Holland writes approvingly elsewhere of an what he considers to be a genuinely radical project that took place within the company, Peter Brook's 'Experimental Group', which led to the 'Theatre of Cruelty' performances in 1964 (see Holland, 2013b, p. 13-14). Alongside Brook-directed productions of *US* (1966) and *Marat/Sade* (1964), Holland observes that

Brook's project of radicalization at this stage was to be accomplished through the core of the theatrical establishment.

(Holland, 2013b, p. 14)

The tensions hinted at here, between Hall's avowed radicalism, the status of the company as 'establishment', and the positioning of Brook's radicalism as resistant to that establishment, suggest an already emerging critical dilemma; how should a company as large, as dominant, as embedded in a site of heritage and nostalgia, as the Royal Shakespeare Company be understood?

As the insurgent, radical force that Hall wanted it to be, or as the voice of the establishment that it seemed destined to become? Sinfield suggested, above, that the company's 1960s radicalism lay in its 'image', implying that it was cosmetic rather than deep-rooted in the structures and cultures of the institution. Perhaps, therefore, a key artistic legacy of Hall's stewardship during the 1960s lies in *perceptions* of the company's radicalism. By restructuring and rebranding the existing Stratford company in 1961 Hall made a powerful statement of intent (though achieving a Royal Charter for the company instantly problematises the company's supposed radicalism); by appearing to focus on the creation of an ensemble rather than staging star-led productions he, in theory, promoted a more egalitarian ideology (though he continued to work with actors such as Peggy Ashcroft and Paul Schofield); and by demanding that all of the company's Shakespearean productions should be engaged with wider contemporary society he forged a new political identity for the institution. In the 1960s, for a period, Hall's intentions worked; the company was perceived as of radical intent. Few would suggest now that the company of which Doran became artistic leader in 2013 is still a radical company, if it ever was.

Practices, structures and intentions have, of course, changed, but before I examine the institution's evolution since then, I first wish to briefly consider some of the shifts in critical perspectives that have taken place in recent years, which have re-sited the RSC within a less hospitable critical context regardless of any changes in practice, culture or leadership at the RSC itself. As my (and Holland's and Sinfield's) remarks above make clear, the tensions between a largely establishment agenda and something more radical were undoubtedly there in the 1960s, but even without the changes to the RSC in the intervening years, trends in Shakespearean performance criticism have evolved from a largely positive engagement with the company's work to an ontological perspective where, for many scholars and critics, the rhetoric and philosophy that so many of the company's public statements espouse have come to be seen as deeply problematic.

In 1977 J.L. Styan published *The Shakespeare Revolution* (1977), and in doing so made an important and influential argument for a shift away from the literary analysis of 'The New

Criticism',⁵⁶ towards a more stage-centred analysis of Shakespearean performance. He characterised New Critics as having

...believed that a work of literature should ideally be examined and judged as an object in itself, without reference to the personality of its author, the facts of its composition, its historical context, the audience its author intended or its effect on them.

(Styan, 1977, p. 168)

Such an approach privileges reading a play above seeing or performing a play, placing the authority of that text firmly in the written word, but it also denies any consideration of the material conditions of the original production of the play, and is not capable of making a critique of the work's efficacy or impact as a piece of theatre. The emphasis on close textual analysis therefore treats the Shakespearean work as a literary one; to be studied as one might other works of literature. If the New Critics inhabited what Worthen describes as a literary perspective where performance was only ever an inferior reproduction of the literary work, then the authority of the work would reside solely in the printed text.

In a schematic sense a literary perspective takes the authority of a performance to be a function of how fully the stage expresses meanings, gestures and themes ineffably in the written work, the source of the performance and the measure of its success.

(Worthen, 1997, p. 4)

Other leading scholars from the first half of the twentieth century also studied Shakespeare from this essentially literary perspective even though differences should be noted; A.C. Bradley, for instance, whose earlier criticism was based around detailed analysis of character (see Bradley, 1991) was later attacked by Knights (see Knights, 1933), and G. Wilson Knight, whose analysis was more thematic, even metaphysical, actively rejected the consideration of a play's theatrical merits, declaring in 1930:

...my experience as actor, producer and play-goer leaves me uncompromising in my assertion that the literary analysis of great drama in terms of theatrical technique accomplishes singularly little.

(Wilson Knight, 2001, p.x)

In such a reading of the Shakespearean work, literary authority is absolute and the text carries a fixed set of meanings and values in which, if the theatrical work is to be considered at all, it is as an inferior iteration of the play itself.

⁵⁶ A critical movement that originated in America, but which Styan found exemplified in England through the work of scholars such as T.S. Eliot, F.R. Leavis and L.C. Knights.

Styan contrasted this with a simple, critical statement of intent:

Whilst it is possible to read a poem as a linguistic or symbolic entity, our understanding of a play must take into account its physical and historical milieu, and the pressures on it from wholly external sources – perhaps governmental, economic, religious, political, cultural or sociological forces both national and local. The intentions of the author of a play and the expectations of its audience are absolutely relevant to any value judgement upon it. If the new criticism insisted upon the autonomy of the text, drama as an art form demands attention to the primacy of context.

(Styan, 1977, p. 169)

Styan drew on the experiences and work of William Poel and Harley Granville Barker⁵⁷ in the early part of the Twentieth Century, and the much more recent Peter Brook RSC production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1970), to argue for a rejection of stage realism and a return to what he perceived as Elizabethan, or Shakespearean, theatrical values, which he considered to be anti-pictorial and based around an open stage. Alongside other critics such as Alan Dessen, whose argument was less explicitly in favour of a specific theatrical approach (see Dessen, 1984, p.156) but who drew extensively on the materiality of early modern production, stage-centred critics argued that by knowing more about the original context of production, it could and should inform stage practice today:

From this angle, such 'historical' insights can function not as a strait-jacket for the modern interpreter but as a liberating device that can expand our sense of the potential for stage metaphors or meaningful juxtapositions or other striking effects factored into the original equations.

(Dessen, 1984, p. 157)

Stage-centred criticism shifted the emphasis to a performative perspective, where the authority no longer resided solely in the literary work, but rather saw the Shakespearean text as providing a map to performance. As I have already described, this conception of the Shakespearean work was later problematised by some scholars, notably Worthen, who saw in this model a lingering subservient relationship; performance may be articulated as of primary importance, but its efficacy is still judged based on a relationship to the work, or text from which it is derived.

In a variety of ways, the success of a dramatic performance is imagined, described, calibrated through reference to the text of the play, to a sense of the play's literary identity, an identity that lies outside and beyond performance. The argument that the theatre is a *more* authoritative vehicle for the production merely replicates a desire to locate the authority of its production of the work somewhere else, in "Shakespeare," a ground that has already been ceded to "literature".

(Worthen, 1997, p.26)

⁵⁷ See Styan, 1977, pp. 47-121 for a detailed and authoritative account of the work of both men, which Styan argues led to the development of stage-centred criticism.

Influenced by poststructuralist discourses, Worthen sought, and seeks, to disrupt literary authority, characterising the printed text as an iteration of the Shakespearean work and a performance as another iteration of it, neither one of which is more authoritative. Both are, to Worthen, sites of performance where meanings are made;

Each Shakespeare performance is an independent production of the work, part of an emerging series of texts/performances rather than a restatement or return to a single source.
(Worthen, 1997, P. 23)

Where Worthen makes common cause with the New Critics is in the marginalisation of the role of the author. After Barthes' 'Death of the Author' (see Barthes, 1977, pp. 142-48), authorial unity is unknowable, and the search of it undesirable; the moment of performance, or reading, is the site where meanings are produced, not by the author.

Though writing within a literary sphere, Terence Hawkes also rejects the idea that texts have essentialist meanings, determined by the author and encoded in the printed document;

...to the uninvolved, alienated eye, no text offers values or meanings that exist as essential features of itself. Shakespeare's plays are not essentially this or essentially that, or essentially anything. They are [...] far more like natural phenomena, mountain ranges, pieces of scenery, out of which we *make* truth, value, 'greatness', this or that, in accordance with our various purposes. Like the words of which they are composed, the plays have no essential meanings. It is *we* who mean, *by* them.
(Hawkes, 1992, p. 76)

Hawkes was critical of Bradley for making meanings that aligned Shakespeare's characters with Bradley's understanding of them,⁵⁸ in a theoretical inversion which suggested that rather than Bradley analysing the characters that were written in the play, he was actually engaged in an act of creating them. For Hawkes 'Text and reading intermingle as the one becomes an aspect, or particular instance, of the other' (Hawkes, 1986, p. 41), leading him to coin the composite term 'Shakespeare-Bradley' (p.41) to describe Bradley's readings.

It is, by now, becoming clear, that the universalising rhetoric of directors such as Doran in the way they talk about Shakespeare sits in opposition to the ways of thinking about Shakespearean texts

⁵⁸ In Bradley's collection of lectures, *Shakespearean Tragedy* (1991), Bradley assumes an essentialist, literary perspective towards Shakespeare's main tragic plays, preferring to read them as drama than see them performed as theatre and providing a series of in-depth accounts of the characters that inhabit them. Bradley often appears to approach these protagonists as though they occupied a hinterland and interiority beyond the confines of the play itself, speculating as to their past lives, family life and motivations.

and performance argued for by Hawkes and Worthen. Situating Doran's rhetoric within an institution that might be considered dominant and imperialist problematises such rhetoric further; Doran's perceived worldview is given a platform from which to export his belief in the Shakespearean work as an expression of authorial intention, and that effective theatre-making, the craft of which he speaks, might unlock the immanent meanings within that work.⁵⁹

Of course, I have already highlighted the concerns raised by Dawson about scholars who, in decoding the multiple meanings that might be unlocked in a stage performance, neglect to include the practicalities of theatre-making in much critical writing (see Dawson, 1991). Dawson also problematises assertions about the status of the text itself, which has, to him, been dispersed and degraded to such a degree that its materiality has been called into question:

There are, of course a whole set of problematic assumptions attached to such a claim,⁶⁰ the most fundamental being that the "text," as an entity, actually exists – that it is something independent of its readings.

(Dawson, 1991, p. 320)

As Dawson goes on to point out, 'What we see in the theatre is always a performance of something.' Dawson, in many ways, anticipated some of Worthen's arguments, and Worthen may have been answering Dawson when he wrote that his argument was the

... kind of theoretically inflected discussion usually repudiated by theatre practitioners and performance scholars as foreign to the practical immediacy of performance.

(Worthen, 1997, p. 38)

Worthen's dismissal of the concerns of theatre-makers is relevant here. If Styan, aligning himself with Brook's work at the RSC, was embracing a particular critical and theatrical moment when scholars and theatre-makers were engaged in an active dialogue, with overlapping concerns, Worthen characterises a movement away from such a relationship. Key to this distancing has been the critical rejection of authority as something that should reside in the author or their work, that the text should carry a set of fixed meanings, and that any rhetorical attempt to articulate such meanings is an inherently restrictive and reactionary project.

⁵⁹ Barthes draws an explicit link between valorising the authorial voice and a conservative agenda, describing the author as 'the epitome and culmination of capitalist ideology' (Barthes, 1977, p. 143).

⁶⁰ The main focus of his critique here is Philip C. Maguire's *Speechless Dialect: Shakespeare's Open Silences* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1985), but elsewhere in the article he also discusses Harry Berger's *Imaginary Audition* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1989) and Leah Marcus' *Puzzling Shakespeare* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1988).

Although dominant in Shakespeare in performance discourses, such a perspective is not unchallenged. R. A Foakes, in a direct response to performance and cultural critics who wish to deconstruct authorial authority, set out his ground thus:

Performance theory in tandem with critical theory has come to take for granted a number of critical positions, such as the distancing or demolition of the author, and the undermining of the authority of Shakespeare's texts by insisting on their indeterminacy. Performance theorists, distancing themselves from traditional modes of criticism, aim to free the productions of plays from bondage to the author or the text.

(Foakes, 2006, p.47)

Having opened provocatively, Foakes goes on to mount a compelling argument for recognition that the text can offer a range of interpretative strategies to actors and directors, but that in doing so it inevitably closes down possible interpretations of the resultant performance. Meaning, in other words, is something that the actors and director can shape based on what they find in the text before it reaches its audience. To Foakes, a performance theorist such as Worthen, considers the text 'closed and exhausted' (p. 56), and acting and directing choices informed by it are inherently limiting. Foakes argues that

This is all very well, but takes no notice of the needs of each new generation of readers and playgoers who come to the plays for the first time, as well as older viewers who wish to hear the text well spoken...

(Foakes, 2006, pp. 56-57)

Foakes's reference to 'well-spoken' suggests that he is arguing *for* a very particular type of performance rather than *against* the kind of radical, revisionist production he characterises Worthen and others,⁶¹ but his argument is particularly relevant here, because I consider that one of the particular strengths of Doran as a director is his ability to open up Shakespearean texts to new audiences.

Foakes's critique prompted a 'Quip Modest' in reply from Worthen, where he conceded that a satisfactory model of analysis had yet to be found:

I don't think we have a compelling way of accounting for what we say the text does relative to stage performance. Texts do not direct how we use them, though they may point to contemporary theatrical conventions [...] and sometimes express the author's desire that they be used in a specific way...

(Worthen, 2006, p. 210-11)

⁶¹ He also cites Susan Bennett's *Performing Nostalgia* (Bennett, 1996) at this point.

What the text *is* to performers, therefore, presents some conceptual difficulties that are yet to be resolved. For Worthen, texts don't tell the performance how they should be used, but they may perhaps suggest ways to use them. This may leave further questions dangling elusively beyond reach, but elsewhere in the same article, he shows much greater clarity in outlining his ideological opposition to the act of writing itself as a totalising force that performance should resist:

While an earlier generation had devalued performance for its transformative "corruption" of the desirable fixity of writing, a contemporary generation of performance culture values the apparent fluidity of non-scripted performance as the means to challenge and resist the inevitable reiteration of dominant cultural values through dominant culture's principal instrument: writing.

(Worthen, 2006, p. 216)

Here, Worthen explicitly links the authority of the writer, invoked so often by Doran, to political containment; destabilising, deconstructing and disintegrating that authority therefore is configured as an act of political resistance against a conservative agenda. Institutionally, rhetorically, commercially and philosophically, the Royal Shakespeare Company *is* an exercise in Shakespearean authority; its purpose is to reiterate, reproduce and export it. It is not therefore entirely surprising that critics who focus almost exclusively on the rhetoric of Shakespearean production are inclined to take a critical stance towards the company that is, in itself, an ideological one.

If Dawson leaves us with an impasse, it is one that continues to perplex scholars. Shakespearean Performance criticism occupies a discourse of its own,⁶² and as Worthen has demonstrated, in problematising the assumptions on which a theoretical model is based, it can sometimes create further, more perplexing questions. Badir and Yachnin's 2008 collection *Shakespeare and the Cultures of Performance* explicitly engages with Dawson's quandary, how 'he challenges Shakespeareans to bridge the gap between theatre and the world.' (Badir and Yachnin, 2008, p.2), acknowledging that conceptual, analytical frameworks in the New Historicist mode can never really grasp the 'playful particularity that is at the heart of theatre', even whilst providing an

⁶² See also Hodgdon (2005) for a 'kind of history' in the Introduction to *A Companion to Shakespeare and Performance*, which also acknowledges the role of the development of performance theory as a distinct discipline from the study of Literature, and, how it has informed much of the discourse around Shakespeare performance criticism; Bulman (1996) covers similar terrain in the Introduction to *Shakespeare, Theory and Performance*; see also Dobson (2005b); Dobson, Gilbert and Rutter in *Shakespeare 25:4* (2007); and Hartley (2009b) for examples of writing about the process of viewing (and writing about) Shakespearean performance.

effective ‘materialist model of the interrelationship of socio-political power and theatrical performance’. The collection concludes with a provocative and challenging Afterword from Pechter which addresses the tensions that Dawson had only hinted at, concluding that models of performance criticism based around performativity and local, historicised meanings are ultimately unsatisfying:

If “the postmodern condition” entails a sceptical aversion to large unifying explanations, the ubiquity of “performance” and “culture” suggests that it entails our deeply felt need to believe in them as well.

(Pechter, 2008, p. 179)

Cultures, and performed identities, therefore become a substitute for universalising meanings in critical discourses. For Pechter, the rejection of a formalist, literary model of criticism has meant that by ‘reacting against the deficiencies of the too-small, we have consigned studies of “the individual play” to oblivion and cut ourselves off from a rich source of interpretative interest’ (p. 179). The rejection of the literary model of criticism, which assigns meaning to the text, and the dismissal of close readings of individual plays, has effectively delegitimised certain types of criticism. He is careful not to argue for a return to formalist modes of criticism, or to deny the huge advances in theoretical understanding of performance, but there is also a recognition that as one epistemological model has marginalised another, the gains made have perhaps been at considerable cost.

Pechter identifies, and challenges, a consensus that appears to have materialised around a mode of criticism that rejects universal, or immanent meanings in the text, and seeks to displace the authority of any meanings made in the performance from the literary to the moment of performance itself. As alluded to by Worthen, and addressed more directly by Dawson and Foakes, this model fails to provide a completely satisfying conceptual framework to articulate the text-performance relationship clearly that allows critics to articulate the intricate matrix of meanings being made in the production and viewing of a Shakespearean performance.

Doran’s work, as I will argue, is extremely alert to the traditions, history and cultures of Shakespearean performance that have been inflected through historic modes of criticism, which have privileged literary authority and/or a version of performance-based authority that still

conceptualises the text as a vehicle of meanings that the production is there to ‘release’. In order to study his work it therefore becomes necessary to negotiate a means of writing about the director’s work that both acknowledges that he draws upon a tradition informed by notions of literary authority whilst still understanding that work as a performance which exists as its own iteration of the Shakespearean work. In doing so, I resist making an ideological judgment on Doran’s engagement with the text and traditions of Shakespearean performance. As Kidnie suggests in a useful intervention, at least for the purposes of this thesis:

The theoretical model I am arguing for here is not inspired by any particular desire to ‘liberate’ performance from text [...] Shakespeare’s text can be immensely enabling of performance. My rather different point – albeit one undoubtedly shaped by at least some of the intellectual influences Foakes lumps together to dismiss as ‘postmodernist theory’ – is to attend to the extent to which both texts and performances are limited by, and in turn contribute to, the play as a conception that changes over time.

(Kidnie, 2012, p. 11)

Michael Dobson, by contrast, approaches the task of viewing and writing about performance with a slightly different emphasis:

What we need to do is to approach contemporary treatments of the plays on their own performative terms, as if performance criticism weren’t a poor relation of Shakespearean editing but actually confronted Shakespearean productions as examples of present-day theatre and indeed cultural politics in their own right.

(Dobson, 2005b, p. 160)

Making a plea to consider Shakespearean productions on their own ‘performative terms’ whilst still within the context of ‘cultural politics’ is perhaps attractive, but in its attempt to marginalise editorial authority, and perhaps remove the performance from the jurisdiction of English Literature, it also denies the meanings made by the viewer’s understandings of performance traditions (and Doran’s negotiation of them). Perhaps the following argument for a model which embraces those meanings, from the Preface to the volume in which Kidnie writes above, *Shakespeare and the Making of Theatre*, might therefore provide a more productive framework for considering Doran’s work:

We approach Shakespeare-performance as a work of art in its own right, a product of a series of creative collaborations as well as a negotiation with theatrical memories and traditions. The study of Shakespeare in performance is limitless. There are 37 plays in the Shakespeare canon, but there are thousands of plays in the Shakespeare-performance canon.

(Hampton-Reeves & Escolme, 2012, p. xiv)

‘Shakespeare-performance’ suggests an equivalence of authorities which is useful here, neither denying that memories and traditions play a key role in the making of meaning, nor asserting an

authorially approved 'correct' version of the play. It creates a theoretical and critical space which I will attempt to occupy throughout the rest of this thesis.

The meanings put into play during performances at the Royal Shakespeare Company have been implied, and/or explicitly argued by some, not all, of the scholars I have cited in the preceding section as conservative and imperialist, promoting a dominant set of cultural priorities that prevents marginalised voices from being represented. I do not dispute much of this critique, and am sympathetic to much of the theory that underpins it; that texts do not carry essentialist meanings, that performance should not be bound by notions of literary authority; and that such literary authority, when resident in an organisation such as the Royal Shakespeare Company, is used to promote dominant ideologies to the exclusion of more marginalised voices. However, I also note and align myself with the analyses which have argued that by conceptualising performance in this way, an academic/theatre-maker divide has deepened which is regrettable. As I will discuss over the following pages, literary authority is embedded in the structures and rhetoric of the RSC, but also informs much of the ways in which actors and directors talk about Shakespeare. Doran, as an actor turned director who has worked for most of his career at the RSC, is immersed in the culture of this rhetoric, and speaks it fluently. This is not always reflected in his practice, or craft, though, and even when it is, his engagements with traditions of Shakespearean performance tend to be much more nuanced and rewarding than many of the kinds of theoretical models discussed here can accommodate.

about a 'hen party' also suggests an opposition between 'Shakespeare' and a certain kind of populism that is illuminating from Purves; in this case the application of the wrong kind of populist analogy seems to have distorted values that she perceives in the text.

If *King John* prompted a polarisation between mainstream critics for whom Aberg's *King John* could never compare to 'Shakespeare's' *King John*, and those who enjoyed Aberg's treatment, then there have also been tensions between scholarly critics and mainstream ones. As I suggested in the Introduction, most newspaper reviewers have been largely supportive of Doran and his perceived agenda, and, as can be seen above, frequently measure RSC productions through their proximity to a notional Shakespearean ideal (even if they oppose that ideal, they are still responding to it). In order to illustrate the kinds of competing critical pressures in which theatre-makers at the RSC sometimes find themselves, I will now focus on a production from the same year that illustrates vividly the ontological differences that can open up between mainstream and scholarly critics.

In 2012 the RSC embarked on a controversial collaboration with the American avant-garde theatre company, The Wooster Group, to stage *Troilus and Cressida*, also in the Swan Theatre. The production, for which the two companies rehearsed largely in separate countries and came together only shortly before opening, cast the Americans as the Trojans whilst the British, directed by Mark Ravenhill, played the Greeks. It attracted almost universally negative reviews and prompted large numbers of audience walkouts;⁶³ the show was condemned by much of the mainstream press as a potentially interesting but failed experiment. I will not dwell on the mainstream critical response,⁶⁴ but instead wish to focus on two scholarly articles which critiqued the show's critical reception, exemplifying a different critical tendency. Thomas P. Cartelli suggests that the audience's lack of theatrical knowledge, specifically of The Wooster Group's experimental aesthetic, was to blame for the negative reviews and walkouts that dogged the production.

...one would hope that the company's reputation for a rigorous, disciplined house style honed by thirty-eight years of unstinting commitment to decidedly non-commercial theater

⁶³ On the night I saw it I would estimate about a third of the audience left at the interval, and numbers of those leaving became a feature of commentaries about the production.

⁶⁴ See, for instance, Michael Billington in the *Guardian* (9 August 2012), Simon Taverner at *Whatsonstage.com* (9 August 2012), Alastair Muir in the *Evening Standard* (31 August 2012), Alexander Gilmour in the *Financial Times* (10 August 2012), all of whom gave largely negative reviews.

production would have preceded them. That it did not possibly says as much about the insularity of the theatergoing public as it does about the group's avant-garde pretensions... (Cartelli, 2013, pp. 236-237)

Benjamin Fowler, a former RSC assistant director (who had worked with Doran on *Cardenio* the previous year), then goes further:

...the reactions they elicited revealed how blinkered British critics are by a literary attitude that personalizes the dramatic work as the author, fuelling reactionary defences against the derisive and vandalistic uses a company might make of a writer's text. (Fowler, 2014, p. 210)

In other words, negative reaction to the production was characterised as a failing of those watching, rather than those making the piece of theatre, and their unwillingness/inability to make the meanings of it that were accessible to Cartelli and Fowler. In doing so, they appear to also be suggesting a fault on the part of the audience and critics, and homogenised the critics and audiences into one reactionary body.

Fowler, in particular, attacked those critics who did not like the production as conservative; critics were 'blinkered' and 'reactionary', unable to grasp what was intended by the 'radical' company:

The pathways opened up in their work eluded traditional evaluative formulas structuring the rhetoric of British reviewing and what constitutes "proper" Shakespeare' (Fowler, 2014, p. 209).

Fowler raises the spectre of 'proper' Shakespeare, and the negative reaction to the production was for him due to a flouting of those conventions. Critics were thus positioned by Fowler as custodians of tradition. Yet both Fowler and Cartelli conflated the negative reviews of critics with audience members who walked out, and both suggest that if those watching had been more aware of the different source material that The Wooster Group were mediating the play through, then the experience would have been altogether a more satisfying one.

The perceived narrow-mindedness of audience members, their conservatism, that they were not 'creative spectators' (Fowler, 2014, p. 229), was found to be at fault here. The implication is that some in the audience would have preferred a production that conformed more to an idea of what a 'Shakespearean' production should be. By now it will have become clear that I reject Fowler and Cartelli's analyses; much of the commentary surrounding the production suggested disappointment at a production that had failed to 'work' rather than anger that it wasn't sufficiently

‘Shakespearean’, and most critics seemed well aware of the previous work and aesthetic of The Wooster Group when writing their reviews. Some of the criticism was undoubtedly proprietorial towards Shakespeare and ideologically coded, particularly when focussing on the ‘poor’ quality of the verse-speaking, but it is also possible that audiences and critics did not enjoy the production for a wide variety of reasons beyond a perception that it was not ‘Shakespeare’. The negative reactions to the production from critics may have been ideological, therefore, but so were Fowler and Cartelli’s responses, and they based their critiques on a series of generalising assumptions about Stratford audiences and those reviewing the production. Just as mainstream critics responded antagonistically to the production, so commentators such as Fowler reductively characterised those who rejected it as conservative.

It is within such a context that Doran was appointed, and it demonstrates in part why I wish to reject a simplistic conservative/radical dichotomy in the consideration of Doran’s work. In the case of *Troilus and Cressida*, The Wooster Group were arguably conservative in their adherence to their own traditions and aesthetic and failed to engage productively with a new and challenging performance context. In this case, perceived radicalism, I would argue, resulted in a kind of conservatism, but the site of performance, the Royal Shakespeare Company, and the radical reputation of the visiting company, unhelpfully framed critical discussion of the production. In the case of Fowler and Cartelli’s analyses, it meant positioning the audiences of Stratford-upon-Avon as a reactionary force resisting the deconstructive agenda of The Wooster Group.

This is not to deny that the audience that Cartelli and Fowler describe does not exist. In an anecdote which has become a marker of historic Stratfordian conservatism,⁶⁵ Beauman recounts how a stuffed stag killed on the nearby Charlecote estate was used in the 1879 Shakespeare Memorial Theatre production of *As You Like It* and soon became a recurring feature of each subsequent revival of the play. When Nigel Playfair rejected the stag in 1919 in a production otherwise notable for being uncut (similarly against the then Stratford tradition) he describes receiving the following reaction in Stratford:

⁶⁵ Hodgdon also describes the same incident in *The Shakespeare Trade* (see Hodgdon, 1998, p. 212).

‘Outside the theatre’, Playfair wrote, ‘the storm raged, and it attained a ferocity I would hardly have thought possible. When I came into my hotel... people turned their backs and got up and walked from the room... The rest of the cast fared little better; they were cut and cold-shouldered everywhere. When Lovat Fraser (the designer) was walking in the street, a woman came up to him and shook her fist in his face. “Young man,” she said impressively, “how dare you meddle with our Shakespeare?”’

(Beauman, 1982, p. 66)

Such behaviour seems comical now, but it also reflects a perceived limiting influence that Stratford-upon-Avon itself, or at least the people who live in it and visit it, can exert upon the parameters of Shakespearean performance. As Adler argues:

The very fact that the RSC’s artistic center is also Shakespeare’s birthplace offers another challenge to the company. Many tourists attending Shakespearean plays in Stratford expect to see them rendered in an “authentic” way. They anticipate a rousing Elizabethan costume/drama, but what they envision is a nineteenth-century-style production of Shakespeare – which is no more historically accurate or appropriate than one set in a contemporary milieu.

(Adler, 2001, p. 10)

This is a generalisation, but there are undoubtedly some who view themselves as stakeholders and consider it their role to police the company’s aesthetic.⁶⁶ The irony, as Adler suggests, is that the ideal to which productions are being unfavourably compared is in fact a Victorian rather than a historicist Shakespearean one.

Adler links the proprietorial attitude of some towards the RSC explicitly with the site of the institution, and of Shakespeare’s birth. Since David Garrick’s Stratford Jubilee of 1769 the birthplace of Shakespeare, Stratford-upon-Avon, has been central to the evolution of Bardolatry, the quasi-religious veneration of Shakespeare, a journey mapped by Graham Holderness in *The Shakespeare Myth*:

Garrick’s 1769 Shakespeare Jubilee, the great formal inauguration of Bardolatry as a national religion... ‘marks the point at which Shakespeare stopped being regarded as an increasingly popular and admirable dramatist, and became a god’ (Deelman, p.7).

(Holderness, 1988, p. xi)

As Holderness, Chambers (2004) and others have documented, the establishing of a regular site for Shakespearean productions in the town has been accompanied by Stratford’s emergence as a focal point for the cultural production of ‘Shakespeare’. Hawkes notes that

⁶⁶ For an example of this, see Margaret Yorke’s account of her years of play-going in Stratford, in which she proprietorially conflates her personal aesthetic preferences with the quality of the company’s output over several decades (Yorke, 1997).

...the notion of birthplace, or seat of origin, as somehow a location of special sanctity and source, ultimately of authority and authenticity, is a crucial matter. The example of Bethlehem is the most obvious of many. For if birthplaces can be said to fix, formulate and guarantee forever, they can stand as major fortifications against flux. They can be said to make us what we 'really' are, and to promise that nothing ever 'really' changes. Locating Shakespeare firmly and finally in Stratford is, like placing God in his heaven and the Queen on her throne, curiously comforting.

(Hawkes, 1992, p. 49-50)

For Hawkes, Shakespeare's Birthplace performs a key function in the making, and reinforcing of, dominant values. The formation of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre in 1879 (later becoming the RSC in 1961) and the founding of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust in 1847 combine with the merchandising, souvenirs and tours to promote and normalise their particular versions of Shakespearean authority, though, as Hodgdon notes in her vivid account of Stratford-upon-Avon and its many sites of 'Shakespeareanism', the relationship between the Birthplace Trust and the RSC has occasionally seemed semi-detached, even competitive (see Hodgdon, 1998, pp. 193-94, 199-200).

The opening of the Globe Theatre reconstruction on the South Bank in London in 1997 has challenged this narrative, contesting Shakespearean authority with Stratford on geographical grounds, as the site of Shakespeare's *work*. Comparing the Globe to other reconstructed playhouses abroad, Cornford notes that the 'inherent suitability of these theatres for Shakespeare is their *credo*: they claim to bring his plays home' (Cornford, 2010, p. 319); the South bank reconstruction, therefore, has an architectural, historical and geographical claim to Shakespeare in performance that Stratford cannot compete with. The RSC is not immune to its own experiments with structural responses to Shakespearean authority, and I will consider the architecture of the RSC's main performance spaces in due course, but for the present I shall observe that the nature of the new Globe Theatre's claim to an authority of Shakespearean performance has a very different theatrical remit. The organisation negotiates a similar set of commercial, academic and artistic pressures as the RSC,⁶⁷ but the Globe's archaeological status and initial focus on 'original practices' established it as a very different type of concern. This practice encompassed a wide-ranging exploration of the use of early modern materiality and practice in contemporary

⁶⁷ The Globe is not funded on a continuous basis by the Arts Council, unlike the RSC, and so is more dependent on audience revenue and private fundraising.

Shakespearean performance, encompassed action, design, props, costume, music, the actor-audience relationship and the interaction with the performance space itself.⁶⁸ The development of this approach (and the problems with it) have been critiqued by Cornford (2010), Lopez (2008), Karim-Cooper (2012) and others and as such need not detain us here, particularly as the practice is far from universally enforced, except to observe that aesthetically and ideologically it places the South Bank theatre in very different territory from the RSC. A key element of The Globe's rationale is reconstructive and investigative; the RSC's is primarily theatrical and has always rejected historicist attempts at reconstruction through performance. This divergence means that the Globe's identity is a distinct one from the RSC's, and though both institutions place rhetorical emphasis on Shakespearean authority, in practice that manifests itself aesthetically and conceptually in completely different ways.

Trying to define precisely what the RSC's aesthetic tradition is, is problematic, however, because there are actually several inheritances to invoke, and because the company has always been a collection of artists working within a particular context rather than to a common set of aesthetic ideals. There have, however been trends within the company, which have largely been contingent on the artistic directorship and the wider politics of the institution at the time. To gain some sense of how these contexts have shaped performance outcomes, it is first necessary to briefly examine the early years of the organisation.

There was, according to Chambers, no doctrine demanding an overall company performance style, more a loose aesthetic framework:

The RSC was not searching for one particular style but, in the process of refining its work within certain common aesthetic guidelines determined by Hall, it produced a recognisable style as a consequence.

(Chambers, 2004, p. 13)

So in practice, a 'house' style tended to emerge, though it was not universally enforced. The brutalist, metallic scenery and meticulously realistic props that characterised Hall and John Barton's History Cycle was a departure from the Stratford aesthetic of the 1950s, but it was only one of many aesthetic styles employed in the early years, even if it is the one that has historically

⁶⁸ See Carson, 2008, pp. 29-34 for a more detailed outline of the parameters of the project.

defined that particular chapter in the company's history. This particular aesthetic was in fact influenced as much by the Brechtian aesthetic of the Berliner Ensemble, which Hall had encountered when the Ensemble visited London in 1956, and the writings of the Polish critic Jan Kott,⁶⁹ as it was by traditions of Shakespearean performance in Stratford-upon-Avon prior to 1961. Mazer argues that

Barton and Hall were committed to "Berliner Ensemble naturalism" which had characterized the Hall/Barton *The War of the Roses* (1963): "if a messenger came on from a presumed journey then he must have conspicuous mud on his boots" (Beauman, 292, quoting Terry Hands).

(Mazer, 1996, p. 159)

The History Cycle both exemplified this particular aesthetic, but also it was an occasion when

...Hall used his work as a way of engaging with questions of national culture, [...] his political and artistic lives collided to create powerful statements about both Shakespeare and the present.'

(Hampton-Reeves, 2013, p. 59).⁷⁰

According to Mazer, the end of Hall's tenure and the new leadership of Trevor Nunn in 1968 heralded a shift from the sparse yet specific naturalism of Hall to more overtly theatrical modes of representation, exemplified by Brook's production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1970).

Despite the search for aesthetic unity implied by Chambers and Mazer, the sheer volume of work meant that Hall could not exert complete creative control over the company's output. Chambers argues that the first critically successful production of this period, Clifford Williams' *Commedia dell'arte* staging of *Comedy of Errors* in 1962, was disliked immensely by Hall (see Chambers, 2004, pp. 22-23). This was ironic as, according to Kenneth Tynan, the production meant that 'Peter Hall's troupe has developed, uniquely in Britain, a classical style of its own.' (Tynan in Chambers, 2004, p. 23). For Tynan, it vindicated Hall's radical reorganisation and creation of an ensemble despite Hall's disapproval.

The one constant that Hall applied from the beginning was the foregrounding of verse-speaking as a high priority for the emerging company, structuring the company around continuing training for

⁶⁹ His landmark text, *Shakespeare our Contemporary* (Kott, 1964), reconfigured Shakespeare's plays through the lens of the atrocities of 20th century history.

⁷⁰ For a more detailed description of the politics and aesthetic of Hall and Barton's History Cycle, see Hampton-Reeves, 2013 pp. 60-64.

the actors working there in an effort to meet the demands that he believed Shakespearean texts presented. In this, and in his many pronouncements on the subject since, Hall has continued to place verse-speaking, and his particular version of verse-speaking, as a key concern in the effective production of Shakespearean texts, creating a powerful aesthetic legacy for his successors to negotiate.

Hall's achievements were large in scale and rapid in implementation. There was a substantial increase in the volume of work produced and by 1962 the RSC were the largest theatre company in the world with nearly 500 employees producing 24 productions. He brought the RST stage out over the orchestra pit (see Addenbrooke, 1974, pp. 43-44) to create a stronger relationship between the performers and the audience and asked John Barton to oversee the training and development of verse-speaking within the company.

However, Hall's reorganisation never resolved the critical tensions that have characterised commentaries and critiques of the company ever since. Despite Hall's aim that the new company should be a break with the traditions of the past, in practice it was in the same place, used the same theatre and employed many of the same people. Crucially it also had the same audiences, in which a sometimes vocal minority aggressively positioned themselves as custodians of the company. As Chambers notes:

The baggage of Bardolatry was carried by actors, audience, academics and critics alike, a formidable alliance that not only demanded Shakespeare be produced 'properly' but was prepared to police productions deemed to fall beyond the pale. (Chambers, 2004, p. 116)

The competing demands of different stakeholders that I have discussed here (scholarly critics, mainstream reviewers, the residents of Stratford-upon Avon) create a context for the theatrical work of the Royal Shakespeare Company that is often contradictory. All seem to base their proprietorial arguments for what the RSC should be on their perceptions of what they would like 'Shakespeare' to be, but this ground is heavily contested. This is quite apart from the financial pressures and sometimes competing demands of ticket sales, government priorities and funding

bodies,⁷¹ which exert their own sets of pressures. Even if this creates a challenging context for the company to operate in, it is also clear that leadership can, and does, shift the parameters of what ‘Shakespeare’ is at Stratford. Hall achieved substantial changes in the kinds of work that the RSC was staging, and when the leadership passed to Trevor Nunn, there was a more evolutionary shift, but a shift nonetheless.

As can be seen from the above, if Stratford-upon-Avon is a site of Shakespearean authority, then the Royal Shakespeare Company and the company that preceded it have become a space where that authority is asserted and contested. Following Peter Hall’s dynamic and high profile leadership, however, the artistic director of the institution has become in themselves a figure in whom Shakespearean authority can reside, and where it can be challenged. If verse-speaking and the production’s aesthetic are to be assigned value according to their proximity to notional Shakespearean ideals in the eyes of many stakeholders, then it becomes apparent that the director’s approach to these elements of the *mise en scène* becomes a critical tool by which the relative merits of any individual occupying that post can be judged. I will therefore close this chapter by briefly outlining the approaches of those who have, in my judgement, done most to shape, reaffirm, and occasionally challenge, the parameters of Shakespearean performance in Stratford since the company’s formation just over fifty years ago. The roles that key figures at the RSC, from Peter Hall to Michael Boyd, have occupied, and the artistic and structural legacies they have left behind, shape the traditions and expectations that Doran must now negotiate. Understanding them is therefore key to this analysis.

⁷¹ Chambers (2004) writes extensively on this, but as this thesis is largely concerned with aesthetics, practice and Shakespearean authority, I consider a detailed examination of commercial, legislative and industrial pressures on the institution as beyond the scope of this study.

The artistic inheritance

In Peter Barnes' play *Jubilee*, directed by Doran in the Swan Theatre in 2001, the actor David Garrick has a dream visitation from three spectral figures:

Hands' Voice	I can't see anything, Trevor.
Nunn's Voice	You should feel comfortable, Terry. It's as dimly lit as one of your productions.
Hall's Voice	Audience can never see a damn thing, even if they wanted to.
Hands' Voice	Directors always walk into rooms voice first, Peter. (Barnes, 2001, pp. 29-30)

This tetchy exchange between former artistic directors of the RSC Terry Hands, Trevor Nunn and Peter Hall humorously refers to Hands' habit of lighting (and under-lighting) his own productions. The scene goes on to refer to the 'worldwide Shakespeare industry' (p. 30) that they all have to thank Garrick for creating, before touching on Nunn's parsimony and Hall's failed attempts at a cinematic career. The dialogue highlights both that each artistic director of the RSC possessed defining traits by which they were well known, and that these characteristics were identifiable enough to Stratford audiences that several years later Barnes felt he could satirise them gently, or at the very least play an insider's joke that enough of the audience could appreciate to make it worthwhile. Barnes' play (and Doran's staging) also added another familiar trope which had come to define the various heads of the RSC: the artistic director as an aloof, remote and intimidating figure.

I have no wish to duplicate the achievements of others, in particular Addenbrooke (1974) and Chambers (2004), whom I draw upon extensively over the following pages, and there is insufficient space here to include the full breadth of each holder of the artistic directorship's' accomplishments. I also must include, as I consider them to have made significant contributions to the company's artistic development, a small number of other figures who have adopted positions of artistic leadership within the institution. What follows then is a brief summary of the main political and artistic legacies that each of them has left behind, insofar as they have shaped the RSC as it is today and therefore set the context for Doran's artistic directorship. In particular, following on from my

previous assessment of the particular challenges that the company faces in this environment, I will focus on their approaches to *mise en scène*, including verse-speaking, drawing attention to innovation and deviation from Stratfordian and Shakespearean tradition as and when appropriate.

Peter Hall (Artistic Director 1960-1967)

I have already outlined how Peter Hall was the driving force behind the creation of the company in its current form, serving as its artistic director until 1967. Building on the substantial reputation of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, he successfully married that organisation's Shakespearean authority with a new adventurism, combining political relevance with theatrical ambition. He created an ensemble of actors on long term contracts and supported them with a programme of training and professional development. He established a London presence at the Aldwych Theatre, developed a new writing programme within the company, and created a sustainable economic future for the organisation by successfully lobbying for substantial public subsidy.

He also created a model which every artistic director until Michael Boyd was to follow, the one parodied by Barnes and Doran in *Jubilee*. Hall was a highly visible leader for the company in the heroic mode, leading by example and working a punishing schedule that ultimately led to his early relinquishment of the post due to ill health in 1967. Maintaining a high profile in the mass media, he enjoyed a substantial level of celebrity and came to define the company that he built in the public eye. This visibility gave him a political platform from which to argue for the company's centrality to English theatre, but it also led to the establishment of the trope that sees the artistic director positioned as an all-powerful commander of the theatre, a perception that has both empowered and constrained holders of the post ever since.

It is in his attitude to text and particularly verse that Hall describes his legacy as most profoundly felt. Educated at Cambridge, where he claims he learned how to speak verse from George Rylands and the Marlowe Society and how to analyse the text from F.R Leavis, Hall states that he

... matured in the middle of two entirely opposing philosophies... Leavis taught me that theatre needed social commitment if it was to be at all necessary... Rylands taught me that theatre needed form if it was to be capable of speech.

(Hall, 2003, p. 189)

As Corder notes in a recent article for *Shakespeare Survey*, Hall has often recounted a semi-mythologised lineage of his views, lending them authority. This traces his particular approach to verse from William Poel via Rylands back through Kean, Garrick and Betterton through to

Shakespeare (see Cordner, 2013, pp. 113-114). Cordner problematises the ‘implausibly gigantic chronological leaps’ (p.114) that this would require, as well as detailing the many inconsistencies between rhetoric and practice that feature throughout Hall’s high-profile career. The effect is to cast doubt on the legitimacy of the inheritance that Hall bequeaths and on the validity of his insistence that there is a correct way of performing Shakespearean verse.

It is undoubtedly an approach that has evolved over the years and hardened to the extent that he now proudly identifies himself as an ‘iambic fundamentalist’ (Hall, 2003, p. 209),⁷² his rhetoric foregrounding the importance of form far more didactically than textual analysis. Initially, though, his emphasis was on moving the company to a text-centric approach which resisted sub-textual readings.

Emphasis was placed on verse speaking from the outset, as Hall wished to have a company with the idea of acting ‘based on the word first and the Method second’. He felt that modern actors had spent much of their time at drama schools learning to play a meaning ‘underneath the text, instead of learning to illuminate the meaning of the text itself’.... ‘We want to tell you about ends of lines, about alliteration, about rhyme, about the form of the verse, the nature of verse, and verse speaking as a craft. We want you to think about these things in rehearsal in creative terms.’

(Addenbrooke, 1974, p. 43)

Thus, from the RSC’s creation, the idea was embedded in the company that directors and actors should consider the *form* of the verse, the manner in which it is written as well as the words themselves, as central to the rehearsal process and creative decision-making that would follow.

Hall subsequently went on to found and run the National Theatre for fifteen years, and has since enshrined his views on verse in writing, which are now far more restrictive than they once were. For example, when directing *Antony and Cleopatra* at the National Theatre in 1987, he seems to have believed that allowing the actor to breathe mid-line on a caesura was permissible:

Breathe where there is a full stop – at the end of the line, or in the caesura breaks;
sometimes you’ll have to take an imperceptible breath in between.

(Hall in Lowen, 1990, p. 28)

Yet by 2003 he was writing that

Breaths whether small or substantial should only be taken at the end of the line.

⁷² Accordingly to Holland, the phrase has been appropriated by Hall, but was originally meant as criticism by the actor Hugh Quarshie, who featured in Hall’s RSC production of *Julius Caesar* (1995) (see Holland, 1997, pp. 4-5).

(Hall, 2003, p. 29)

This inconsistency may seem a trivial evolution in his thinking, but Hall's guide to verse speaking speaks of absolute rules, and an 'easily learned technique' (Hall, 2003, p. 13), implying that good practice is fixed in perpetuity. The 'correct' way to speak verse is, according to Hall, structurally embedded by Shakespeare in the text and can only be extracted by one who knows how. It is a process which his years of experience have given him insight into and has been ratified by his authority as the former artistic director of both the RSC and the National Theatre. As Hall's approach has become more didactic, so have the actors who subscribe to it become fewer in number, leading Hall to pessimistically assert that

There are some fifty actors who practise this technique in Britain and there are a handful of directors. Many of this select band are of the older generation and know how to do it simply because they performed so much Shakespeare in their youth.

(Hall, 2003, p. 13)

Hall's definition of this 'technique' is of course a narrow one, and it is his technique, not Shakespeare's, but through his status as a 'Great Shakespearean' and founder of the Royal Shakespeare Company, and his later publication of his views, he has bestowed considerable authority upon it. Hall has, in effect, attempted to make his technique 'Shakespearean'.

John Barton (1960-)

John Barton's influence in the rehearsal and performance of Shakespeare is widely acknowledged, and for most of the RSC's life he has been at the heart of its formulation of policy and training towards Shakespeare's language and how to perform it. Hall invited Barton to join the company almost immediately upon his own appointment. As well as directing for the company Barton was given the remit of developing a cohesive approach to speaking verse for the embryonic company, and he is still there today, albeit in an occasional, advisory capacity. His television series and book *Playing Shakespeare* (1984) are a mature expression of the views that he developed there, and suggest a variety of strategies for performing Shakespeare's language which have influenced a generation of actors and theatre-makers. It is noticeable, though, that by comparison with Hall's *Shakespeare's Advice to the Players* (Hall, 2003) it is a thoroughly un-dogmatic work, that through a series of workshops with leading actors seeks pragmatically to find a consensus of approach. Barton leads the process, but he undoubtedly takes his actors with him, and talks respectfully of 'marrying the two traditions' (see Barton, 1984, pp. 6-24) of the verse and the play on the one hand and the psychology of the character on the other:

First there's Shakespeare's text written at a particular time and for particular actors...
Secondly there are the actors today with their modern habit of mind and their different acting tradition, based on the kind of text they're more used to:

(Barton, 1984, p. 8)

Barton's verse work with the company has ranged from the general cast workshop to remedial work with specific actors. A director of considerable note himself, he staged a series of highly acclaimed Shakespearean productions during the first two decades of the company's life and continued to adapt and direct until the mid-1990s. Now he occupies the position of Advisory Director and still regularly facilitates workshops and gives advice within the organisation.

Barton has been a hugely influential figure for Doran and has been a regular presence in Doran's rehearsals throughout the latter's career; he has regularly been invited into Doran's rehearsal room to give workshops (as he does for other RSC productions) and Doran speaks of him with enormous respect. Barton wields the authority his years of experience at the RSC have given him lightly, though, as outlined in an interview he gave to *The Guardian* in 2006:

...while I don't want to be a spectre haunting the RSC, I try to be of help. I'm very close to Greg Doran and told him, after I'd seen his *Midsummer Night's Dream*, that I found it over-inventive and a bit inhuman in places. We had a very open, civilised discussion about it and I think Greg went back and changed certain details. So, although I'm an advisory director, I only try and offer advice when it can be of use.

(Billington, 2006)

Barton's role, as well as delivering the obligatory verse workshop, has now evolved to that of a trusted *Consigliere*, able to offer candid advice about a production which Doran then apparently proceeds to act upon.

Peter Brook (1946-1978)

Peter Brook was never artistic director of the RSC, though he was arguably as central to the company's artistic success in its early years as Hall was.⁷³ Though it was the latter who had the organisational vision to drive through radical structural change it was arguably Brook who did more to cement the company's reputation as a centre of theatrical daring and excellence. Brook had enjoyed a successful start to his career at Birmingham Repertory Theatre before attracting critical attention at Stratford with a visually stunning *Love's Labour's Lost* in 1946. He then directed several Shakespeare productions throughout the 1950s for the company, including a hugely influential staging of *Titus Andronicus* with Laurence Olivier and Vivian Leigh in 1955. His first solo contribution to Hall's reconfigured RSC,⁷⁴ *King Lear* in 1962 starring Paul Scofield, demonstrated a theatrical imagination and political engagement with post-war Europe to match Hall's rhetoric about the company.⁷⁵ It was 'a *King Lear* played according to Jan Kott's rules as a Beckettian Endgame in which death rescued Scofield's Lear only from confrontation with an existential void' (Selbourne, 1982, p. xix).

It was Brook's later *Theatre of Cruelty* season in 1964 that cemented the company's position as an ambitious and experimental one, though. Inspired by the writings of Antonin Artaud, this was an investigative series of workshops led by Brook that developed into public performances (in London rather than Stratford) and culminated in the staging of Peter Weiss' controversial *Marat/Sade* in August 1964. The achievements, and subsequent reputation, of the production were such that when the RSC sought to commemorate the company's 50th Anniversary in 2011, it staged a revival of the play, this time directed by Anthony Neilson. What was once exciting and transgressive, however, had now become a part of the company's nostalgic Birthday celebrations. Despite the production's attempts to distance itself from this sanctioning by the theatrical establishment, through unorthodox

⁷³ Brook was actually invited to serve in a ruling triumvirate in 1962 alongside Hall and Michel Saint-Denis, who was recruited to oversee actor training and development alongside Barton. Saint-Denis set up an experimental studio for the company; but it was short lived and closed in 1966 due to budgetary restrictions, after which Saint-Denis drifted away from the company and died in 1971.

⁷⁴ Brook had co-directed *The Tempest* with Clifford Williams the previous year.

⁷⁵ See Holland, 2013b, pp. 38-41 for an account of the production's influences and critical reception which notes the influence of Beckett and Kott on the production.

rehearsal methods,⁷⁶ references to contemporaneous events such as the Arab Spring, and explicit sexual content, the production met with mixed reviews.⁷⁷ Although Brook's original production also featured transgressive sexual acts, the politics of the time configured such acts as a rebellion against authority and conformity; removed from this context and reconfigured as a reproduction of 'classic' theatre, Neilson's efforts were arguably doomed to failure.

Brook's theatrical adventurousness was married to further political radicalism in 1966 when his devised anti-Vietnam war drama *US* was staged at the Aldwych Theatre, marking the RSC as a theatre company of protest. Brook's defining Shakespearean production for the company, though, was his staging of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in 1970. Training his cast in circus skills as part of a gruelling rehearsal process, the resultant production's playful theatricality and extensive aerial work led to a production of such exuberance and joy that decades later Peter Holland was able to write of seeing it:

I came out three hours later dancing across the lawn in front of the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, filled with more joy than any other theatre performance has given me, before or since.

(Holland, 2013b, p. 9)

The production, likewise celebrated in Styan's *The Shakespeare Revolution* (1984), if in slightly less personal terms, has left a legacy to which subsequent revivals are often unfavourably compared. Barbara Hodgdon notes its canonical status below, describing how it was

...widely acclaimed as *the* theatrical event of the decade and subsequently mythologized (by John Styan) as the culminating moment of a "Shakespeare revolution," ensuring its canonical status.

(Hodgdon, 1996, p. 74)

All *Dreams* which follow at Stratford are therefore received in relation to Brook's. This is further complicated in more recent commentary by the distance of time, as many who write approvingly of the status of Brook's production cannot possibly have seen it.⁷⁸ In such cases, it is the reputation of Brook's *Dream* which begins to take precedence over the actuality.

⁷⁶ I have spoken to two actors that were working at the RSC at the time regarding this, one of whom was in it, and both of whom shall remain anonymous. Neilson employed a rehearsal process which challenged several norms of appropriate behaviour in an attempt to get the cast to behave as transgressively as possible, including sending them out on shoplifting exercises and encouraging them to stage a riot on the riverside area next to the RST.

⁷⁷ See Billington, 2011b; Carnegy, 2011; Dickson, 2011; Cavendish, 2011.

⁷⁸ I include myself in this category, having been born in 1971.

Brook left soon after to establish his own company in Paris and only returned once more to Stratford in 1978 to direct *Antony and Cleopatra*, but his legacy set standards for theatrical innovation and excellence in the company's history which it arguably has never surpassed.

Trevor Nunn (Artistic Director 1967-1977)

Like Hall, a young man when he became artistic director,⁷⁹ Nunn had come to prominence following his production of *The Revengers' Tragedy* (1966);

The Revenger's Tragedy displayed a number of qualities that seem to me to remain constant features of Nunn's work: telling stage images, a vivid theatricality, an emphasis on storytelling, a simple but striking setting and a boldness in seeking contrasting but distinct and defined 'moods' (what Nunn calls 'turning on a sixpence')

(White, 2008, p. 286)

Now more famous as the director of a series of commercially successful West End musicals, during his tenure at the RSC he initially became known for coaxing brilliant and detailed performances from his actors (like Hall, his preference for close textual analysis was influenced by Leavis whilst at Cambridge), as well as a confident and ambitious theatricality in his staging.

Colin Chambers characterised the shift in emphasis between the two men thus:

In reaction to Hall's signature style – a puritan realism accompanying a new public and political inquiry, which had been a response to the cloying richness of the enclosed 1950s theatre – the company under Nunn kept the social backdrop in sight but turned to a more private and personal scrutiny, a more romantic speaking style and a sharper, more intensive use of colour.

(Chambers, 2004, p. 61)

Nunn also altered the ensemble system, reducing the length of actors' contracts from three years to two. His main structural innovation during the 1970s, however, was the opening of the company's permanent⁸⁰ studio theatre in Stratford, The Other Place (TOP), in 1974. Designed to provide a smaller theatrical space in which the energy and experimentalism of the fringe could flourish at the RSC, Nunn originally placed the talented and politically committed young director Buzz Goodbody in charge (see Chambers, 1980, pp. 7-14), though her suicide in 1975 meant that her tenure was tragically short-lived. Ron Daniels took over the theatre soon afterwards, though the production that most defined the company during this period, and is perhaps the most important from this period in terms of legacy to the company that Doran inherited in 2012, was Nunn's staging of *Macbeth* in TOP in 1976. Featuring Ian McKellen and Judi Dench in the title roles, the production

⁷⁹ Hall had been 29, Nunn was 28.

⁸⁰ There had been a series of experiments with temporary, small-scale performance spaces and touring, mostly in London (see Chambers, 1980), but TOP was the first attempt to create a permanent, smaller space in Stratford.

utilised the claustrophobia and intimacy of TOP to powerful effect. The production was filmed and became, in a manner analogous to Brook's *Dream*, the production that all subsequent RSC productions of *Macbeth* are compared critically against. It also developed a trend, which had begun with Buzz Goodbody's *Hamlet* (1975), that would increasingly see Shakespeare staged more frequently in the company's smaller spaces, supplanting less commercial programming in the process.

Nunn's tenure continued to be marked by critical successes, though the increasing demands of the expanding organisation meant that from 1977 onwards he shared the post of Artistic Director with Terry Hands.

Cicely Berry (1969-)

Along with John Barton, voice coach Cicely Berry still remains a member of the organisation's leadership and as such is a figure of continuity with the RSC's past achievements. Initially appointed by Nunn on a part-time basis in 1969, her work became increasingly central to the company throughout the 1970s, and still underpins the general approach to voice work at the company. At the time of writing as with Barton, her involvement is restricted due to age and mainly takes the form of occasional workshops, though she retains a formal association as an Honorary Associate Artist. This press release from the company announcing the company's fiftieth anniversary celebrations demonstrates the celebrity that attends Barton and Berry's occasional appearances and the authority that they both possess:

The pedagogy at the heart of the RSC makes us unlike any other theatre company. The two geniï responsible for the RSC's unique position are John Barton and Cicely Berry. Their work on text and on the voice are the pillars on which the RSC is built. As part of a weekend conference on training for classical theatre in the 21st century they will lead an open workshop with actors and voice specialists giving a unique insight into their work and practice.

(Royal Shakespeare Company, 2011, p. 12)

Berry has been a hugely influential figure both within the company and without. First emerging as a voice coach on Brook's production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, she later published a guide to developing the voice (*Voice and the Actor* (Berry, 1973)) that has become a canonical text in actor training:

I would argue that *Voice and the Actor*, together with the approaches to voice and text that it introduces, has been as pivotal in the history of Shakespearean performances in the twentieth century as the production that provided its impetus – Brook's *Dream*.

(Knowles, 1996, p. 95)

Berry's key thesis (alongside her more technical emphasis on the mechanics of effective voice production) is that language, and particularly Shakespearean language, carries emotional content in the sound it makes when it is articulated, and that by opening up to the potential of those sounds the actor can 'release' this content. Her rhetoric speaks of empowerment and freedom of expression for the actor, and has become common currency in the wider vocabulary of voice work. This is characterised by Knowles as an approach which emphasises the text's universality rather than its status as a specific and historicised construct. As such it is de-politicised:

This construction of freedom feeds both the individual /universal vs. the social/historical axis, and the construction of Shakespearean essentialism that the RSC inherited from Leavis's Cambridge. In doing so, it prescribes a certain range in which an actor's choices can be made, a range circumscribed by conceptions of character (human and dramatic), of dramatic texts, and of Shakespeare, that are ideologically coded...

(Knowles, 1996, p. 100)

Knowles therefore characterises the actor in receipt of Berry's training as essentially passive and a vessel for a series of ideological assumptions masquerading as 'universal truths'. Sarah Werner goes further, suggesting that Berry's techniques are nostalgic and deny political engagement as a result:

Although the focus is on a psychological as opposed to a historically based primitivism, an unmistakable result of this drive towards the innocent and primitive version of the self is a naturalization of the good old days, those mythical days in the past when we were more in touch with our emotions and closer to the very origins of language.

(Werner, 1996, p. 250)

It is worth noting that Berry angrily rejects this charge, writing in reply to Werner:

I find the inference that the notion that 'freeing the self and the voice distances the actor from any kind of political action' to be outrageously offensive: it is in total opposition to anything I have ever said, taught, or believed in.

(Berry, Rodenburg & Linklater, 1997, p. 49)

To some extent, there is an interpretative misunderstanding going on here; Berry understands Werner's interrogation of the ideology encoded in her methods as a political attack and resists accordingly. Werner actually seems to be questioning Berry's rhetoric rather than her practice, which promotes a far more complex engagement between actor, text and meaning than Werner's critique allows for. In the same way that I have previously argued with regard to perceptions of Doran and the RSC, the decision to focus on universalising rhetoric leads to a reductive characterisation of Berry's actual practice.

What is undeniable, though, is that Berry, like Hall and Barton before her, places great emphasis on the 'value' of the Shakespearean text, and that just as Hall believed diligent textual work could uncover its meanings, so Berry believes that rigorous voice work can release its 'truths'. As Knowles alludes to, this rhetoric is embedded in the way that the RSC engage with performance and text, and it still remains common currency at the company today, including, perhaps especially, in the utterances of Doran.

Trevor Nunn & Terry Hands (1977-1987)

As the rapidly expanding organisation moved into the 1980s under joint leadership, so the artistic identity of the RSC began inevitably to weaken. It was still a company capable of ambitious theatrical ventures (Nunn and John Caird's production of *Nicholas Nickleby* (1980), for instance), but as the reach of the company continued to grow, moving first into the Warehouse Theatre in London in 1977 and later the purpose-built Barbican complex in 1982, there was an inevitable dilution of purpose:

... volume of output had become an end product in its own right and was now taken as the norm. Relentless turnover lay at the centre of the process, which was given public cohesion by the potency of the RSC brand name. Yet at the same time, the process was undermining the individual creativity that sustained the brand.

(Chambers, 2004, p. 85)

Nunn increasingly took to directing commercial musical theatre alongside his RSC duties, and his high profile and ability as a West End director later bore profitable fruit for the RSC when the company produced *Les Misérables*, directed by Nunn at the Barbican in 1985. This was a production which survived scathing reviews to achieve worldwide commercial success and is still a source of revenue for the company today.

Before Nunn eventually left the RSC in 1987, leaving Hands in sole stewardship of the company, the RSC opened the third of its Stratford performance spaces, the Swan Theatre. The Swan thrust stage was built to approximate a Jacobean playhouse, and allowed the company's repertoire to be opened up to include more work by Shakespeare's contemporaries which were not seen as able to withstand the commercial realities of the much larger RST.

The legacy of this period artistically also lies in the increase of spectacle, partly associated with Nunn's aesthetic but also with the brash, materialist culture of the 1980s. This, along with the proscenium arch stage of the main house, led to an increasing tendency towards design-led extravagance, and towards conceptualisation.

The 'good night out' principle – that theatre-going in Stratford should be an experience closely modelled on theatre-going in London – resulted in the creation of a general visual style for Shakespearean production in the RSC in the 1980s that was unlike the more specific styles of the RSC in the 1960s and 1970s and more like the styles for London

musicals. The empty stages, massive walls of metal and leather costumes that seemed so distinctively RSC in its earlier phases have their own theatrical roots but they were never to be found in the West End theatre. Minimalism gave way to splendour...

(Holland, 1997, p. 13)

The company, which had always been identified strongly with the directors who ran it, was now increasingly being linked with pictorial production values and high concept, large scale stagings which seemed the epitome of conceptual director and designer-led theatre.

Terry Hands (1987-1991)

Terry Hands, who often designed his own lighting, was also a director capable of considerable visual flair, although his best work at the company was arguably achieved long before he finally became the sole leader of the organisation.⁸¹ By now the tendencies towards spectacle on the main stage and the lack of overall artistic cohesion, coupled with a political narrative driven by the Thatcher government which sought to attack larger arts institutions as a drain on the public purse, led to the perception of an organisation in crisis. As the company's identity became ever more diffuse, so it was difficult in many eyes to sense any core purpose to its activities. Hands' own production of *Julius Caesar* in 1987 was widely criticised, and prompted Michael Billington to pen an open letter to Terry Hands in *The Guardian*, entitled 'Is there a crisis in Shakespearean acting?' (Billington, 1987). It went on to say that he

...was frankly shocked by the rawness – with two shining exceptions – of the company and left pondering what I perceive as a growing crisis in Shakespearean acting in Britain today.
(Billington, 1987)

Billington's tone throughout is more in sorrow than in anger and he blames 'the impoverishment of the arts in this country' and a decline in 'verbal culture' as much as the RSC, but his point is clear as he refers to actors 'losing the ability to relish Shakespeare's irony, ambiguity and play of imagery which was a cardinal feature of Peter Hall's policy in creating the RSC'. In Billington's view, the Royal Shakespeare Company isn't what it used to be, and its perceived decline is located in its ensemble acting and verse-speaking.

The common thread through much press coverage during this time was of an institution in crisis, and reviews of individual productions must be viewed in that light. As Colin Chambers has remarked, the period of Terry Hand's stewardship exhibited

Unevenness of productions, particularly on the main stage of the Barbican, and indecisiveness meant that Hands' judgement was called into question and what might have been hailed as imaginative if better executed either failed to materialise or came across as muddled.

(Chambers, 2004, p. p. 93)

⁸¹ In addition to being sole Artistic Director, he also became the organisation's chief executive.

Referring to the RSC's forty seven productions in 1987, seventeen more than the previous year, Giles Gordon in an article titled 'RSC Days of Malaise' for the *London Daily News* claimed the company's proliferation had resulted in a 'verbal drabness, a thinness of imagination in most of the productions' (Gordon, 1987).

Hands had developed an approach to verse which differed in some respects from Hall's, privileging speed of delivery and the integrity of the thought over the verse line:

I think Shakespeare works much better if we work to the full stop; but also if we work on one breath to that full stop, so that, if the line is three words long, we put the breath there. Or if it's ten lines to the full stop – it's ten lines on a single breath'

(Hands, in Rutter, 2012a, p. 212)

In the interview with Carol Rutter cited above Hands goes on to distance himself from the approach of Hall, Nunn and Barton with regard to verse. In particular he challenges Barton's desire to see some 'colouring' of the words in performance (see Rutter, 2012a, p. 211), an approach that he believes leads to a delivery that is too slow. This not only demonstrates the difficulties inherent in attempting to define the 'rules' of verse-speaking, but Hands' stance raises questions regarding the company's unity on this matter at this time. John Barton was still nominally the person mandated to uphold the company's standards of verse-speaking and was regularly invited into rehearsals for workshops with the cast. The company's policy on the correct way to speak verse, which Hall had attempted to fix, was actually a constantly shifting and evolving set of rules rather than a static prescription.

Hands also claims to have preferred a more improvisatory style of performance.

I wouldn't do blocking. I never do. I don't to this day. You really can't 'block'. Because the way in which Miss A or Mr B speaks and moves is going to be different each time. With 'blocking' you can erase masses of detail, and that detail has to come from the actor. And if you allow them to act freely, it does.

(Hands, in Breen, 2008, p. 166)

This approach appears superficially empowering for the actors, encouraging flexibility in performance and granting the actors a level of agency over their movement. In practice, however, Hands' didactic approach to verse and breathing hints at a more authoritarian style which contrasts strongly with his rhetoric of freedom.

In the case of *Julius Caesar*, Michael Coveney felt the RSC had fielded

... one of the weakest supporting casts ever seen at the RSC. Some of them can hardly utter a line without mumbling and stumbling. The battles and suicides are perfunctorily managed and an appalling mess is made of the death of Cinna, who is, I take it, murdered as much for his bad acting as his bad verses.

(Coveney, 1987)

At such a distance and with only a poor quality VHS video recording from which I have been able to study the production, it is difficult to create a judgment that can agree or disagree with Coveney's assertions, or directly attribute outcomes to Hands' methodology. It is clear from the recording however, that there is little variation in speed or pitch of delivery, and much of the staging appears under-powered and lacking urgency despite the briskness of the verse-speaking.

Adrian Noble (1991-2002)

Like Hands before him, Noble had attained a reputation as a director capable of individual brilliance, but his tenure was increasingly marked by controversy as the tension between commercial reality and artistic integrity that I have already highlighted mired the institution in ever greater difficulties. Noble attempted to restate the company's commitment to its original aims:

What this company needed was for its principles to be restated loud and clear, the principles of classicism, ensemble, the primacy of language and **verse**-speaking. We are not going to be all things to all men. We are not primarily a new play house, although a third of our work is new plays. We are not a manufacturer of musicals. We're the natural home of artists who want to do the classics.

(Noble, in Lewis, 1993)

In practice, though, Noble did little to challenge the design-led aesthetic that had become dominant once more on the main stage. Artistically the company's classical repertoire continued along similar lines to that which had existed under Hands, with occasional brilliance but little sense of company or cohesiveness. Noble personally placed more emphasis on line endings when speaking verse than his immediate predecessor, aligning himself with Hall rather than Hands (see Noble, 2010, pp. 66-80), but there is little evidence to suggest this was in any way enforced or even suggested for other directors working at the company.

Increasingly the company had become a place where productions of theatrical quality happened to take place, rather than an organisation that facilitated such work being made on a regular basis. As Chambers recounts, 'good intentions collapsed under the pressure of ill-prepared plans and the reality contradicted the rhetoric' (Chambers, 2004, p. 96). Noble initially preferred to employ freelance directors and designers rather than retain a group of associates, allowing new directing talent (including Doran) to emerge, but also further diluting the RSC's sense of itself as a company.⁸²

Chambers (2004, pp. 107-111), Gilbert (2002a) and Kidnie (2009, pp. 51-62) have provided compelling accounts of the controversy surrounding Noble's proposed reforms to the company, entitled 'Project Fleet', which he announced in 2001 and which led to his resignation a year later.

⁸² He later reversed his position and appointed a new group of associates in the late 1990s, including Doran.

Intending a more flexible company⁸³, he proposed to radically reduce the number of long term contracts offered to company members and largely terminate the cross-casting policy which was at the heart of the RSC's principles of ensemble, preferring a set of smaller companies operating simultaneously yet independently. He also announced the transformation of The Other Place into a training academy and the demolition of the RST and its replacement with a new performance complex which would be called the 'theatre village'. A coalition of voices came together to oppose the changes, ranging from those reactionary voices horrified by the destruction of a listed building to those who saw in Noble's plans the submergence of the company's artistic identity beneath the weight of commercialism and the RSC 'brand'. The merits or otherwise of individual proposals could not be considered in the escalation of criticism that followed, and calls for Noble's resignation in the press began to appear soon after.

Perhaps reflecting the London-centric attitude of many arts commentators and critics, it was his decision to end the company's long relationship with the Barbican Theatre that seems to have generated the most vociferous response. Preferring to transfer productions to London only when deemed appropriate and then source a venue accordingly, the move has left successful productions reliant on the interest of commercial producers to facilitate a transfer. As a result a number of acclaimed productions over the past decade have closed after their Stratford run without a London afterlife. Hall identified from the beginning the need to have a regular London presence for the company, both in order to attract the best talent, and to establish the RSC as a truly *national* company. By early 2002 the criticism in the press over Noble's reforms had gathered pace, though, according to Kidnie, it was the intervention of an actor with legendary status at the company that sealed his fate:

On 18 April *The Stage* published a letter written by Dame Judi Dench in response to a document circulated by concerned Stratford citizens, in which she writes: 'I applaud your submission to the RSC governors, and you have my wholehearted support. I am deeply worried about what is happening as I know are so many people in the profession.'
(Kidnie, 2009, p. 60)

As Kidnie also notes, 'Noble resigned one week later...' (p. 60)

⁸³ Noble had already experimented with changing the repertoire system between 1996 and 1998, reducing the length of some actors' contracts and reorganising the way Stratford/London was timetabled.

Many of Noble's reforms remained in place, though in the case of the RST the proposal changed to a partial reconstruction which reshaped the interior of the theatre whilst retaining the 1931 Elizabeth Scott façade. It is only since Doran assumed the artistic directorship of the RSC in 2013 that the company has once more started transferring productions to the Barbican, but this is still sporadic and tends to be reserved for the most high profile productions. New plays, if they have transferred (and few have), have done so into the commercial theatre environment of the West End, and plays by Shakespeare's contemporaries, which have enjoyed a revival under Doran's leadership, have largely remained the sole preserve of Stratford audiences.

Michael Boyd (2002-2012)

Michael Boyd was appointed amidst the backlash to Noble's plans, and he immediately set about re-establishing the ensemble principle that Noble had been seen to reject. Boyd had scored a big success with his staging of the *Henry VI* plays and *Richard III* as a part of the 'This England, The Histories' season during Noble's tenure, winning an Olivier Award in the process. This season had staged the entire History Cycle over the course of 2000 to 2001 whilst allowing individual directors and designers to impose their own concepts on the individual plays. The result was an eclectic mix of aesthetic and conceptual approaches, but Boyd's contribution was received triumphantly. On assuming the artistic directorship, Boyd decided to remount the entire Cycle over three years adopting the same structure and aesthetic as he had earlier employed for the *Henry VI* plays. Every artistic director since Hall has defined themselves in part through a staging of the history plays, and Boyd's 'Glorious Moment'⁸⁴ was very much in that tradition.

Boyd's History Cycle was a bold theatrical vision, with a ghostly meta-narrative featuring a series of fathers and sons played by the same actors that recurred throughout (in both corporeal and spiritual form) and emphasised the plays' cyclical nature. A substantial quantity of aerial stunts added to the theatrical excitement, an element of Boyd's stagecraft that along with his emphasis on the otherworldly was to become a recurring trope:

What is the essence of Boyd's style? For a start, a vertical method of staging so that characters make aerial descents like SAS commandos. Boyd also delights in ritual as much as realism, often using bodies in massed ranks.

(Billington, 2007)

Boyd's aesthetic was a distinctive one, as Billington's observation implies. Increasingly, however, his later Shakespearean productions seemed less sure-footed and were less well-received, and he directed only three more plays by Shakespeare for the company.⁸⁵ Of these, *Antony and Cleopatra* suffered scathing reviews, largely due to the perceived miscasting of Kathryn Hunter as the Queen of Egypt. The following was typical:

⁸⁴ The RSC's self-titled description of when audiences were able to see all eight history plays over the course of one weekend.

⁸⁵ They were *As You Like It* (2009), *Antony and Cleopatra* (2010) and *Macbeth* (2011).

The only full-blown tragedy last week was Antony and Cleopatra and, alas, what really makes your eyes water is that this RSC transfer is so gobsmackingly bad. That this clueless, pig's ear of a production is the work of Michael Boyd – the company's artistic director – beggars belief.

(Bassett, 2010)

Boyd had mischievously distanced himself from the house playwright in 2005, claiming 'We've run out of Shakespeare' (Arendt, 2005), and he often appeared content to let Doran be the company's spokesman to the media on matters Shakespearean. Artistically he reinvigorated the new writing programme after the marginalisation of the Noble years (although it remained largely responsive to the core programming rather than having an identity in its own right), brought a sense of internationalism to the RSC through greater links with foreign companies and reinvigorated the company's ensemble ethos with a second three-year company of actors being assembled after the History Cycle had run its course. He also restored the company to profit, having inherited a sizeable deficit from his predecessor.

Boyd's structural achievements were considerable. Inheriting Noble's plans for the destruction of the company's main house, he worked consensually with stakeholders to adapt the site, changing the old proscenium arch theatre into a thrust stage auditorium which reopened in late 2010 and staged full productions again from February 2011. During the period of closure (2007-2010), a temporary thrust stage auditorium and prototype for the new RST, the Courtyard Theatre, was successfully erected and performed in on the site of The Other Place.

Boyd was widely perceived to have inherited a poisoned chalice and a company in peril, and it is generally acknowledged that by the time he stood down in 2012 the company was on much firmer ground both financially and artistically. During Boyd's time in charge, his Chief Associate Director, Gregory Doran, had delivered a series of critically acclaimed productions of plays by Shakespeare and his contemporaries, many of which shall form the basis of my analysis throughout this thesis. Boyd's preoccupations and organisational distractions had sometimes given the impression he was less interested in Shakespeare than his more prolific and high profile colleague. It meant that when Doran was appointed to the Artistic Directorship in 2012 he was able to assert:

Mike re-established as it were, the final letter of our logo, established a real sense of company, C for ensemble.... My focus is on our middle letter, on the Shakespeare.

Doran, in contrast to Boyd, was asserting his credentials, as a 'Great Shakespearean'.

Situation vacant

At the time that Noble's premature departure created a vacancy in 2002 Doran seemed perfectly placed to inherit the reins of the company, yet it was Michael Boyd who was instead to inherit its leadership. Doran had previously denied an interest in the position in an interview with Michael Billington for *The Guardian* (Billington, 2000), despite Billington's best efforts to talk him up for it, but his reluctance to be drawn on his ambitions rested mainly on the qualification that 'the job isn't up for grabs'. Even though his 2000 production of *As You Like It* in the RST had not been a success and was considered by many critics to be a conceptual misfire (in a fairly representative review John Peter of *The Sunday Times* called it 'a hopelessly muddled affair' (Peter, 2000)), it had been surrounded by a run of unqualified hits such as *Macbeth* and *A Winter's Tale*, as well as his 'Jacobethan' season in the Swan (2002). As Billington described it, it was a 'hiccup in a run of success' (Billington, 2000).

The reputation for inconsistency, however, did seem to attach itself to him around this time:

The Observer's Susannah Clapp once described me as the "Goran Ivanisevic of directors". I had no idea what she was talking about, but I realised that in theatre you need to develop an elephant's hide.

(Doran, in Barnett, 2008)

Anyone who follows tennis will recognise this reference as describing an admired player near the top of his profession who often gets to the semi-final or final but rarely wins. On his day he can beat anybody but is thought to lack the consistency and true genius to win a grand slam. Of course, Wimbledon-watchers may remember that in 2001 at the age of 31 (old for a tennis player) Ivanisevic memorably beat Tim Henman in the semi-final and went on to win the championship.

Despite this, and speculation that he might apply in tandem with his partner Antony Sher, Doran was widely touted as the favourite for the role. He did apply solely, but was unsuccessful, and accepted a lesser promotion instead to remain with the company as Chief Associate Director. In 2002 the internal and external politics of the company appeared to demand a more marked change in direction after Noble's botched reforms; if one of the chief criticisms of Noble was his 'self-professed determination to expand the company's commercial operations into an international

market and to exploit the RSC as a ‘global brand’ (Kidnie, 2009, pp. 53-54), then Doran was increasingly associated with that brand through both his theatrical work and public persona in a way that Boyd was not. Although both directors had emerged during the same period, Doran was perceived as the continuity candidate and Boyd was seen as a force for change.

In 2012, the institutional needs were different. Doran had burnished his Shakespearean credentials substantially in the intervening years with a series of popular successes. In particular, Doran had been able to woo a series of high profile actors to the company to star in his productions, including Noble’s arch critic Judi Dench, as well as David Tennant and Patrick Stewart. If Boyd’s lengthy ensemble projects had brought artistic rewards, then Doran’s more starry productions often achieved a higher profile. He also used his own visibility and status within the company to push through projects such as seasons of works by Shakespeare’s contemporaries and a reconstruction of Shakespeare’s lost play *Cardenio* (2011). It meant that when Boyd’s successor was to be chosen, Doran’s reputation balanced commercial success with a seriousness of purpose that made him the obvious choice. If Boyd’s latter Shakespeare productions had been a weakness in the company’s repertoire, it would also ensure that the company’s Artistic Director was also its greatest ‘Shakespearean’.

I do at this stage wish to foreground one other distinction between Boyd and Doran, and between Doran and many of his predecessors. If the Artistic Director is a site of authority at the RSC, and the individuals occupying that post are to some extent judged by how they engage with the house playwright, then Boyd did so in a largely conceptual way. Hall, Nunn, Hands, Noble and Boyd were all directors who asserted the primacy of the director in various manifestations throughout their time leading the company; it was, in many respects, a directors’ theatre. Doran was an actor before he was a director, and he foregrounds in both rhetoric and process the importance of the writer and the actor, eschewing aggressive directorial intervention. Ironically for a director who is perceived as a continuity candidate, Doran is in one important aspect a different kind of director from his predecessors and has set about creating a different kind of theatre company - a theatre in which the actor is foregrounded rather than the director or designer.

Throughout the period that Boyd remained in charge, Doran was regularly portrayed by critics as part of an RSC Shakespearean lineage, in the way that Boyd was not. Two contrasting reviews of Doran's 2004 production of *Othello* in the Swan Theatre clearly demonstrate the inheritance with which Doran must co-exist, and how it has become a critical yardstick by which to judge him:

... the real test is that of director Gregory Doran; and the prize is the crown of the old king of Stratford, Trevor Nunn.

Doran shares Nunn's gift for making every part of the stage, and every actor on it, contribute to the meaning of the play. Like Nunn, he can draw strong, thoughtful performances from actors, and, further, he can revive neglected plays (*King John*, the Jacobean season of two years ago) and make them new. He's got the charm – he's even got the hair.

(Koenig, 2004)

This was in a generally mixed review for *Othello* and the comparison was generally unflattering to

Doran. By contrast, this came from a more positive one:

With these two productions⁸⁶ Gregory Doran has confirmed his growing reputation as one of the finest Shakespearean directors of our time. He is heir to the great tradition built up by John Barton, Peter Hall, and Peter Brook.

(Peter, 2004)

The reputations of Doran's predecessors are here valorised in a line of succession in which Peter now suggests that Doran should take his place.

Following the RSC's 2011 Anniversary season Carol Chillington Rutter collected her review of the season for *Shakespeare Survey* under the rather scathing heading 'Stoopid Shakespeare', a title that leaves one in little doubt regarding her feelings about the productions under consideration.⁸⁷

Leaving aside the merits or otherwise of the three productions she writes about, she is unequivocal in laying the blame for their faults at the doors of the productions' respective directors, whom she sees as having burdened the plays with unwelcome directorial conceits. She concludes her piece with the following paragraph:

For me, then, this RSC anniversary was a dismal wash-out. But by coincidence and as luck would have it, this year I also had conversations with four of the RSC's founder directors. They cheered me up. They approve the new building, are optimistic of the future, are (almost all of them) awesomely generous talking about colleagues. When I moaned, they stopped me. 'The RSC had the Age of the Builders. That finished when Terry Hands left.

⁸⁶ *Othello* and *All's Well that Ends Well* (both 2004)

⁸⁷ They were *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Directed by Nancy Meckler), *Macbeth* (Directed by Michael Boyd) and *The Merchant of Venice* (Directed by Rupert Goold).

Then the Age of the Inheritors (which hasn't worked out very well). The present climate is for self-advertisement in directors. But that will change. That won't be there forever. There's a lot of "concept" about. But it will pass, and the imagination will come back again. Heart, humility and rigour: they'll come back. Another Peter Brook will emerge, somewhere, somehow.' Hopeful, but slightly impatient, I respond: "Bring it on".
(Rutter, 2012b, p. 483)

I do not intend to suggest in this thesis that Doran is 'Another Peter Brook'; he is his own director and has his own preoccupations, strengths and weaknesses. Otherwise, though, his appointment does appear to be at least a partial fulfilment of the predictions of Rutter's sources, which it is worth noting she has cited anonymously in support of her own critical prejudices (which do not include championing Doran). This is especially the case in Doran's rhetorical rejection of the concept of 'concept', and in placing it in opposition to the director's imagination.

Doran is acutely aware both of his inheritance, but also of the transience of theatrical fashion and avoids the absolutist rhetoric of many of his predecessors:

I'm also aware that Shakespeare, if you look at Shakespeare throughout the 20th century every 20 years there's a revolution around how we do Shakespeare. There's a rejection of 50's star led Shakespeare to an ensemble approach under Peter Hall, to designer theatre then rejection of all that then the purity of Peter Brook or the much more conceptual approaches of people like Michael Boyd actually, so there are revolutions.
(Doran, 2014)

Despite, therefore, his rhetorical veneration of Shakespeare, his stated belief in the universality of the text, and his evangelical culturalism, there is no attempt to present his theatrical work as 'Shakespearean' in itself. Doran's work, he recognises, is of its particular time and place. Doran is, in short, an *institutional* director. He is defined by the theatres, history and culture of the company for which he works. The question then arises, how does Doran work within these boundaries, how (if at all) has he challenged them, and has he in any sense altered the landscape for future practitioners and audiences? Doran's professional success suggests that it has been possible for him to work within these boundaries creatively and productively, not by smashing or subverting them, but by using them as a platform from which to build. These are questions and issues which my analysis of Doran's process and aesthetic over subsequent chapters will explore.

Doran's *institutionalisation* at the RSC was recognised by the company in a very particular way in the late 1990s. In an act of symbiosis that to my knowledge no other Artistic Director of the RSC

has shared, Doran became ‘the voice of the recording that for some years had urged patrons to take their seats when the performance was about to begin’ (Ward, 2011, p. 4). Thus a director who has largely developed under the RSC’s auspices and absorbed much of its historical concerns, aesthetics and methodologies had now become an audible part of each performance. This is vividly illustrated in the prompt copy of the Doran-directed production of *Macbeth* in the Swan Theatre. It begins with the instructions ‘Go “Greg”’. This is followed immediately by (presumably when the tannoy announcement had finished and not as a reference to the director’s mortality) ‘End of “Greg”’.

Chapter Two

Henry VIII (1996): A Case Study

***Henry VIII* (1996): A Case Study**

I will now examine in detail the first Shakespearean production that Doran directed for the RSC, which illustrates many of the tropes and concerns that I consider to characterise Doran's theatrical work. In conjunction with a series of other productions in the late 1990s and early 2000s, Doran's staging of *Henry VIII* in the Swan Theatre helped to establish a critical narrative that located Doran's aesthetic within a conservative performance tradition.⁸⁸ As such, my analysis will both demonstrate some of the elements within the production which have given rise to this perception, as well as problematising the assumption that his work automatically sits within such a tradition.

Opening in November 1996, *Henry VIII* was not only the first play by Shakespeare (written in collaboration with John Fletcher) that Doran directed at the RSC and but also his second full production in Stratford after 1992's *The Odyssey*. Designed by Robert Jones, the cast included Paul Jesson as Henry VIII, Ian Hogg as Cardinal Wolsey and Jane Lapotaire as Katherine of Aragon. It also featured Guy Henry in the first of a number of productions for Doran, doubling the role of the Lord Chamberlain with the Chorus.

The production was set in historical dress, which Paul Jesson describes as 'Basically Tudor in inspiration' (1998, p. 119), and featured a number of tropes which some critics associated with 'traditional' Shakespearean production. These included warm, golden lighting emphasised by the natural wooden tones of the Swan, frequent bursts of choral music, impressive pageantry and richly embroidered period costumes. Casting also conformed to the semi-mythologised figures of popular history and drama, with Jesson suitably Holbeinesque, Lapotaire an ascetic Katherine and Ian Hogg every inch the corpulent, bloated Wolsey of collective imagination, as immortalised in Sampson Strong's 1610 portrait for Christ Church College and reinforced by a number of iterations on stage

⁸⁸ *The Merchant of Venice*, staged by Doran in 1997 in the RST, in particular, was similarly criticised as a production that seemed bound by tradition and failed to offer anything original or theatrically exciting. In Chapter Five I will examine the particular engagement of this production with the play's performance history at Stratford, and question this perception. Other productions that faced similar accusations included *All's Well that Ends Well* (2003) and *Taming of the Shrew* (2003).

and screen.⁸⁹ This combination of period setting and casting to type caused some newspaper critics to treat the production dismissively, one memorably referring to it as ‘like a Tudor theme evening at a Beefeater Inn with lots of hands-on-hip acting from noblemen wearing giant berets and gold chains’ (Gore-Langton, 1996) and another describing it on its London transfer as

...stately, hollow, the kind of Heritage “Lite” experience we will probably see in the Millennium Dome.

(Curtis, 1998)

Nicholas de Jongh similarly concluded that it was a ‘...bizarre production... to see a Golden heritage approach seriously adopted in 1996 to this weak chronicle-pageant play... beggars theatrical belief’ (De Jongh, 1996). He goes on to conclude that ‘Doran... tends to take Henry VIII at face value.’

Other newspaper critics were more positive, with appreciation shown for the ‘sumptuous’ (Spencer, 1996) costumes and ‘golden splendour of raiment and ornament’ (Nathan, 1996) that characterised the processional parts of the production, whilst Spencer also commented that ‘the verse speaking is admirably clear’ (Spencer, 1996). It appears that the signifiers of ‘traditional’ Shakespeare that the production exhibited had been seized on by critics in order to promote their own ideological agendas; on the one hand, those who groaned in despair at the ‘traditionalism’ of such a richly upholstered production, and, on the other, those who applauded it as appropriately ‘Shakespearean’.

Doran’s production had clear precedents in the play’s performance history, which has been dominated by lavish staging and pageantry. The play was often heavily cut in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries to allow for extensive ceremonial set pieces (see McMullan, 2000, pp. 17-36), and, by the time Henry Irving staged the play in 1892, it was not deemed exceptional for Irving to cut Acts 4 and 5 in their entirety and to employ an enormous cast to stage a succession of scenes reproducing the ‘pageantry’ of Tudor life. Beerbohm Tree went further in 1910, using 172 participants in a series of vast set pieces of ‘immense opulence’ (p. 33). However, the references to tourist

⁸⁹ Most notably, Orson Wells’ portrayal of Wolsey in the Oscar-winning 1966 film *A Man for All Seasons* (Dir. Fred Zinnemann), although more recent performances such as Jonathan Pryce in BBC Television’s *Wolf Hall* (2015) have challenged this perception.

attractions above suggest that the critics were responding not just to the production's relationship with its performance history, but also to a sense that it had a lowbrow 'theme park' aesthetic catering for an undemanding tourist market seeking a heritage experience. I consider this to be a mistaken reading of the production, as my analysis will show.

It is worth restating that, at the time, the RSC had been the target of attacks over its lack of artistic cohesion and sense of defining purpose. The company's identity had become an uncertain one and it had increasingly become associated with the spectacle of its staging rather than the virtues of its acting or verse-speaking (see Chapter One), though in practice such spectacle was often realised in multiple variant forms, ranging from beautiful but essentially realist stagings to highly conceptualised productions. Doran's *Henry VIII* was notable in such a context, therefore, because the signifiers of traditionalism that it exhibited, which some critics had seized upon as evidence of creative bankruptcy, seemed, I would argue, to be deployed with a vigour which suggested active and deliberate policy rather than inert conformity to tradition.

After Guy Henry's prologue the production opened with an impressive piece of pageantry, which immediately recalled the play's long associations with decorative staging. Paul Jesson's Henry entered astride a large, artificial horse plated with gold armour, set atop a platform which glided magisterially onto the forestage, accompanied by a bombastic sung chorus. This powerful and regal image, designed to represent the triumphalism on show following the meeting between Henry VIII and Francis I at the 'Field of the Cloth and Gold' in 1520, was a memorable way for the young Doran to announce his presence as a Shakespearean director. Subsequent appearances by Henry were usually accompanied by a gold aura and sumptuous paraphernalia, and further lavish ceremonial sequences were staged for Anne Bullen's coronation at 4.1 and Elizabeth's christening at 5.4. The pageantry and ceremony of Doran's *mise en scène* was staged throughout with considerable grandeur, suggesting substantial investment of company resources in these sequences.

The picture is more complex than suggested by the more hostile critics cited above, however; for example, the RSC's own recent stagings of the play had differed substantially from the historical

model of splendour and pageantry, so if there was an implication that Doran was simply mimicking past stagings, he could not have been drawing on the preceding Stratford productions. The RSC had staged the play twice in the RST since the company assumed its current incarnation; in 1969 directed by Trevor Nunn and in 1983 directed by Howard Davies (with David Edgar working alongside him in a dramaturgical capacity). Both productions did influence Doran in different ways, but that influence did not manifest itself as imitation.

Trevor Nunn's staging in 1969 initially employed the superficially Brechtian device of newspaper headlines projected onto the set, though these were later dropped from the production when it transferred to London. Otherwise, it was performed in Tudor period costumes in an austere black box set (a design that was created for every production that season in the RST by Christopher Morley, but changed colour as necessary to suit each production).⁹⁰ Featuring Donald Sinden as the King and Peggy Ashcroft as Katherine, it was noted for the quality of its performances, though Hugh Richmond in his production history of the play described it as an 'otherwise rather low-key presentation of the text' (Richmond, 1994, p. 94). However, Richmond also judges it to be 'one of the most thought-provoking productions of this century' (p. 17). This seeming contradiction on Richmond's part is best explained by understanding 'low-key' as an absence of the large scale ceremonial set pieces for which the play was renowned, as the stage itself was frequently a hive of buzzing activity. Nunn's staging helped to redefine the play institutionally, firstly by demonstrating that the play could be highly successful without lavish scenes of pageantry, and secondly by associating the play with actors of the stature of Peggy Ashcroft and Donald Sinden.

Doran didn't see Nunn's production,⁹¹ although he certainly researched it;

When you do plays at Stratford you are always aware of previous productions... [*Henry VIII*] was my first Shakespeare at Stratford and it was a play and a period that I researched a lot.

(Doran, in Sewell & Wright, 2012b, p. 310)

Doran did see Howard Davies' production, though. It too, seemed to bear a Brechtian influence:

⁹⁰ For an eyewitness account of the Nunn production of *Henry VIII*, I am indebted to the recollections of Michael Corder (Corder, 2014), who was fortunate enough to see it live.

⁹¹ According to his previously cited statement, the first RSC production he saw was *As You Like It* in 1973.

Davies's main stage presentation in 1983, with Richard Griffiths as the King and Gemma Jones as Katherine, mixed elaborate historical costumes with Brechtian devices, such as cut-out images sliding across the stage on metal grids and a Kurt Weill band on the side of the stage in plain view of the audience.

(Halio, 1999, p. 59)

This was a staging which was 'clearly glancing at the right-wing politics of Margaret Thatcher's government in the 1980s' (Sewell, 2012b, p. 298). Davies and Edgar's anti-realist *mise en scène* (and Hayden Griffin's designs), consisted of 'enlarged reproductions of Elizabethan street scenes and architectural perspectives, trundled along traverse rails and suspended well above the stage floor' (Sewell, 2012b, p. 298). As with Nunn, Davies had rejected the ceremonial splendour of previous productions, though in a markedly different way.

Doran's rationale when planning his own production was as follows:

It is arguably only in the wake of Davies' production and its deliberate resistance to the legacy of splendour that *Henry VIII* can be taken beyond these contrasting and controlling modes, recovered as a Jacobean play, and re-invented for the twenty-first century.

(Doran, 1996)

This was in a programme note that Doran wrote, in which he referred not just to Davies' production but Nunn's and Tyrone Guthrie's 1949 Stratford stagings too.⁹² Doran's logic suggests that Davies' relative innovations had liberated him from the need to 'resist' the play's tradition of pageantry. By referring both to recovering *and* reinventing the play Doran invites us to see him as reconnecting the play with its past as well as suggesting it is current for contemporary audiences; he is therefore indicating that it is possible to achieve both authenticity *and* relevance simultaneously by restoring it to a historically situated period aesthetic.

Doran therefore came to direct the play, knowing that it had been defined at the RSC by two major productions, one of which was remarkable for its superb performances and accomplished staging and the other for its political reading of the play; both had been described as Brechtian in different

⁹² Guthrie's production was again spectacular, though he used a much fuller version of the text than many of his predecessors. Adapting the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre into a thrust stage, his large cast was acclaimed for its attention to detail and realist acting, though the production was also criticised for its mischievous sense of humour (see McMullan, 2000, pp. 48-51).

ways. Both had also achieved their success without indulging in the kind of overblown spectacle for which the play was famous.⁹³

Doran's investment in a *mise en scène* full of ceremony and spectacle only presents half the picture, however. Though Doran undoubtedly invested heavily in the pageantry, his staging also made clear that he was portraying such events ironically, though this point appears to have been lost on some of the critics I quoted earlier.

The production opened with Guy Henry's dry and ironic delivery of the Prologue. Henry is an actor with an undeniable comic presence. His reading of the speech to my ear was extremely slow and emphatically end-stopped, with rhymes fastidiously sounded throughout, as though satirising an overly-rhetorical mode of Shakespearean performance. By the time he reached

Those that come to see
Only a show or two, and so agree
The play may pass, if they be still, and willing,
I'll undertake may see away their shilling
Richly in two short hours.

(Prologue.9-13)

...it was apparent that his arch delivery was seeking to establish a complicit relationship with the audience, which aimed to gently parody the conventions of the play they were about to see.

Speaking the words 'two short hours', Henry stressed all three with a drop in pitch and a smirk for maximum comic effect. It suggested an understanding with the audience that the production was going to be much longer than that. From the opening, Henry's speech was attempting to establish an ironic relationship between the production and the events it was going to depict.

Similarly, no sooner had Jesson's magnificent golden steed been wheeled on in 1.1 than a crack of thunder announced a storm was forthcoming (the 'hideous storm' that Buckingham refers to at 1.1.105), and it was promptly and unceremoniously reversed back upstage. The ironic counterpoint this created, presenting grandeur then undermining it, came to be a feature of the production.

⁹³ McMullan suggests that both Davies and Nunn were responding to Terence Gray's 1931 Cambridge Festival Theatre production, which had set a precedent in the twentieth century by rejecting the pageantry of earlier productions (see McMullan, 2000, pp. 44-48).

Following this spectacular and striking opening, the forestage remained bare for much of the subsequent performance, with the main structural feature of Jones' design being a pair of enormous upstage double doors which were periodically closed to reveal the legend 'All is True' emblazoned across them, drawing attention repeatedly to what Doran saw as the play's ironic and troublesome relationship with the concept of 'truth'. To Doran, the ambiguity of the play's presentation of a 'chosen truth' (Prologue.18) is implicit in the play's alternative title, one that he believed to be the originally intended title for the play itself and one that he had intended to use for this production (see Jesson, 1998, p. 116).⁹⁴

I am entirely convinced that the play is called *All is True*.... It struck me that the title is a bit like the comedian saying, 'this is an absolutely true story': the more the comedian emphasizes the truth of his tale, the more you question its veracity.

(Doran, in Sewell & Wright, 2012b, p. 312)

Although Doran's production was eventually marketed under the eponymous title of *Henry VIII*, the alternative name was featured prominently in all the production's publicity material, before finally becoming a permanent feature of the set design and an onstage commentary on the text itself. Doran therefore positioned his ironic take on the play as an authentic one, acquiring historical legitimacy from the play's alternative (and to Doran, dominant) subtitle (though it is of course possible to view *All is True* un-ironically).

Throughout the play further ceremonial occasions brought pageantry out onto the thrust stage of the Swan, but otherwise stage furniture was kept to a necessary minimum and visible signs of opulence tended to remain upstage. The forestage could therefore become a place of political intrigue rather than state ceremony, often dimly lit and plainly dressed. Occasionally it was both. At the start of 4.1 the coronation of Bullen was staged as a procession from USC down the thrust stage to the DSR corner, with the Gentlemen DS commenting on it to the audience. Their dialogue therefore ran concurrently with the procession rather than consecutively, meaning that the ceremony could be staged at considerable length (one minute fifty-one seconds in the performance that was filmed) without adversely affecting the pace of the play. This scene is one of the strongest pieces of evidence in the text (other than the title) that supports Doran's assertion of the play's satirical

⁹⁴It is noteworthy that in Doran's biographical note on the company's website, the production is listed under its title *All is True*, with *Henry VIII* merely parenthesised (Royal Shakespeare Company, 2014c).

relationship with the events it portrays, structured as it is around an act of pageantry followed by a humorous commentary on it.

As Russell Jackson observed, 'The play's counterpoint of private and public transactions was well served' (1999, p. 192), which enabled a long play to hold

...attention through a skilful alternation of display and austerity, and excellent use of the Swan's thrust stage for the long sequences of argument and confrontation, or such moments of direct address to the audience as Norfolk's speech on his way to execution.
(Jackson, 1999, p. 192)

Another example was in 2.2, with Henry visible upstage reclining in his chambers and bathed in golden light, creating a powerful contrast with the drabness inhabited downstage by Norfolk, Chamberlain and Suffolk as they conduct the scene's opening conversation. This use of the stage, and the constant contrast throughout the production between the opulence of court ceremonies and the mundanity of court politics, further undermined the grandness of the narrative that was being presented. It also bore similarities with the Nunn production, which likewise sought to exploit the counterpoint between public splendour and private intrigue by using distinct areas of the stage to portray simultaneous but contrasting action. Doran, of course, had the advantage of the Swan's thrust stage in the way that Nunn did not in order to fully realise his *mise en scène*, a development of which he took full advantage.

At the climax of the play Doran decided to ironically counterpoint the effect of the pageantry he was presenting by adding an extra entrance for Anne Bullen. In another echo of Nunn's production (which brought Bullen into the final Christening scene even though she is neither present in the text nor would have been so historically), in Doran's staging the play closed with the ensemble fixed in a smiling tableau as Claire Marchionne's Anne slowly walked to centre stage. Facing the audience with a blank expression on her face, she then swiftly drew her figure across her neck in a foreshadowing of her eventual fate. Thus, Cranmer's oration (5.4.19-60) which had so celebrated the future Queen Elizabeth was brutally undermined by reminding the audience of the fate of her mother.

Doran was not just ‘foregrounding historical material’ (Rist, 2001, p. 5), but ironically contrasting the overblown and hubristic nature of the celebratory final scene with an altogether more chilling image. As Doran elaborates:

I tried to set up the glory of the spectacle, which has a theatrical impact, at the same time as saying that the narrative is going to end as everybody knew: in Anne Bullen’s head being chopped off. We tried to place those pieces of spectacle not just as excuses for a lot of nice costumes and some music, but as something that you could see had a political agenda.
(Doran, in Sewell & Wright, 2012b, p. 317)

Doran’s production sought to be both magisterial and ironic, a ‘discreet spectacle’, in Doran’s own words (McMullan, 2000, p. 54). He aimed to

...move beyond the Brechtian rejections of ceremonial by reclaiming the fullness of spectacle at the same time as demonstrating (and in order to demonstrate) its emptiness – to which end the ceremonial must be impressive, not pre-debunked.
(Doran, in McMullan, 2000, p. 54)

As my account has suggested, sometimes his ‘de-bunking’ occurred simultaneously with the ceremonial, or in the case of the play’s opening happened so quickly on the heels of it that the spectacle arguably didn’t have time to make the requisite impact that Doran was aiming for before being undermined. What is unarguable, though, is that Doran’s intentions in staging *Henry VIII* were not simply to stage a spectacular, ‘traditional’ production of the play, but something more political and ironic.

Resisting the overtly non-naturalistic *mise en scène* of Howard Davies he had instead presented an aesthetic which both largely honoured the pageantry of the play’s pre-RSC performance history, but with a more contemporary and gently subversive take on proceedings. In doing so he was not just gently satirising the events in the play but also poking fun at the pageantry embedded in its performance history.

The production also contained other aesthetic elements which suggested a stronger authorial voice from the director might be suggested by his resolutely non-interventionist rhetoric.⁹⁵ In 4.2, as Queen Katherine lay dying at Kimbolton, she received a spiritual visitation. The stage directions for this vision are recorded in the 1623 folio as:

⁹⁵ See Chapter Five for a more detailed exploration of Doran’s aesthetic.

Enter solemnly tripping one after another, sixe Personages, clad in white Robes, wearing on their heades Garlands of Bayes, and golden Vizards on their faces, Branches of Bayes or Palme in their hands. They first Conge vnto her, then Dance: and at certaine Changes, the first two hold a spare Garland ouer her Head, at which the other foure make re|uerend Curtsies. Then the two that held the Garland, deli|uer the same to the other next two, who obserue the same or|der in their Changes, and holding the Garland ouer her head. Which done, they deli|uer the same Garland to the last to: who likewise obserue the same Order. At which (as it were by inspiration) she makes (in her sleepe) signes of reioycing, and holdeth vp her hands to heauen. And so, in their Dancing vanish, carry▪ the Garland with them. The Musicke continues.

(Shakespeare, 1623, p. 226)

In Doran's production, this complicated piece of staging was replaced by a simple, directional shaft of white light which bathed the Queen as she slept, powerfully suggesting a spiritual purity. There were noticeably no 'Personages'. For Doran, this decision is partly justified by referring to the nature of the Swan itself:

...we decided ultimately that, in a stage the size of the Swan space, Jane Lapotaire's expression alone could create a greater vision than I could summon up.

(Doran, in Sewell & Wright, 2012b, p. 324)

Lapotaire gives a different reason for omitting the vision. Her reference to 'the idea of the younger members of the cast tripping round me in white dresses and cherub wings' (Lapotaire, 1998, p. 149) in her account of the production demonstrates her resistance to a fuller staging, but also suggests that it was initially entertained as an idea by Doran, though he was quick to dispense with it. Simplifying this moment, though, dramatically changes its meaning. If the apparitions are given corporeal form, and appear on stage, then it implies that a supernatural experience has taken place, therefore granting Katherine her salvation. This is particularly the case in a production which has previously made no attempt to take us into the subjective worldview of one of its characters. If the experience remains an interior and subjective one only for Katherine, however, then it might that we are witnessing the delirious dreams of a dying woman.

The shaft of white light gave us a hint of something more divine, however, because elsewhere in the production, Howard Harrison's lighting was strongly symbolic and an indicator of religious sanctification or damnation. In 1.4, when Henry and his fellow masquers, sporting wolves' heads and artificial phalluses, ascended from a CS trapdoor they were uplit by a powerful red light

accompanied by rising smoke. When Henry and Anne Bullen exited through the trap at the end of the scene they descended into the same bright red pit in the stage.⁹⁶

It took on demonic overtones as [the masque] emerged from and eventually exited via the trapdoor.

(Sewell, 2012b, p. 300)

If Henry was demonised in this scene then Buckingham was sanctified in 2.1, also exiting via the trapdoor but this time into cool, white light, suggesting his purity in powerful contrast to the ‘sinful’ debauchery of the Tudor monarch and his cronies. Lighting here was editorialising powerfully on the characters, making key Doranian interventions to the meanings that were suggested. By the time of Katherine’s death scene, the lighting had become a recognisable aesthetic trope that carried meaning, so I understood the shaft of white light on her passing to be Doran’s judgement on her, as a saintly figure, rather than God’s.

If the lighting demonstrated a willingness to proactively use elements of the *mise en scène* to signify specific interpretative judgements on character by the director, then the production also exhibited tropes that frequently recur through Doran’s later work. When the masques in 1.4 emerged from ‘hell’ they then proceeded into a dance that was a crude, boisterous exhibition of male fertility and comradeship. The masculinity on display here was threatening rather than an equal celebration of sexual congress, ‘sweeping the women into a dance that threatened rape, asserting the ruthless male dominance of this world’ (Smallwood, R., 1998, p. 241). Coupled with the red light, the image presented began to recast a play that actually contains little to signpost the coming Reformation into a much more overtly religious morality play.

Then, in 3.1, there was a feminist riposte to the boorish machismo and crude behaviour of Henry and his masked companions in 1.4. In a strikingly Spanish arrangement the song of Orpheus at 3.1.3-14 became a hymn to Katherine’s Spanish homeland and ultimately led to a vigorous, even ecstatic, round of Flamenco-inspired dancing. In doing so it also became a joyous show of female defiance and solidarity, positioned as a radical act of nationalistic rebellion rather than as an act of

⁹⁶ There is a long performance tradition dating back to the Mystery Plays associating stage trapdoors with Hell, although O’Connell (2007) argues persuasively in his MFA thesis that in fact this was only one of many uses for trapdoors on the early modern stage.

containment. Intriguingly, this, coupled with the symbolist use of lighting I highlighted earlier and the Spanish accent that Lapotaire had adopted at Doran's suggestion, increasingly seemed to celebrate Catholic Spain.

Throughout this case study, I have cited numerous references to Doran's use of the Swan stage, in particular his use of its depth and thrust stage to counterpoint contrasting images for ironic comment. In 3.1, he also strikingly domesticized it, contrasting the opulence of the court with Katherine's residence at Kimbolton by having laundry hung on washing lines across the upstage half of the stage. It was the only time in the production when the stage became cluttered, reshaping it into a more intimate and humble space and providing a strong juxtaposition with the decadence of Henry's court. It seemed to reclaim the space for Katherine, creating a sense of ownership in which her celebration of her nationalist, Catholic identity could take place. Doran's confident use of this particular theatrical space has become a defining feature of his most critically acclaimed productions, and it is clearly evident in the first experience of directing in there.

Doran's use of the Swan bears further examination, and will form part of my analysis of his work with design and space in my exploration of the director's aesthetic in Chapter Five. So, too, will his use of ritual, dance, bawdy and religious imagery, all of which were clearly in evidence in *Henry VIII*. Coupled with his ironic, gently political, reading of the play, these tropes challenge Doran's articulation of himself as a director who lacks an authorial aesthetic pragmatically serving Shakespeare's text; in this case Doran's craft is clearly serving Doran's, not Shakespeare's, theatrical preoccupations.

Chapter Three

Defining Doran's craft: working with actors

Defining Doran's craft: working with actors

Having analysed in Chapter One how Doran's practice has become defined by association with a 'Shakespearean' tradition which is often characterised as conservative, I will now go on to explore the methodology that he uses during the rehearsal process. In short, I will analyse the mechanics of his craft.

Cornford (2015) locates craft firmly in an artisan tradition, and notes that tradition as embodied in material practice, but in decoding the rhetoric of actors questioned about their craft he also detects some assimilation between learning a craft, or tradition, and a more instinctive, 'artistic' process.

The process of imitation, therefore, seems to depend upon absorbing influence into the process of finding one's own way. Gielgud puts it well: "tradition is not a god that should be worshipped in the theatre. [...] It is a warning as well as an example, a danger as well as an ideal."

(Cornford, 2015, p.95)

Rather than articulating art as occupying a binary, oppositional relationship to craft, Cornford suggests a much more holistic link between the two, connecting art with instinctive individuality and craft with what is learned. Here, craft, or skill, which is rooted in but not bound by tradition, can become an enabling force, a facilitator of 'art'. As Cornford concludes, 'a deep understanding of skill can lead us to artistry.' (p. 97).

Doran never discusses his 'art', but frequently refers to his craft, and this chapter will argue that it is, too an enabling force, rooted in empowering actors to make informed choices about the material they are working with in ways that lead to tangible performance outcomes. It is also a learned craft, acquired through a lengthy apprenticeship; informed, but not bound by tradition; and, a portable, systematised process which is applied from production to production with relatively little adaptation.

Chapter Five will consider Doran's use of space, his work with designers and wider aesthetic, but here my project is an examination of what I consider to be the defining element of his craft, his work with actors during rehearsals. There is considerable published material recounting the

rehearsals of individual Doran-directed productions, usually from a single actor's perspective, and I will use these accounts together with Doran's own writings and statements on the subject to here provide a comprehensive analysis of his process. I will supplement that with my own observations of Doran in rehearsal and information gleaned from interviews with the director and some of his collaborators.

This analysis will be framed by a consideration of the different acting and directing priorities that inflect debate and practice at Stratford. John Barton broadly characterises these as two competing traditions, between those who prioritise the form of the play, and specifically the language, as a starting point for rehearsals, and those who privilege the construction of character psychology in a way that the modern, post-Freudian, post-Stanislvskian actor might recognise.

I have given an overview of the key figures who have shaped the modern RSC in my opening chapter and I will return to many of them throughout this next section, as they and their views inevitably set the context within which Doran conducts his rehearsals. Partly due to the legislative attempts of Hall and others, debate around verse-speaking has become a defining and sometimes divisive issue at the company, with pragmatic attempts to determine good practice often foundering on ideological certainty. Actual practice at the company might often occupy a more nuanced space, but public pronouncements, particularly from Hall, are frequently characterised by a desire to shape discourse and legislate parameters for future practitioners. In such an environment, directors and actors have a tendency to take sides, to align themselves with a particular tradition.

In this climate Doran has emerged, a director whose 'Shakespearean' reputation might imply the privileging of verse and verse-speaking as the primary rehearsal priority in the manner of Hall. I will argue that Doran has instead developed a methodology which is a fusing of institutionally important values such as metrical alertness, an adaptation of post-Stanislvskian practices, and, techniques for enabling actors to engage with more overtly theatrical priorities.

I will combine this mapping of process with an analysis of what performance outcomes might be achieved, and a consideration of the politics of democracy in the rehearsal room and how Doran navigates them.

I will conclude this chapter by examining a key production that Doran directed in 1999, *The Winter's Tale*. This was staged in the Royal Shakespeare Theatre and featured Antony Sher as Leontes. My analysis, which recognises that this was a critically acclaimed production, interrogates some of the difficulties of an approach to performance that draws heavily on psychological realism for a play that might be seen to resist it, and looks forward to the case study in Chapter Four of Doran's 1999 production of *Macbeth*, which perhaps navigated these tensions more successfully.

Over the coming pages I will characterise Doran's craft as consisting of four broad areas, which he consistently applies in his rehearsal process. The first two are Barton's 'two traditions'. Firstly, Doran draws upon RSC traditions of verse-speaking and an approach to the language and form of early modern texts, which is clearly informed by the work of previous RSC directors including Peter Hall, Terry Hands and Adrian Noble; secondly, his own experience and preferences as an actor, and those of the theatrical culture in which he works, incline him towards a psychologically realist style of acting, facilitated by a reliance on Stanislavski-inspired rehearsal methodology. Much of Doran's craft is concerned with reconciling these competing traditions, and his relationship with both will be explored over the coming chapter. A third dimension to his craft is then provided by his emphasis on clarity and storytelling; techniques such as paraphrasing, scene names and 'crossroads' are applied methodically throughout each rehearsal process with the intention of producing performance outcomes that are particularly accessible to audiences. Lastly, and perhaps most crucially to the way in which Doran characterises himself as a director, is the way in which he attempts to promote a fully-engaged, democratic acting ensemble that works collaboratively towards consensually agreed goals. This goes far beyond normal rhetorical nods towards democracy in the rehearsal room, but is rather structurally embedded in his rehearsal process and therefore can, and should, be considered the fourth element of the director's craft.

The Stanislavskian inheritance

It is worth commenting at this juncture that Doran rarely references Stanislavski himself; when asked about his influences he tends to refer to the institutional figures he has encountered at the RSC. Despite the clearly considered and precise approach he has developed to rehearsal, he is also resistant to defining it in any theoretical terms:

I remember at one point listening to Tim Supple talking very, very specifically about his work and I remember thinking Gosh I would never talk about my work, I've never defined a thing as my work. It's what I do but somehow calling it my work seems to elevate it into some kind of mystery. I think it's a mixture for me of an entirely practical thing which is about the stage picture; it's about how you are spending your budget... And working out the practical things...

(Doran, 2014)

Doran characterises himself as pragmatic and practical, in many ways the antithesis of the ideological didacticism of Hall or the quasi-spiritualism of Brook. This is worth unpacking, however; pragmatism, practicality and 'common sense' are often seemingly ideology-free terms which can actually mask a series of assumptions, and can be used to reassert dominant cultural values. Doran's process is informed by a particular worldview, shaped by his personal views and experiences, and by the institutional priorities that he identifies so clearly with. His strongly articulated 'Shakespeareanism', his background and training as an actor, and, his lengthy apprenticeship as a director at the RSC all will have inflected his practice, which has evolved within a wider context in which the cultural capital of 'Shakespeare', is dominant.

Barton acknowledges the Stanislavskian influence on RSC practice overtly,

Our tradition is based more than we are usually conscious of on various modern influences like Freud and television and the cinema, and, above all, the teachings of the director and actor, Stanislavsky. I suspect he works on us all the time, often without us knowing it.

(Barton, 1984, p. 8)

As with most actors trained in this country, Doran's acting education at the Bristol Old Vic would have been heavily inflected by the theories of Stanislavski.⁹⁷ His close personal and professional relationship with Antony Sher, who places great importance on research as a rehearsal tool and draws heavily on a Stanislavskian framework to construct 'character' in a psychologically realist

⁹⁷ Doran was taught acting by Rudi Shelly, whose approach whilst pragmatic, unorthodox and anti-intellectual (see Foot, 1998) was still fundamentally rooted in a Stanislavskian framework.

tradition, has in all probability also had considerable impact. Escolme argues (see 2005, pp. 11-14), citing Sher's performance as Leontes in *The Winter's Tale* (1999), that Stanislavski is inherently associated with naturalism in the tradition of Zola, leading to 'scientific, positivist' (p. 13) acting, and that the 'dramatic subjectivities it produces are to be imagined by the actor as living outside the theatre' (p. 14). To Escolme, 'Naturalistic Theatre is that which attempts to erase its own theatricality'. Escolme's use of the word naturalism is insightful, as, drawing on Zola and Raymond Williams,⁹⁸ she prefers it to describe Stanislavskian performance outcomes ahead of the 'broader and more historically fluid "realism"' (p. 12).

It is unsurprising that Zola is considered anti-theatrical, when reading the following extract:

I am waiting for everyone to throw out the tricks of the trade, the contrived formulas, the tears and superficial laughs. I am waiting for a dramatic work void of declamations, majestic speech, and noble sentiments, to have the unimpeachable morality of truth and to teach us the frightening lesson of sincere investigation. I am waiting finally, until the development of naturalism already achieved in the novel takes over the stage, until the playwrights return to the source of science and modern arts, to the study of nature, to the anatomy of man, to the painting of life in an exact reproduction more original and powerful than anyone has so far dared to risk on the boards.

(Zola and Draper, 1961, p. 6)

Zola's epistemology doesn't really articulate what it is that Sher does though, which seems to me to be a performance that is much more theatrical, much more rooted in craft, than the anti-theatrical values of Zola would allow for. As I will discuss later in this chapter, Sher's performance in this production does draw on scientific method and research to construct a modern subjectivity that arguably sits in tension with the early modern text, but there is also a highly theatrical engagement with Shakespearean language. Sher does articulate a desire to give a psychologically realist performance in his rhetoric surrounding the production, and throughout his many writings on performance there are recurring concerns with finding a 'character', which is often constructed with the help of research. Realism, of which naturalism was a development rather than a synonym, seems perhaps a more useful term to work within, then, for which I use the following description:

Realistic drama, such as Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* (1890) and Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* (1904), located the suffering of the characters in their social values and psychological self-deceptions, though a strain of economic, social, and hereditary determinism may operate in these plays as well.

(Postlewait, 2010)

⁹⁸ Escolme cites Zola, 1961, p. 6; Williams, 1980, p. 45.

The kind of psychological realism described here seems to articulate more clearly the ways in which we might understand what Sher is talking about, and the kinds of performance that Doran is facilitating, when they talk about character. There is a further tradition evident in Doran's process though, which is neither naturalistic or realist, and which I shall outline in detail over the coming pages; an emphasis on enabling actors to make choices about their performance that embrace priorities far wider than the subjectivities of 'character', but rather are aimed at clarity and ensemble storytelling.

First, though, it is important to outline exactly how Stanislavskian processes and traditions do inform Doran's practice. Chief amongst the Stanislavskian concepts that appear to apply is an engagement with the kinds of detailed textual analysis with which the Russian practitioner has become synonymous, work that exists to elucidate the 'given circumstances'.

It means the story of the play, its facts, events, epoch, time and place of action, conditions of life, the actors' and regisseur's interpretation, the mise-en-scene, the production, the sets, the costumes, properties, lighting and sound effects, - all the circumstances that are given to an actor to take into account as he creates his role.

Stanislavski and Hapgood, 1980, p. 51

It is important to note that though Stanislavski's definition of 'Given Circumstances' suggests the kind of deterministic emphasis which situates him in a realist or naturalist framework, there is also a foregrounding of the materiality of performance and the interpretation of the director. For Stanislavski, theatricality can sit alongside realist methodology.⁹⁹

As I will demonstrate, Doran devotes considerable resources to ensuring that every member of the cast has a strong grasp of the detail of the story they are telling; in other words they are beginning to engage with the 'given circumstances'. In order that this is possible Doran's company engages in extensive analysis of both the text itself, and, research into knowledge that he (and his cast) identify as useful to support their performances which is drawn from outside the text. This process

⁹⁹ Perhaps reflecting the way in which they were translated by Elizabeth Hapgood and published in the West, Stanislavski writings are inconsistent. For instance, elsewhere in the same volume he stresses how conscious preparation can enable the actor to cross 'the threshold of the subconscious' (see Stanislavski and Hapgood, 1960, p. 282), which seems to suggest an internalised immersion in character is the desired outcome rather than a more performative self.

typically occupies up to the first three weeks of rehearsal and is clearly in the Stanislavskian tradition of ‘table work’.¹⁰⁰

The other Stanislavskian concept that I wish to introduce at this stage is that of what Merlin characterises as a ‘dual consciousness’ (see Merlin, 2007, pp. 252-256). This acknowledges that however much the actor must immerse themselves in the world of the character they must also observe themselves in performance to ensure that they are communicating their performance effectively. Stanislavski refers to this as perspective;

As a part moves along we have, as you might say, two perspectives in mind. The one is related to the character portrayed, the other to the actor. Actually Hamlet, as a figure in the play, has no idea of perspective, he knows nothing of what the future has in store for him, whereas the actor who plays the part must bear this constantly in mind, he is obliged to keep it in perspective.

(Stanislavski and Hapgood, 1968, p. 179)

The performance is therefore neither the actor alone, nor the character, but a synthesis of the two which blends the interiority of the character with a mix of the actor’s overall understanding of the play and their stagecraft. This is an essentially a theatrical creation, which means that the actor can immerse themselves in the details of the role without ever losing sight of their role as a performer who has a function to play:

Remember that I have told you more than once that every actor must be his own director.

(Stanislavski and Hapgood, 1981, p. 133)

Stanislavski’s own engagement with Shakespeare was, of course, using a translated text. This may mean (as I cited Doran describing in the Chapter One) that the Russian has been liberated from a ‘responsibility to the text’ (Doran, 2014), but Stanislavski’s account of his work on *Othello* is extremely light on detail regarding verse (see Stanislavski, 1961, pp. 107-210). Instead it focuses almost entirely on psychological realism and performance detail, investigating a series of question which I will characterise as ‘Where are we?’, ‘What do we want?’ and ‘Where are we going?’. In other words, Stanislavski’s main rehearsal concern is the ‘given circumstances’ that I have referred to above. Initially, in the case of *Othello*, these are explored largely through improvisation rather than textual investigation, substantially reducing the status of the text itself, and in particular its

¹⁰⁰ This is not specifically a Stanislavskian phrase, but has become associated with a period of Stanislavskian textual analysis, typically done sitting down, though not always round a table, in the early stages of rehearsal.

form. Replying to a student who complains that they are being made to improvise scenes with little knowledge of *Othello*, Stanislavski's alter-ego Tortsov replies:

But you have thoughts and feelings which you can put into your own words. The point is not the words. The line of a role is taken from the subtext, not from the text itself. But actors are lazy about digging down to the subtext, they prefer to skim along the surface, using the fixed words which they can pronounce mechanically, without wasting any energy in searching out their inner essence.

(Stanislavski, 1961, pp. 139-140)

Morgan argues that this was an anti-heroic project, suggesting that in making Shakespeare's protagonists more realistic, they would also be diminished. He

...wanted to make Shakespeare come alive on the stage and saw his realism as an optimal production style. Carefully he demystified Shakespeare's heroes and made them mundane. He recreated the verity of their assigned time and place with all the experiential intricacy he could muster.

(Morgan, 1984, p. xx)

Stanislavski's views towards performance evolved over the course of his life, but his account of *Othello* is dominated by a meticulous and detailed attempt to establish a sense of verisimilitude in performance. His focus is on the detail of the world of the play rather than the play itself, a clear attempt to site the play in 'given circumstances', where character, and action, becomes contingent.

Contrast this with Peter Hall's approach to commencing rehearsals:

The actor must always start by scanning the speech. 'Scanning' means trying to fit the five foot iambic rhythm to the given words.

(Hall, 2003, p. 30)

So, for Hall, the metrical analysis is the starting point. In fact, Hall's whole approach, as outlined in his book *Shakespeare's Advice to the Players*, is based around close analysis of the ways in which the specific words and rhythms of the text are operating, and how that might inform the actors' choices when rehearsing the play. When briefing the cast of his 1987 production of *Antony and Cleopatra* at the National Theatre he issued the following warning (as described by Tirzah Lowen):

Referring to the lush language of the play: the actors should learn to handle the verse correctly. 'If you approach it psychologically, it will get up and hit you!' warns Hall.

(Lowen, 1990, p. xiv)

It is not just that Hall prioritises language, but that he later actively discouraged the kind of psychological approach that characterises Stanislavski. As I have already observed, Hall's thinking

has hardened as he has neared the end of his career, but to Hall, meaning, sound and rhythm are indivisible and the specificity of the language is everything.

I should stress that Hall does allow discussions about motivation and characterisation in the rehearsal room; his particular emphasis is that this can only usefully occur if informed by the metrical patterns of the text, and so it always follows close textual work on the language of the play and is therefore given secondary priority.

Despite Hall, the RSC does have a tradition, exemplified in Barton's teachings, of trying to reconcile what Michael Dobson calls the 'potential mismatch between Shakespeare and Stanislavsky' (Dobson, 2006, p. 4). Adrian Noble certainly suggests a marriage of the two approaches, arguing that the cast work with an approach that is both

... 'inside-out' and 'outside-in', that I find truly exciting. When I get an actor to come at a piece of text simultaneously from the Stanislavskian method and the Shakespearean route, then I can expect something highly original, truthful and yes, realistic.

(Noble, 2010, p. 4)

Noble's tenure was marked by an attempted re-prioritisation of verse-speaking which, as I have previously described, had only intermittent success, and he doesn't always seem to have been that interested in Stanislavski in the rehearsal room, if Sher's account of playing the Fool in Noble's 1982 production of *King Lear* (Jackson & Smallwood, 1988, pp. 151-165) is representative (although the Fool is a role that potentially encourages theatrical rather than realist readings). Noble's book on performing Shakespeare does pay lip service to the fusion of Stanislavski with Shakespeare, but it also makes clear he prioritises a Hall-style approach to verse, which he characterises in the passage quoted above as 'the Shakespearean route'. In Noble's rhetoric Stanislavski appears to be a necessary evil, an interloper, grudgingly welcomed but still a guest and certainly not an equal.

By contrast there are elements of Stanislavski that appear integral to Doran's process and they are placed on a seemingly equal footing with the other elements of his process. In particular, there is a preoccupation with research, both into character-specific details that might inform performance and more general social and historical contextual information. My examination of Sher's process

during *The Winter's Tale* in this chapter and *Macbeth* in the next will provide detailed examples of the use of research in rehearsal as well as other examples of Doran's methodology in practice.

Doran is not alone in embracing elements of Stanislavski at the RSC, in particular research. The director Bill Alexander for example facilitated lengthy research processes for a string of productions during his time at the company, as Sher memorably recounts in his book detailing their collaboration on *Richard III* (1984) (Sher, 1985). In that case, Sher had spent a large amount of time and energy before rehearsals commenced conducting extensive research into the nature of Richard's disability, building a psychologically credible profile of the character, and determining how he could define himself in a role so occupied in performance history by Laurence Olivier. Finally, on holiday with his family in South Africa, four months after the then Artistic Director Trevor Nunn had mentioned in passing the possibility of playing Richard, he actually read a copy of the play (Sher, 1985, p. 58). For Sher (at this point in his career) a study of the text itself¹⁰¹ is of lesser concern; only research can help him to find a way into the character that makes sense to him, and only then can he confront the language. This is the antithesis of the Hall approach.

So, research-based techniques aimed at facilitating the construction of 'character' are certainly in usage at the RSC. For Doran, a process of research, along with a lengthy period of table work before beginning to stage any physical action, and a clear engagement with, if not a total embracing of, psychologically realist characterisation, are all part of his rehearsal methodology and show a clear Stanislavskian influence on his practice. Before detailing that process further though, I will now turn to the politics of the rehearsal room, and examine Doran's claims to democracy within the institutional context of the RSC.

¹⁰¹ Sher also eschewed the kind of detailed study of 'given circumstances' found in the text at this stage that Stanislavski might have advocated.

Doran, Brook and the politics of consent

I suspect that directing is tyranny masquerading as democracy.

(Doran, 2014)

Doran's flippant suggestion, above, that his affable exterior actually hides a more controlling instinct has been repeated by the director a number of times,¹⁰² to the extent that the statement has perhaps become devalued through overuse. His use of this particular phrase suggests that his diffident and mild-mannered persona might mask a Machiavel and that his approach is inherently manipulative. I have seen little evidence of this in researching this thesis; if anything the opposite is the case, leaving me to conclude that it is a mildly humorous attempt to self-bolster the authority of a director who eschews many of the more clichéd signifiers of the authoritarian director (heroic leadership model, visible directorial interventions, assertively dominating rehearsals). Although he may eschew these, however, there are undoubtedly tensions between structuring a rehearsal process in the way that he does, in which some performance outcomes become more likely than others, and a truly democratic collaboration; the director sets the parameters of any exercise so that, no matter how exploratory and consensual, the outcomes will usually fall within a prescribed range. Doran's statement above is surely in part also an admission of this.

Before considering the particularities of Doran's approach, I will first examine the rehearsal politics of Peter Brook, a director who did so much to shape expectations of both RSC audiences and RSC actors. As I will explore over the coming pages, this was a director whose reputation was built on lengthy, exploratory processes which privileged improvisation and games and characterised themselves as the antithesis of a top-down, authoritarian directorial approach. Brook employs the rhetoric of a facilitator, in whose rehearsals discoveries can emerge, but as with Doran, the nature of those discoveries is perhaps not quite as organically arrived at as might be supposed. I have already suggested that Brook is a crucial figure in the institutional history of the RSC; he therefore now provides a useful lens through which to view certain elements of Doran's practice, and particularly the tension between artistic control of the rehearsal process and facilitating the consent of the cast.

¹⁰² Sher even repeated it second hand in an interview to promote his own directorial debut (Sher, 2006).

I have earlier described some of Peter Brook's extraordinary theatrical successes at the RSC. However, examining Charles Marowitz's¹⁰³ account of Brook rehearsing the 1962 RSC production of *King Lear*, one is struck by the tension in the director's 'relentlessly (and at times, maddeningly) experimental' (Marowitz & Trussler, 1967, p. 137) approach; between Brook's desire to emphasise collaborative exploration with the actors on the one hand and his tendency to drive the actors into exhaustion until they produce the desired results:

The crucial insights into any play, Brook believes, will be found by the actors themselves. 'The greatest rehearsal factor is fatigue. When you get so thoroughly exhausted from grappling with a certain problem and you think you can't go on – then suddenly, something gives and you "find something". You know that marvellous moment in a rehearsal when you suddenly *find something*.'

(Marowitz & Trussler, 1967, p. 136)

This implies that the 'something' is there already, waiting to be found, presumably in the text, which will produce a moment of enlightenment. Of course, it seems more likely that the 'something' will turn out to be a particularly Brookian discovery rather than a Shakespearean one. This sense of Brook leading a quasi-spiritual quest towards a mode of performance that is characterised as unknowable at the commencement of the 'journey' is commonplace in descriptions of Brook's process, particularly after he left the RSC to set up his own Centre for International Theatre Research in Paris in 1970. Shevtsova describes this process as involving

...long physical-spiritual preparation of the actors and then through group immersion in a plethora of exercises (including martial arts) and experiments (including those of a textual-interpretative nature) that gradually shaped the production.

(Shevtsova, 2012, p. 22)

Marowitz also perceived more aggressively manipulative methods in action during the *Theatre of Cruelty* workshops, on which the two men collaborated in 1963:

Brook is cunning in his use of praise and admonishment, cold-bloodedly applying one or the other, depending on what he hopes to achieve.

(Marowitz & Trussler, 1967, p. 179)

Marowitz concludes that Brook is 'brilliant at using actors as objects' (p.180), but 'If the actor cannot understand what is being asked or cannot find the route to the result, Brook often cannot provide specific-enough guidance' (p. 179). Instead Marowitz observes Brook

¹⁰³ Marowitz collaborated with Brook on the *Theatre of Cruelty* season and was an experimental theatre maker in his own right. His caustic observations on Brook (and others) provide a useful counterweight to the deification of Brook that inflects much commentary on his time at the RSC.

... dropping provocative but inconclusive hints about character, saying just enough to force an actor to reappraise his entire conception of a role but not enough to supply him with an alternative.

(Marowitz & Trussler, 1967, p. 136)

Marowitz's picture of Brook is not particularly flattering, painting a portrait of a director who is unable or unwilling to articulate his requirements with specificity, manipulative in his interpersonal relationships and merciless in the conditions he makes the actors work under. Brook is not the first and will not be the last RSC director to use covert or problematic tactics to get the results he desires (see the example of Neilson's *Marat/Sade* I cited in Chapter One, for instance), but it should also be noted that Marowitz has an agenda and was renowned for his vitriolic attacks on former collaborators, so we should perhaps be slightly wary of his more barbed attacks on Brook:

...Marowitz...was notoriously blunt-spoken and quarrelsome, and during his career made as many enemies as friends. In *Burnt Bridges*, an aptly titled memoir of his time in London, he settled scores with, among others, Tom Stoppard, Peter Brook and Joe Orton's biographer John Lahr.

(Anonymous, Obituary, 2014)

However, David Selbourne, who chronicled Brook's *Dream*, also expressed reservations, suggesting that 'The moulding of words and bodies on the potter's wheel of theatrical direction is a cruel process' (Selbourne, 1982, p. 27). Mitter, however, sees the harshness of Brook's regime as a necessary one:

If one can relinquish the notion that the actor must always be consciously in control... then one can come to appreciate how provocation of this sort can be liberating. To manipulate is not always to coerce; it also implies skill of the kind a chiropractor may use – where too success is contingent on submission.

(Mitter, 1992, p. 40)

Whatever Brook's genius (and Mitter, employing a vocabulary which suggests the application of a craft, or 'skill', argues that Brook's methodology was a largely benign and necessary part of that genius), it is clear that he was a challenging taskmaster who pushed actors through a series of gruelling processes until they achieved the results he wanted; although staging decisions were theoretically made collectively, in practice the context in which they were made could not be considered democratic. Coupled with Hall's didactic approach to verse-speaking, the impression is given that the RSC in the 1960s may have been capable of theatrical brilliance, but that brilliance was driven by committed, creative individuals forcefully driving those around them, rather than attempting to facilitate collective endeavour and mutual respect. The authority within the institution appeared to lay firmly with the directors rather than the actors.

Marowitz also records Brook's scepticism towards Stanislavski. He believed that Brook's methods only worked with certain actors because Brook 'distrusts the methodology of Method-work' (Marowitz & Trussler, 1967, p. 180).¹⁰⁴ Stanislavski aside, though, there are many similarities in methodology between Brook and Doran. Both favour long periods of workshops before staging the physical action of the play; both demand detailed and rigorous work from their actors through a long period of research and experimentation; both provide actors with a constant stream of stimulation, information and ideas to provoke the actor's imagination, though Brook uses improvisation far more than Doran as a device.

Brook was one of a generation of charismatic leaders in the early RSC who not only set the standard in terms of the quality of the productions, but also defined the context in which rehearsal would take place. If Hall was the ideologue and Barton the sage advisor then Brook was the director-as-guru, often elliptical in his pronouncements but punishing in his process. Hall may have established the tone and been the visible leader of the company, but it was Brook who redefined what it might be theatrically possible to achieve there, given enough rehearsal time and space to experiment and explore.

If Brook and his colleagues were demanding of their actors, then the cast were also capable of resisting their director's methods. Turning once more to Marowitz (his accounts of working at the RSC are so undiplomatic that it makes him an unusually valuable source on this period), he observed whilst documenting Brook's *King Lear* that 'one senses in the company an ingrained resistance to improvisation or any other experimental device during rehearsals' (Marowitz & Trussler, 1967, p. 139). There, the friction is caused by some actors not 'seeing the point' of improvisation around the text, largely informed by previous experiences where such work has failed to yield results. Marowitz helpfully provides a model for dividing actors into 'Trads' and 'Mods' in order to discuss these divisions. He suggests both types have a radically different

¹⁰⁴ Mitter disagrees with Marowitz on this, finding multiple points of convergence between Brook's approach and Stanislavski's (see Mitter, 1992, pp. 6-41). Mitter appears to be referring to Stanislavski's later psycho-physical, or somatic, method, however, whereas Marowitz associates Stanislavski with both the Russian's earlier theories and their American offshoot, 'Method' acting.

rehearsal language, which he pejoratively summarises in a table and which I will quote selected examples from:

Trads

Mods

Let's get it plotted

Let's get it analysed.

Fix inflections and readings.

Play for sense and let inflections take care of themselves.

Plot as soon as possible.

Move freely for as long as possible.

Final decisions as soon as possible.

Final decisions as late as possible and always open to reversal.

Let's get on with it and stop intellectualizing.

Let's apply what reason we have to the problems at hand.

(Marowitz & Trussler, 1967, p. 175)

The kind of exercise that was radical then is, of course, commonplace now. This is undoubtedly a development that Brook has played a role in facilitating, and any disagreements over the validity of a specific way of working are now more often about efficacy than ideology. With Doran, his particular process demands extensive exploratory analysis sat around a table, which can prompt resistance of a different kind. Keith Osborn, an actor in Doran's 2008 production of *Hamlet*, observes that

We actors tend to be practical people who are more comfortable in action, on our feet rather than just sitting and talking.

(Osborn, 2010, p. 87)

Jasper Britton, a memorable Petruchio for Doran and more recently cast as Henry IV for the director, is even more sceptical of lengthy exploration around a table, though as a leading actor his resistance is perhaps born of mild frustration rather than ideological:

He always makes you play a tiny part. I'm not very good at sitting around talking.

(Britton, Jasper, 2013)

Britton's remark characterises him as a 'Trad' in Marowitz's model, resistant to lengthy exploration, but there is also a reference to a key feature of Doran's process, that of asking actors to work with parts other than their own. By reassigning Britton to a smaller role at this stage of rehearsals, and presumably allowing an actor with fewer lines to work on Petruchio, Doran is placing value on the contribution of everyone to the creative process. Through an act of imposition, or dictatorship, he therefore facilitates a potentially less hierarchical approach to working on the play.

With rehearsal schedules under pressure, any time that is not spent actually working on staging the play can quickly become the focus of resentment. Osborn and Britton may find such work useful, but would also clearly rather be on their feet working through the actualities of the scene. The nuances of the debate may have changed since Marowitz's time at the company, but there is still a tension between the desire of the director and some of the cast to *explore*, and those actors who wish to start committing to specific performance choices as soon as possible.

The tendency of directors to impose either directorial concept or unfamiliar rehearsal methodology on their cast is one that still exists at the company today. When Jane Lapotaire was approached by Doran about playing Queen Katherine in Henry VIII, her first question was to ask 'Do I have to play it in a flak jacket?' (Lapotaire, 1998, p. 132). It is a response that betrays this particular actor's suspicion of modern dress, but it also reflects the wider concern of an actor working in a directors' theatre. For such an actor, the production is something that is done *to* them rather than *with* them.

The tradition that Doran inherits is therefore not necessarily a democratic one, or one that enfranchises the actors. A series of charismatic directors have at times achieved some remarkable pieces of theatre at the RSC, but have not necessarily always persuaded cast members of the value of their methods or ideas. Doran employs a range of strategies to promote actor engagement by collectively binding the whole ensemble into the decision-making process, which I will detail over the coming pages. Alert to the needs of actors such as Osborn, he also takes care to ensure that

there is variety in the rehearsal room, breaking up this lengthy period of ‘table work’ with a series of workshops, research trips and talks by outside experts. This is not to diminish the importance of the ‘table work’; it is a substantial block of rehearsal time and central to the creative process for him.

Before I map the various stages of the process, however, I first would like to briefly illustrate Doran’s collaborative instincts in action with an example from his 2003 production of *The Taming of the Shrew*. In Doran’s staging of *The Taming of the Shrew* the first encounter between Petruchio and Katherina (played by Britton and Alexandra Gilbreath) in 2.1 was staged in a manner that was perhaps surprising for its lack of violence and for the unusually good nature in which it was conducted. This is a scene which can be performed as a robust sparring match filled with knockabout ‘humour’, crudity and (often) physical violence,¹⁰⁵ yet in this version the most aggressive act was the forced tickling of Katherina’s feet by Petruchio. I will examine the production in more detail in a case study in Chapter Six, but I wish to highlight here an example of how diligent textual work done by the leading actor crucially informed this reading of the scene, and how the director embraced that contribution.

In the editorial tradition of the play, the re-entry of Baptista, Gremio and Tranio at the end of the encounter between the two protagonists comes on ‘Here comes your father.’ (283). Jasper Britton, who always insists on working from a facsimile of the 1623 Folio, discovered through his own study that in the Folio, the entrance was marked three lines earlier, after ‘Thou must be married to no man but me’ (279):

The other revelation for us, and frankly the key to the production, was a stage direction which had been misplaced by almost every editor in nearly every edition we read. Baptista and the others return to see what is happening in the middle of Petruchio’s final speech.
(Doran in Bate & Wright, 2010, p. 153)

This is Britton’s observation but Doran’s statement above reflects how the director seized on it whole-heartedly. Its importance is that with additional characters on stage the following lines become self-consciously performative:

For I am born to tame you, Kate,

¹⁰⁵ See Hodgdon, 1998, p. 2-4 for examples of more violent renditions of this scene.

And bring you from a wild Kate to a Kate
Conformable as other household Kates.

(2.1.-208-282)

The words are now meant for the auditors that have just arrived, rather than for Kate. The *Shrew* company had also done textual work that had seen them compare all the relative usages of the terms ‘thee’, ‘thou’ and ‘you’ in the scene and observed that Petruchio switches to a ‘you’ at this stage. This seemed to dovetail with the relocated stage direction and Doran enthusiastically embraced the reading that stemmed from this. Apart from demonstrating the foregrounding of detailed textual analysis in Doran’s rehearsal room this anecdote also illustrates the collaborative nature of that process; it was Britton’s observation that the stage direction had moved, yet this realisation was transformative for the entire production. From that moment on there was a private Kate/Petruchio relationship established as separate from the one for public consumption, and both characters were complicit in the charade.

Doran freely admits that it was Britton who made the crucial breakthrough rather than himself. It was

...revelatory to me. That was both a close reading of the text and Jasper’s even closer attention to the Folio and just an instinct that that was the bit of the scene that we couldn’t crack otherwise because it suddenly didn’t seem to make sense.

(Doran, 2014)

It is worth noting that Britton was drawing on a Shakespearean editorial authority to suggest a performance strategy which made ‘sense’ of the scene. The criterion for the change was, of course, based on its value to the dynamics of the scene and to Britton’s conception of its playability; the adjustment invited a particular interpretation of which he and Doran approved. Both men characterised the decision as a ‘discovery’ however, which returning to the Folio had enabled them to make. It was exactly the kind of interpretive choice that Foakes is describing when he argues that the text should be considered full of ‘potentialities for action and meaning’ (Foakes, 2006, p. 56), but that Worthen seems to deny the potential for. Britton, drawing on a textual/editorial authority, makes a clear choice in rehearsals that helps to determine the performance outcome, and in doing so makes the scene more plausible, not just for him, but potentially for the audience.

It is clear though that Doran welcomed the intervention from the actor. Doran's process may have enabled the discovery to occur by creating a space where actors feel empowered to make contributions, but we should note the director's generosity in allowing Britton to provide a correction with such transformative potential. By welcoming such offerings Doran has rejected an authoritarian model of directing and encouraged creative responsibility for the production to become a collective act.

Casting and Ensemble

Tyrone Guthrie said ‘Good directing is 80% good casting’ and that might be an overstatement but I think it’s a very accurate representation of what, if you’ve got the quality of actors to play those great whopping roles and if you’ve got people who are cast with something they can genuinely contribute even if they are tiny roles, that will really help you.

(Doran, 2014)

From the formation of the RSC in 1961 Peter Hall placed an ensemble system at the heart of the company with actors placed on long term contracts and cross-cast across multiple productions, performing both classic plays and new writing. Since Hall, the concept of the ensemble and what it means has therefore assumed a totemic importance for the company, but maintaining, and defining what that ensemble might be, has often been contested territory; if it is meant to determine anything in the way of a company-wide approach to staging and performing Shakespeare, then it is arguably militated against by the very organisation that exists to facilitate it. As Adler reasons,

At the RSC, several factors conspire against the creation of a true ensemble: the divergent approaches of the corps of directors, the disparate methodologies of the actors, the sheer size of the company, and the significant turnover of performers annually. For a given production at the RSC, a director might choose to employ an ensemble approach that combines exercises and improvisations in a more democratic rehearsal process, but the RSC as a whole is too large and unwieldy to ever be considered a true ensemble.

(Adler, 2001, p. 213)

In recent years, under Michael Boyd’s leadership, there has been a partial return to Hall’s original system of three-year acting ensembles, although there remained a series of shorter term productions with acting companies unique to those productions (many of which were directed by Doran). This model appears largely stable under Doran with slight adjustments; a core ensemble is thus retained at Stratford though on shorter contracts than during the Boyd era, and there is a greater emphasis on limited runs featuring ‘star’ performers in leading roles. If I contest the term ‘star’ here it is because it is often used derogatively to imply actors who owe an undeserved status to high profile television and film roles and consequently lack the ability or training demanded by Shakespearean stage work. All of the actors Doran has employed to date with a high profile nationally and internationally had substantial stage experience previous to achieving this profile, including with the RSC. Doran does however define ensemble in a different way from Boyd:

Michael Boyd and I disagreed on what the word ensemble meant... we agree on part of it in that it’s a group brought together with a shared community of ideas... in terms of going back to the first principles of the RSC and Peter Hall put a company together which was to

be together for three years to do a particular period of work... it was a company led by Peggy Ashcroft and Paul Scofield and I think the leading of the ensemble was actually part of it rather than some kind of democratised group... I don't guess that Richard Burbage played many spear carriers at the Globe... You can't cast an ensemble; you can only grow an ensemble and that growth comes from inviting and encouraging the investment of the team that you're working on...

(Doran, 2013b)

Doran, as Hall did, acknowledges that it is desirable commercially *and* artistically to have an actor of high status leading the ensemble; he believes that Shakespearean acting companies are, and should be, at least in terms of casting, hierarchical.

Even when Michael Boyd was directing the two long ensemble projects that defined his time as Artistic Director it was noticeable that Doran often tended to work outside of that structure, leading shorter term projects which often featured higher profile actors. As well as the many productions with Antony Sher that I have already mentioned, there was Judi Dench in *All's Well that Ends Well* (2003) and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (2006) (alongside Simon Callow), Patrick Stewart and Harriet Walter in *Antony and Cleopatra* (2006), David Tennant in *Hamlet* and *Love's Labour's Lost* (both 2008) and Richard Wilson in *Twelfth Night* (2009). Since taking over the Artistic Directorship Tennant has returned, along with Jane Lapotaire and Michael Pennington for *Richard II* (2013) and Eileen Atkins played *The Witch of Edmonton* (2014). Simon Russell Beale is also to return to the company to play Prospero in Doran's production of *The Tempest* in winter 2016. In some sense the short runs of each of these plays echo Noble's ill-fated 'Project Fleet' here, with a policy of shrinking the project to fit the star's schedule, although the RSC has always had standalone productions alongside its core repertoire. What also appears to be the case, though, is that a number of actors that have not worked at the RSC for several years, where in many cases they made their reputations, are now beginning to return. I consider this to be not merely about flexible contracts; Doran is creating a space that prioritises the contribution of actors in the theatrical process and it seems that as a result it is becoming a more desirable company to work for.

Mounting discrete productions which are not part of the core RSC ensemble also means that latterly Doran has not always had the same pressures that many RSC directors face when they compete for the attention of their cast in the rehearsal schedule. This was certainly not always the

case, although Doran, as a director with such intimate knowledge of the institution, seems adept at getting his way. Consider Assistant Director Tom Wright's account of working with Doran on *The Tamer Tamed*

The RSC's cross casting system wasn't working anyway, cause we were up against another director who was new to the company who works in a very ensemble way so he wanted all of his actors all of the time... That was Greg Thompson on *As You Like It*, who I think was rather unfairly treated by the RSC actually cause they hadn't really explained what is actually quite a convoluted system, which of course Greg (Doran) knows like the back of his hand, so there was some frustration about the fact that on his priority day he would call everyone, which was making our rehearsals very complicated and of course Greg (Doran) was sharing a cast with himself... it was complicated.

(Wright, T., 2013)

Wright's testimony demonstrates some of the tensions inherent in the system, as well as Doran's experience and skill in negotiating them.

Equally important for Doran, once casting is complete, is ensuring that every member of the company is fully engaged in making the piece of theatre that will result.

I remember John Barton saying to me 'it's not Macbeth and Lady Macbeth you've got to worry about, it's Lennox and Menteith'. Lady Macbeth and Macbeth will do their own performances, you'll create an environment in which they can flourish all being well, but what's Menteith going to do with his three lines and how do you engage him in helping you to create that world and that I think is key.

(Doran, 2014)

How Doran does this, and how he structurally embeds the enfranchisement of all actors rather than just the leading ones in his rehearsal process, levelling the hierarchies that his casting inevitably sets up, will now be my focus, and I will turn my attention to the 'table work' element of the rehearsal schedule.

‘In your own words...’: paraphrasing the text

When *Titus Andronicus* commenced rehearsals in 1995 it was in a manner that has come to define the early stages of rehearsals for every Doran-directed production:

So finally, after a couple of ice-breaking, group-warming games, we begin to rehearse. The first few days will be rigorously devoted to taking the text apart so that everybody understands each word. This involves long sessions of sitting round a table reading the whole text, line by line and paraphrasing.

(Sher & Doran, 1996, p. 110)

Compare this with an actor’s account of working with Doran on a pair of productions in 2008:

As for *Dream* we go through *Hamlet* reading each scene in short sections, first in Shakespeare’s then our own words.

(Osborn, 2010, p. 87)

Similarly, Guy Henry’s relates how, on *King John* (2001)

... the cast won’t read the play through on the first day, as is often the case; they’ll read it through slowly over the first couple of weeks, painstakingly examining, and paraphrasing into ‘modern’ English, every word and line of it, as a full company together, so that each and every member of the cast knows precisely what’s being said at any one time.

(Henry, 2004, p. 26)

All three extracts refer to the practice of spending early rehearsals reading the text and paraphrasing it into contemporary language. Of the many descriptions of Doran’s rehearsal techniques that have been published in various forms, the centrality of detailed textual work of this nature at the beginning of rehearsals is emphasised in all of them. A full read through of the play is usually held back until the climax of such work, sometimes as late as the third week, ensuring that it occurs at a point when a considerable level of fluency and understanding has already been achieved.

Paraphrasing *per se* is not in itself unusual; what draws attention here is the rigour of the exercise, the time that Doran devotes to it, and the fact that he clearly uses the same method for every play that he directs.¹⁰⁶ In fact, recurrence is common to many of the techniques that will be discussed here; they are frequently cited by actors working in different Doran-directed productions. Guy Henry relates how when working with Doran for the second time (the first being Doran’s 1996

¹⁰⁶On the rare occasions when he directs a new play he may adapt the process but it is still clearly recognisably a variant of the same, as he works through the script methodically with the author present, encouraging his cast to test and challenge every word.

production of *Henry VIII* in the Swan), he ‘was happy to see that the rehearsal techniques that I’d enjoyed then were going to be employed on our *King John*’ (Henry, 2004, p. 26).

To return to the issue of paraphrasing, which plays such a prominent part in these first few days, clarity is usually cited as the main justification. Doran himself expands on this in a piece written for the programme of his 2008 production of *Hamlet*, also published online in the form of a director’s diary:

This may sound laborious, but it reveals how easy it is to assume you know what the words mean, and how hard it is to be really specific. Sometimes it shatters preconceptions, sometimes confirms them.

(Doran, 2008)

Doran often gives the following example to illustrate how this can lead to sometimes surprising discoveries for the company:

He tells me at the beginning of rehearsals he sometimes gets the actors to read the chorus’s line from the start of *Romeo and Juliet*. They groan – it is too familiar, but he then proves they have all misunderstood it. The line “A pair of star-crossed lovers take their life” doesn’t mean they kill themselves, it means they take their lives – i.e. they are born – from their feuding families.

(Appleyard, 2012)

From this starting point Doran then proceeds to encourage paraphrasing that is detailed and thorough. Each line is paraphrased many different times and aided by the various editions and critical commentaries he has at the company’s disposal during rehearsal:

...we had different people who were responsible for different [editions], so Onions and Crystal and Oxford English were all scattered around, so say if you do *Hamlet* and everybody’s got a different edition and ‘My editor says...’.

(Wright, T., 2013)

He therefore facilitates what he characterises as a collective process of discovery. For Doran and his company, the suggestion is that they are locating fixed meanings already in the text. It might be more precise, however, to suggest that he, and his actors, are producing meanings that align with their understanding of the play and their characters, rather than reproducing meanings already there. The meanings that are being assigned are therefore consistent with an essentially Stanislavskian, realist conception of character, and a thoroughly modern subjectivity.

In Doran’s rehearsals, lines are paraphrased repeatedly by different actors, and interpretations challenged until the most satisfying ones, for them, are adopted, not just by the actor who has to

perform them but by the whole ensemble. The production of meaning is, therefore, in theory, a collective rather than an individual act.

Though Doran attributes his methodology to his experience at the RSC in 1987, there *is* a reference to its application as a universal rehearsal principle for Shakespeare in Antony Sher's account of his drama school training at Webber-Douglas, which he commenced in 1969 long before meeting Doran.

We did 'Speaking Shakespeare' with the actor Nick Amer, from whom I first learned two basic principles: you have to paraphrase every single word in every single speech, *translate* them into contemporary English, and then, when you've understood everything, get it back up to speed, like normal speech. We talk very fast, very deftly, and Shakespeare is easier to understand at this pace than when it's overemphasised.

(Sher, 2001, p. 107)

It is clear therefore that this part of Doran's process, at least, was part of Sher's approach long beforehand, and even if their respective techniques have evolved in isolation there is an alignment of process which hints at the successful professional (and personal) partnership that has developed. For now, it is worth observing that whilst the technique in itself does not guarantee excellence in performance, or even clarity, Doran's productions are frequently praised for their lucidity. As applied here, though, paraphrasing appears to achieve something more, which is a sense of ownership of the language by the whole company. The actors have assigned very specific meanings to every word in a collective endeavour that is unique to this particular group of actors.

Wright does raise the issue of retention as a problem, although he supports the validity of the exercise:

Interestingly there was a slight disjunct in that bits that we'd really nailed down and we'd really been clear about later on in rehearsals you wondered if the actual actor whose line it was had been listening when we translated it as there were quite a few moments when you'd go 'oh... really'.

(Wright, T., 2013)

As with any rehearsal process, Doran's particular technique, it seems, is only as useful as the diligence and engagement of those in rehearsals. Here, the problem seems to have occurred when the cast return to scenes that had been paraphrased sometime before, but find that adequate notes had not been taken by some actors and work had to be repeated. Individual lapses, though, should

not detract from what is undoubtedly a thorough process that (in theory) ensures the whole ensemble is committed to the same meaning of every word said.

It is worth considering that when Sher directed *Breakfast with Mugabe* at the RSC in 2006 he made the following statement about his own approach:

To penetrate it, I used the RSC approach to Shakespeare. Everyone slowly picks through the text together, paraphrasing it, checking they understand every word, and then they get it back to speed.

(Sher, 2006)

Ironically, he is not describing the RSC approach to Shakespeare, he is describing Doran's.¹⁰⁷ He sees them as one and the same thing.

¹⁰⁷ Even though other directors at the RSC do use paraphrasing, Doran is the one most associated with it as a central part of his methodology, as can be seen from the actors' accounts of working with Doran cited above.

Telling the story collectively: swapping characters and naming scenes

The one rule in this process is that you never get to read your own part;
(Henry, 2004, p. 26)

In the extract from Guy Henry's description of *King John* rehearsals quoted above, the actor alludes to another element in Doran's early process: that no actor ever reads their own part during this stage of rehearsals. Again, this is related in numerous accounts of Doran-led rehearsals; one such description relates how the cast must read 'each scene in turn regardless of gender, BUT the golden rule is that no one is allowed to read or comment on their own part' (Osborn, 2010, p. 29). As with the paraphrasing, which it typically works in conjunction with, multiple cast members are encouraged to give multiple readings. In doing this, Doran is asking the cast to place the perceived needs of the play before the needs of their own part, and to consider the function of all roles within each scene rather than just their own. The process is designed to promote understanding and connection with the text for *everyone*, and by allowing multiple readings of each line Doran opens up a variety of choices for each cast member, encouraging no one to get too set on just one fixed reading at this stage.

Doran outlines the outcomes he intends in the passage below:

As always I start rehearsals by reading the play as if the ink were still wet on the page. We read around the table, with no one playing their own parts. Then everyone puts the text into his or her own words. The actor with the smallest role may illuminate a word or line with a fresh insight, and as a consequence, three things happen: 1) our mutual understanding of the play deepens; 2) the sharing of ideas breeds a greater investment in the production; and 3) the company begins to grow into an ensemble.

(Doran, in *Macbeth: Shakespeare in Performance*, 2007, p. 11)

Doran's references to wet ink here implies that there is an attempt through this process to search for contemporary reference points rather than early modern ones, by effectively treating the text as a new play. Doran's rhetoric frequently privileges Shakespearean authority; here he is privileging the production of meaning as facilitated by his process. It is what the words mean now that assumes importance, negotiated by the wider ensemble rather than just the individual actor.

This process undoubtedly finds favour with those playing smaller roles, for whom rehearsals can otherwise be characterised by brief bursts of activity surrounded by an awful lot of waiting, but it

also appears to prove useful for many of the leading actors that Doran has worked with. Harriet Walter writes approvingly of the technique, that it ‘... enabled us to study the whole play objectively and to highlight things about our own character by listening to another voice reading it’ (Walter, 2002, p. 9), and Guy Henry expands further:

This is a great way for the company to get to know, and hear, each other; it allows those cast in the smaller parts to be genuinely involved in the production from the outset, and it means that no one feels any pressure to ‘perform’ their own part – nor get set in their ways with it! – at such an early stage.

(Henry, 2004, p. 26)

This creates an interesting scenario for the actor whose main goal is an act of mimesis. Rather than commencing the construction of their individual performances at the outset of rehearsals they must sublimate that desire into the needs of the ensemble, and devote time and energy to seeing the play through another’s eyes. Doran clearly feels there are substantial payoffs here, in terms of ensemble unity, understanding and collaborative working. It would also appear to encourage a cast that listens – if you have read the part in rehearsals that you are talking to onstage, or even heard it read in a multiplicity of voices, then you are, in theory, far more likely to have a direct engagement with those lines as they are spoken by another actor in performance. As Jane Lapotaire observes on rehearsing *Henry VIII* or *All is True*:

The process was hugely useful too, as it often gave one a chance to read one’s opponent. I gained great insight into Wolsey, Katherine’s arch enemy, by, as luck would have it, having to read him for a whole scene and therefore empathising with his predicament and feelings in a way that might otherwise never have been opened up to me.

(Lapotaire, 1998, pp. 133-134)

Lapotaire’s insight into Wolsey, gained through this process, challenges the internalising notion of character that a psychologically realist process might suggest. To use Stanislavski’s term, this opens up an entirely different ‘perspective’, in which through playing Wolsey she sees how her own role functions within the scene, and gains some understanding of her character’s impact on her enemy at the same time.

As the company work through the play a number of times, paraphrasing and switching roles, each scene, or sub-section of a scene, is given a name by the cast and director. This is then used exclusively throughout the rehearsal and production process rather than the act and scene number. The naming act is again a collective one, chaired by Doran and usually involving multiple

suggestions before the one that feels most apposite is settled upon. Broadly, the names used are divided into two categories; the purely descriptive, recording the location or character of the scene; or the more thematic, relating an event, happening or idea that emerges during its course. Most of the prompt copies I have consulted retain this system of naming scenes throughout, suggesting the naming act is more than cosmetic and has a currency within the stage management and creative team as well as the acting company. For example, the following scene names were taken from the prompt copy for 1999's production of *Macbeth* in the Swan Theatre.

Part One: The War

Act 1	Sc 1	“We Three”
Act 2	Sc 2	Bloody Captain
Act 1	Sc 3	Blasted Heath
Act 1	Sc 4	Forres

Part Two: Murder of Duncan

Act 1	Sc 5	The Letter
Act 1	Sc 6	King's Arrival
Act 1	Sc 7	Cold Feet
Act 2	Sc 1	Dagger scene
Act 2	Sc 2	The Murder
Act 3	Sc 3	Porter

Part Three: Murder of Banquo

Act 2	Sc 4	Old Man
Act 3	Sc 1	King and Queen
Act 3	Sc 2	Scorpions
Act 3	Sc 3	Banquo's Murder
Act 2	Sc 4	The Great Feast

Part Four: Beware Macduff

Act 4	Sc 1	Apparitions
Act 4	Sc 2	Lady Macduff
Act 4	Sc 3	The England Scene
Act 5	Sc 1	Sleepwalking

Part Five: Malcolm

Act 5	Sc 2	Defectors
Act 5	Sc 3	Seyton
Act 5	Sc 4	The English Forces
Act 5	Sc 5	The Queen's Death
Act 5	Sc 6a	Birnam Wood (Now near enough)
	Sc 6b	Young Seyward (They have tied me to a stake)
	Sc 6c	The Mac's Fight (tyrant show thy face)

This is a process facilitated by Doran, and a possible means for him to assert storytelling priorities whilst engaging in a semi-democratic process. For instance, certain characters ('Seyton', 'Young Seyward'), particular imagery ('Scorpions'), or locations ('Blasted Heath') are privileged at the expense of alternative choices. Even, in one case, the use of the definite article implies a self-referential tone towards 'The England Scene', an awareness of its reputation as a difficult scene to perform effectively. The scene names are a means by which a key element in each one becomes the focus for the ensemble; that element, to a lesser or a greater degree, is then foregrounded in performance. It is a technique that opens up the possibility for meanings in performance to be clearly and consistently produced by the whole ensemble, but it also controls what those meanings are.

It is also an assertion of directorial over editorial authority, reclaiming scene names from the act and scene divisions in printed versions of the text. Doran, who usually works from a bespoke performance script, appears to be attempting to reclaim the dramatic structure of the play from the divisions imposed by editorial tradition.¹⁰⁸

Doran's technique is to immerse the actor in a culture of taking responsibility for the whole play along with their fellow cast-members. The paraphrasing process, the rotation of roles and the scene-naming during this early part of rehearsals are largely focussed on two outcomes: building an ensemble through engaging all cast members in the process of analysis on a notionally equal footing, and a focus on storytelling priorities where every member of the company commits to a set of common objectives and meanings, to be expressed through the play's eventual performance.

¹⁰⁸ Outdoor performances at the Globe would generally have been performed without intervals and therefore did not have act and scene divisions. Indoor performances, such as at the Blackfriars, would have had Act divisions generally dictated by the length of time candles could last before being changed.

Research, workshops and ‘experts’

As I have detailed, Doran devotes a considerable amount of the early rehearsal structure to textual work on clarity and meaning, often long before attempting a first read through, let alone beginning the task of putting any scenes ‘on their feet’. Alongside the process I have described so far he also provides variety and depth to the schedule by placing great emphasis on the role of research as a means of achieving understanding and empathy with the characters each actor is playing. Doran appears to believe that establishing a meaningful relationship with the characters and world of the play is vital for him and his actors, and it is here that his work clearly begins to fall within the second of Barton’s ‘two traditions’, the imperative for psychological realism in the construction of character. It is also the section of his early process that draws most heavily on Stanislavskian ideas.

At their most banal the research tasks Doran sets are little more than bonding exercises to break up early rehearsals. For instance, sending the actors playing Hermia and Helena in 2005’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* on a shopping trip to pick out their wedding dresses, or later that year taking the entire company of *The Canterbury Tales* to Canterbury in an ersatz recreation of the Pilgrims’ journey, then asking them to find the most ridiculous pieces of Chaucer-related merchandising they could buy when they got there. It is difficult to seriously quantify the effect such exercises might have on the performance the actors later give, but Doran clearly believes there is value in such work as it features regularly in accounts of his rehearsals.

Doran was already grappling with the question of research and how it might inform characterisation when, as an actor, he featured in the 1987-88 RSC season. Playing Solanio in *The Merchant of Venice* in a production which also featured Antony Sher as Shylock, he conducted his own detailed research into the Venetian merchant class of the period, including journeying to Venice himself to investigate. He subsequently observed how the kinds of detail gleaned through research, which might inform his performance and support him as an actor, could actually come into conflict with what he understood as the needs of the play:

It's easy to become so involved in the search for character that your perspective becomes distorted. Even the attempt to discern a through line can be deceptive. I don't really think Shakespeare thought in those terms. These characters work from moment to moment; there is little psychological progression discernible.

(Doran, 1993, p. p. 72)

As with so many other practitioners, Doran is describing a tension between the needs of the Stanislavski-trained actor and the wider perceived demands of the play. As Jonathan Holmes has written of the same account,

Far from being an illustration of Stanislavskyan dependency, Doran's essay is a diary of the process of questioning such a stance. Significantly, it is the experience of playing such a small part ('these parts') that sparks off such a critical response, as Doran becomes aware of the character's functional relationship to the plot more than its supposedly self-contained personality.

(Holmes, 2004, p. p. 21)

Whereas Barton's 'two traditions' might be described as embodying an analysis of form on one hand and character on the other, there is also an additional tension between *character* and *function* in play here, and specifically the wider dramatic role the character is supposed to play in the drama as it unfolds. As Holmes suggests, Doran is realising that an overly realistic and detailed character might actually be detrimental to, rather than compatible with, an effective performance.¹⁰⁹

It appears that Doran the actor is in discussion here with Doran the emerging director. He shows an awareness of the production's perceived need for clarity, without extraneous or irrelevant detail, and the functionality of his own role within it, although he describes that need as emanating from Shakespeare's writing rather than the demands of the production. The account is written at a distance of several years, which perhaps alongside his subsequent directorial experience grants him an objectivity he did not possess at the time, but it is apparent that he is starting to question his own process as much as a director as an actor. In such questioning we begin to see the roots of his own methodology taking shape, specifically the need for an actor to understand their function in the play, so that they can fulfil their theatrical purpose as well as delivering a realistic character. He eventually concludes of his own work on Solanio:

I don't know whether these details ever really registered to the audience. In the end it doesn't really matter. Perhaps someone noticed them; perhaps they contributed to the general life of the world we were depicting. I hope so. I hope they didn't pull focus, or

¹⁰⁹ Stanislavski does account for this awareness of the wider play beyond the character, through his use of the term 'perspectives'.

even distract from the main action. After all, Solanio and Salerio are not the main course; they're only side salads.

(Doran, 1993, p. p. 76)

Doran now compares his negative experience on *Julius Caesar* with the much richer, more positive one he had as an actor on *The Merchant of Venice* with director Bill Alexander as a key influence on his developing directorial approach. It appears that just as the lack of attention paid to supporting roles in Hands' production influenced his views on actor engagement, so the close attention to detail and research involved in Alexander's fed Doran's sense of the usefulness of the search for realism through research, even if he realises that this creates a tension with the perceived needs of the Shakespearean play:

...certainly the first play I was in was *The Merchant of Venice* and quite apart from the fact that I met my life partner, it was a very special show because somehow what I learned from that production, it was directed by Bill Alexander, was a sense of inclusivity of every body's perspective, I was playing Solanio in my Salad Days in one of the Salad roles and what I realised was that he really did want to know what I felt about – my perspective was welcomed and therefore my investment was deeper in the show...

(Doran, 2014)

Having observed how much of Doran's early career and success was built around his partnership with Antony Sher, we should note that in Sher's biography the actor also cites the influence of the director Max Stafford-Clark as significant. Stafford-Clark is a director who, much like Doran, has a consistently applied methodology (actioning);¹¹⁰ uses research extensively and asks the actors to draw on their personal experiences.¹¹¹ Sher has recounted how Stafford-Clark has a simple test for research, which the actor is in full agreement with: '...never mind if it's interesting, how can you use it?' (Sher, 2001, p. 321).

If some of the research tasks that I have previously described appeared frivolous, then it could be argued that there is a wider usefulness to them. The relative boredom of a process which involves potentially weeks of sitting around a table should not be underestimated, and one suspects that sometimes external visits and tasks for the actors exist to break up the routine. There is also eclecticism in Doran's approach which sometimes seems to be less concerned with recreation or fidelity to that which is being represented than with providing a more general creative stimulus to

¹¹⁰ This is the subtextual application of a transitive verb by the actor to every line of dialogue, a technique which has a clear antecedent in Stanislavskian processes.

¹¹¹ See Roberts & Stafford-Clark (2007) for a detailed description and analysis of Stafford-Clark's approach across a wide range of productions.

the actor. A particular task or exercise may encourage thought and understanding, it may even contribute to the physical realisation of the character, but it is ‘pick and mix’ in its application.

Discussing Doran’s essay on his performance in *Merchant*, W B Worthen describes it thus:

Reading for “character,” the actors use a kind of historical bricolage to assimilate the centrifugal energies of the role to the modern demand that their performance incarnate a single, undivided, modern subject, a readable self.

(Worthen, 1997, p. 132)

Worthen is sceptical here, questioning if reconciling an early modern subjectivity with the modern ideal of character is a necessary or desirable exercise, but Doran, as with many other actors in the *Players of Shakespeare* series, appears to suggest that it enables the actor to resolve the tensions that have arisen between the two, and, therefore (theoretically) construct an effective act of performance.

This is a key consideration in determining the type of research that Doran deems appropriate, research that enables his actors to productively rehearse the play, but does not necessarily seek to recreate any kind of historicised outcome in performance. In this respect it bears little relationship to the type of ‘original practices’ work carried out by the Globe and other companies, and the materiality of early modern performance conditions are only relevant to Doran and his company in so far as they are *useful*. Instead, his approach centres on very simple questions about how his cast might understand the language they are saying, what meanings they produce from it, the psychology of the characters they are playing and the world they inhabit within the play.

Thus, in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (2005), bolstered by a visit from the naturalist Richard Mabey’s advice and a field trip for the actors, Doran had the cast become personally acquainted with the sights, smells and sounds of the Stratford countryside and the flora and fauna they must describe. When Oberon says,

I know a bank where the wild thyme blows,
Where oxlips and the nodding violet grows,
2.1.254-55

the actor concerned, Joe Dixon, had the sensory experience of seeing, touching and feeling those actual plants to draw upon, enabling the language to come alive and in John Barton’s phrase, seem ‘fresh-minted’:

By being specific about the poetry, it allowed Joe to retain not just the sense of it and experience the lushness and exuberance of the language, but for him to have a genuine purpose in speaking that language.

(Doran, www.rsc.org.uk, 2005)

In this case Mabey provides expertise from beyond the theatrical world which can inform the performance. Speakers and experts who can assist with the acquisition of new skills and knowledge that might be useful in the production are a common sight at Doran's rehearsals. For instance, for his 2001 production of *King John*, Jo Stone Fewings (playing the Bastard) relates how

During rehearsals we had a day with Max Aitchinson, a speech writer for politicians and someone with a passionate interest in the power of words. He took us through a session on the mechanics of public speaking, or, as he put it, 'how to make an audience listen'.

(Stone-Fewings, 2004, p. 65)

Of course the experts that are invited into rehearsals, as well as the company research trips outside, provide knowledge and skills which are determined by Doran in advance to be of value to the acting company. Such priorities then can tend to become foregrounded in the final production. For instance, providing an expert on modern political rhetoric chimed neatly with Doran's satirical take on *King John*, and gave the cast an insight into, and connection between, political spin and the play they were due to perform. Echoing Doran's 'democracy disguised as dictatorship', what often feels to the actor like an empowering experience is actually likely to produce a pre-determined performance outcome.

The second type of specialist that Doran welcomes into his rehearsal space with considerable frequency is other theatre practitioners, bringing with them particular areas of proficiency. The RSC as an organisation has a vast array of experts permanently on hand to draw on for specific skills and knowledge, such as voice and movement directors, dialect coaches and other specialists, and Doran takes full advantage of these. This is common in RSC practice, and many directors choose to effectively delegate responsibility in such areas to the appropriate professional. Sher observes, however, that 'some directors, like Greg, prefer to make this work part of the rehearsal process, often running the sessions themselves' (Sher, 2001, p. 267), though Wright challenges this narrative, based on his experience assisting Doran:

At the beginning of the process in London we had John Barton knocking around so everybody was learning sonnets and that was very present. There were quite a few whole RSC company warm ups, which was mind-blowing, and Cicely Berry turned up for a few of those, so that stuff was in the ether... There was a voice coach so people would

regularly disappear, from quite early on, to go have one- on-ones but I don't remember a lot about verse and metre being in the room... If you've got that resource it makes sense for you not to be spending that time...

(Wright, T., 2013)

Wright suggests that actually the RSC's voice and verse team was actively engaged in the production and embedded in the schedule. For Wright this is a logical use of resources, but I would argue that is also an exercise in institutional authority. In a company in which there has been strongly held yet disparate views over verse-speaking throughout its history and a regular turnover of actors and directors new to the company every year who each bring with them their own traditions, bringing Berry and Barton into the rehearsal room co-opts their authority. Doran cites both as influential figures in his early career as an actor and director, and his rhetoric certainly aligns with Barton, as well as his rehearsal preoccupations:

I think outside the actual directing, the influence of Cicely Berry and John Barton were both huge...

(Doran, 2014)

Berry, too, is therefore clearly important. Doran undoubtedly has views about verse-speaking himself, which I will detail shortly, and is surely competent to run such sessions himself. Just as Mabey or Aitchison can provide the specialist knowledge that bolsters Doran's desired reading of the play, so Barton, Berry and their colleagues provide authority to the performance values that Doran wishes to embed. If Mabey can foreground the role of nature in the play for Doran, then Barton can reinforce the importance of the verse line. It is not that Doran necessarily needs the specialist knowledge; it is that they provide that knowledge with *authority*.

Verse and language

It's not a University degree you need; it's the craft of speaking Shakespeare which we at the RSC work very hard at.

It is a craft and I think it does take a lot of hard work to do it. Nobody's pretending that it's easy but in the mouths of actors who know how to do it it should be absolutely easy to understand.

(Doran speaking on *Antony Sher and Greg Doran in conversation with Sue MacGregor*, 2015)

Viewing Doran's performance as Solanio on the video of *Merchant of Venice* held in the RSC archive several things can be observed. Firstly, his is not a performance swamped by the extraneous detail of his research as he feared it might be – his delivery is light, crisp and seems to serve the play well. He does not hit each metrical stress as hard as his partner on stage Michael Cadman does playing Salerio, but he is clearly metrically observant. He frequently plays through the line ending to the caesura, privileging the integrity of the thought over that of the line, but he also has a tendency to let the last foot of the line have a slight downward inflection, a quality that also gave his Octavius Caesar a downbeat quality. This is not a tendency shared by others in the production, and it is illuminating to contrast Geoffrey Freshwater's speech as Gratiano in 1.1.82-107, who gives a slight emphasis to the final stress of each line without exception.

Ignoring, or diminishing the importance of, the line ending, is not an approach that Doran has taken forward as a director. It also contrasts with RSC orthodoxy promoted by figures such as John Barton, Peter Hall and Cicely Berry, all of whom stress the importance of playing thought, argument and *energy* right to the end of the line. In other words, the final stress of the line should, according to them, be held up, not tilt downwards in pitch or be unsupported vocally. As the instruction for this has clearly not come from the director or from the wider RSC culture of verse-speaking, this would therefore appear to be, whether by choice or accident, the innovation of a young actor. Beyond Doran's performance, the unevenness of approach apparent from the video recording, not just in this production, but also in *Julius Caesar*, gives credence to many critics' accusations at the time that verse was the province of individual directors. Hall's dream of a common identity founded on ensemble acting and a shared approach to language which 'came to stand for the ideology of the company' (Chambers, 2004, p. 143) appeared to be moving further

and further away. Having said that, Doran's delivery appears to be through choice rather than accident:

Terry Hands, directing Doran, once said: 'There are 100 ways of saying Shakespeare, but your way is not one of them.' To which Doran cheekily replied: 'Now there are 101.'
(Kellaway, 1997)

Twenty five years later Doran made the following assertion in an interview to mark his appointment as the new RSC Artistic Director:

That language is at the centre of what we do, and if we don't honour that, and embrace the difficulty and challenges of expressing ourselves through those words, then we're nothing.
(Doran, 2012)

His commitment to the prioritisation of language suggested that he would, in the footsteps of Hall and perhaps Noble, pay close attention to the speaking of verse. In fact, as has become evident, Doran's negotiation of Shakespearean language prioritises meaning before metre. Furthermore, from actors' accounts of Doran's rehearsal process, metrical work does not occupy a space of its own as it might do in a Peter Hall rehearsal, but rather dovetails with other approaches during the 'table' work phase or, in the manner I have described in the previous section, is delegated to an 'expert' within the company. Alexandra Gilbreath has described how she 'got careful advice from the RSC Voice Department, in the person of Andrew Wade' (see Gilbreath, 2003, p. 84), working through the metrical detail of her speeches as Hermione in *Winter's Tale* (1999) outside of the main rehearsals rather than in the room with Doran. John Barton also usually does a workshop,¹¹² but otherwise adherence to the importance of metre is, to use a Stanislavskian phrase, a set of 'given circumstances' that underpins rehearsals rather than a foregrounded concern. Far more scheduled time and attention is focussed on research exercises and paraphrasing.

I have already argued the importance of Barton to Doran personally, and the centrality of Hall's views to the RSC itself. Other directors that Doran worked with as an assistant and actor undoubtedly proved influential too; John Caird, for instance, asked his cast, including Doran, to research Caroline London in preparation for performing in Caird's 1987 production of *The New Inn* in the Swan, a tactic that finds clear echoes in Doran's methodology today. Caird has published his views on directing and performing Shakespeare more recently in a book titled *Theatre Crafts*, like

¹¹² Due to Barton's age these are now less frequent than they were.

Doran opting for the terminology of the artisan rather than the artist. In the section labelled ‘Verse and Verse Speaking’ Caird reveals himself to be a legislator, listing ‘15 Basic Rules for Speaking Verse’. I will not list them all as it is a sizeable section and most are commonplace orthodoxies such as ‘Verse is not naturalistic dialogue and cannot be spoken as such’ (Caird, 2010, p. 771).

The one that is of particular interest is:

The actor should maintain his vocal energy through each line of verse, not dropping in pitch or volume at the end of the line

(Caird, 2010, p. 770)

This is noteworthy for two reasons: firstly, because as I have already observed, it was a feature of some of Doran’s early performances at the RSC that he tended to downwards inflect towards the end of each line; secondly because, as will become evident in the next section, it is now one of Doran’s central priorities when it comes to the speaking of verse.

I will now explore Doran’s practice with regard to verse and Shakespearean language through my experience of watching him in rehearsal for *Henry IV Part I* (2014), and then through an analysis of a short scene from the RSC Live recording of his production of *Richard II* (2013).

Doran in rehearsal

When I observed Doran in rehearsal in January 2014 for *Henry IV Part I*,¹¹³ the company had completed the paraphrasing and role-swapping phase of rehearsals and were now reading their own parts. Each section of the rehearsal began with a read through of the relevant scene, followed by a discussion and then a slow and detailed work back through the text. From the read through and the nature of the work that followed, it was apparent that detailed discussions on verse had not taken place prior to this.

During the rehearsal, the subject of line endings was repeatedly raised by Doran, with the request that they be observed, or marked in some way. Asking the company to ‘recognise what the verse line gives you, that makes it not prose’,¹¹⁴ Doran suggested that it was important to recognise each line ending, even if the line was enjambed to the caesura on the following line. Doran’s approach was not didactic; the instruction was framed as a polite request and he allowed room for each actor to interpret it in their own way, but it was a request made several times to different actors nonetheless. At one point, he digressed onto a discussion of the verse in *Winter’s Tale*, observing that Hermione’s trial speech hardly seems to be in verse, yet if you recognised that it *was* verse then it gave, he suggested, clues to Hermione’s state of mind. His authority at this moment was convincing, reinforced by his ability to quote the passage from *Winter’s Tale* from memory to the cast. He went on:

Hermione’s speech could be looked at as an argument for not recognising line endings...
Shakespeare’s giving you something to play... if you make yourself somehow mark the
line endings you can get her state of mind.

(Doran, in *Henry IV Part I* rehearsal, 2014)

In suggesting that the psychology of the character can be deduced from the structure and pattern of the verse, Doran is aligning with orthodox RSC practice dating to Hall. Unlike Hall, and as we have seen, such discussions in this case are actually taking place after considerable exploration of

¹¹³ The scenes rehearsed were 3.2, 4.1, 4.3 & 4.4

¹¹⁴ Quotes attributed to Doran in this section were transcribed by me during rehearsal. Recording the rehearsal was not permitted; so where I lack confidence that I have captured Doran’s exact phrasing I will rather paraphrase his thinking and acknowledge it accordingly. If the citation appears as a quotation, however, then I am confident I have transcribed his words verbatim.

meaning has already occurred, and decisions about individual psychology and storytelling priorities have already begun to be made.

Doran continued to make observations about language throughout the rehearsal, highlighting irregular syntax at one point (4.1.103-115) and alliteration ('deposed', 'deprived' and 'Disgraced' during 4.3.97-112) at another to give just two examples. He also drew attention to half lines, and mid-line punctuation, speculating it might provide cues for the actor:

My thing about full stops at end of verse lines and full stops in middle of lines could be total crap, but it helps us see where someone might interrupt.

(Doran, in *Henry IV Part I* rehearsal, 2014)

He is referring to his reasoning that when the caesura is marked with a full stop in large speeches it might be a cue for another character to try to interject but they are unable to do so because the person giving the speech carries on speaking. The performance outcome desired here would be for the actor to launch rapidly off the caesura without drawing breath, perhaps pausing mid-thought on the end of the line. This is the same outcome that Hall argues for (demanding hardly any pause on the caesura and never a breath mid-line), though Hall couches it in technical terms. Doran is therefore seeking a similar quality to the actor's delivery as Hall in performance, but justifying it psychologically and rhetorically rather than metrically.

I observed Doran's theory about caesuras and interjections in practice whilst watching a rehearsal for 4.2. Doran asked Jasper Britton and Alex Hassell who were playing King Henry and Hal respectively to do a read through searching for these cues. He reminded them that

People don't tend to make speeches, look for where you could interrupt should you choose to.

(Doran, in *Henry IV Part I* rehearsal, 2014)

Of course, people in plays do make speeches, so Doran appears to be prompting the actors towards a more realist performance, approaching the language with the purpose of making it closer to everyday speech. The speech as a theatrical convention that could be performed in full awareness of its form is therefore rejected as a performance strategy. The outcome sought here was a sense of conversation in a scene marked by a series of long, individual speeches. Doran was attempting to construct a plausible means for the rhetoric of the scene to function in and therefore to construct a

believable duologue rather than a series of interlocking monologues. After the exercise Doran, referring to 4.2.18-28, concluded that

It created a sense of conversation. Hal had to want to make his point but then he does it all in one sentence when he finally speaks.

(Doran, in *Henry IV Part I* rehearsal, 2014)

Several times during the course of the rehearsal Doran emphasised that it was important to make the ‘argument’ clear, alongside his observations about language and line endings. Building on the paraphrasing work that had been done previously, he therefore maintained an emphasis on clarity of thought and meaning with the company. Such an emphasis, which prioritises lucidity above portraying emotion, finds echoes elsewhere in accounts of working with Doran. As Alexandra Gilbreath says of playing Hermione, one of many performances she has given for the director,

Her language in this scene is so clear and so precise that all an actor has to do is follow the arguments. It was very hard not to feel anger or outrage during this scene but to try and play her with resolute patience.

(Gilbreath, 2003, pp. 81-82)¹¹⁵

In fact what is common throughout the many published narratives by actors who have worked with Doran is that whereas there are not that many detailed references to verse and metre *per se*, there are plentiful references to language and how it provides ‘clues’ that might inform the performances. This was reinforced through my observations of Doran in rehearsal, where I noted that a substantial proportion of discussions on matters of detail were prompted by the play’s language or form. In this, as I have inferred, Doran appears as part of an inheritance dating to Hall and beyond.

If Doran’s rehearsal rhetoric and practice points to a genealogical connection with Hall, then his focus on line-endings and ‘mining’ the text for ‘clues’ certainly echoes Hall’s practice:

It’s important to make sure everyone is speaking the same language. Also, it’s how you mine the text.

(Doran, in *Henry IV Part I* rehearsal, 2014)

Doran’s reference to ‘mining’ once more places a rhetorical emphasis on information within the text that is waiting to be discovered. Shakespearean verse is, of course, written in a very particular form that can be understood through metrical analysis, but Doran, and Hall before him, are not

¹¹⁵ Gilbreath is referring to the trial scene in 2.1.

really talking about metre, they are advocating performance strategies which, as I have suggested, are often a combination of personal taste and performance tradition.

The discussion that I witnessed followed the paraphrasing phase of rehearsals, so it is clear that Doran places primary emphasis on comprehension and encourages detailed research long before close examination of the language or the ‘mining’ process really commences. By balancing detailed analysis of meaning and thought with a gentle insistence that line endings should be marked (though not necessarily paused on), he promotes a performance outcome that at its most successful embraces what George T. Wright memorably termed ‘The Play of Phrase and Line’ (Wright, G. T., 1988).¹¹⁶ The actor retains the integrity of the thought, yet finds a way to apply extra resonance to the line ending and therefore create a tension between the two. In performance, this can manifest itself by the actor playing through the line ending to the end of the thought, usually the next caesura, without breathing, but finding some way to mark the final stress; either by a slightly heavier stress, an upward inflection, or a short suspended pause. Done effectively, it can, in theory, provide forward momentum as well as rhetorical structure to a speech, whilst preserving the integrity of the thought (whatever that might be decided to be).

Doran also acknowledges that his way is just one of many and makes no specific attempt to legislate for others at the RSC, though he does seek to define common priorities:

I think there should be a base line where we agree that the iambic is flexible that audibility is paramount. That there are clues in the text which is where you should start from. I’m about to do a series of workshops where with all the team where we are going to reassert what we feel about the text. I’m not an iambic fundamentalist, there are certain things – sometimes the beat of the iambic is too heavily stressed but I do believe that line endings should be marked but I also know that there’s a generation coming up who go Bollocks to all that and I think as long as we don’t throw the baby out with the bathwater...

(Doran, 2014)

It is notable that Doran rarely speaks of rules when talking of verse and is keen to emphatically distance himself from the phrase Hall proudly embraces, ‘iambic fundamentalist’. Doran may agree with aspects of Hall’s craft, but rejects its absolutism in favour of a more negotiated approach that allows flexibility for himself and for the actor, acknowledging that it is finally, for him, a

¹¹⁶ Though Wright concludes that in Shakespeare’s late plays the line ending should become virtually impossible to hear. See also Corder on Wright (2013, p. 119).

matter of taste informed by tradition. He does suggest that a company such as the RSC should have a 'base line', but in practice sets the parameters so wide as to allow enormous flexibility. Ironically, he also acknowledges his place in the company's tradition by suggesting that it has no particular legitimacy and hints at its own impending obsolescence, a development that he seems to view as relatively benign.

***Richard II* (2013)**

I would now briefly like to examine, through a close study of a short scene from *Richard II* (2013), how Doran's practice with regard to verse speaking manifests itself in performance.

Richard II was the first production that Doran directed after officially becoming Artistic Director of the RSC, and was the first play of a History Cycle that he intends to direct between 2013 and 2018.¹¹⁷ It was the first RSC production to receive an RSC Live broadcast, and was also broadcast live to schools across England on 15 November 2013,¹¹⁸ supported by a full online pedagogical package (Royal Shakespeare Company, 2013c). Starring David Tennant, who had previously worked with Doran on critically acclaimed productions of *Hamlet* and *Love's Labour's Lost* in 2008 that had sold out months in advance, it was a production with extremely high visibility. As such, it was a production that, one would think, both Doran individually and the RSC collectively would wish to embody their vision of what the company is capable of achieving at its best. In short, *Richard II* was a collective statement of intent for Doran and the company.

It is, therefore, a useful production on which to examine how Doran's priorities might evidence themselves in performance regarding the delivery of verse, that most totemic of issues at the RSC. The scene I wish to examine is the climax of 1.3, and the duologue between Bolingbroke and Gaunt (253-309). As Doran's production includes text taken from the Quarto of 1597 that is not in the 1623 Folio, I am here citing line numbers from the Arden 3rd Edition (Shakespeare & Forker, 2002), which uses the 1597 Quarto as its base text, as opposed to the RSC edition (Shakespeare, Bate & Rasmussen, 2010), which bases its text on the Folio and only supplies the missing lines as an appendix. My analysis is based on the commercially available DVD recording of the RSC Live broadcast.

¹¹⁷ At the time of writing he has so far directed *Henry IV Parts I and II* (2014) and *Henry V* (2015), and subsequently remounted all four plays as a tetralogy at the Barbican in London in early 2016.

¹¹⁸ A total of 45000 students from 610 schools nationally saw the broadcasts of *Richard II* in 2013, and *Henry IV Parts I and II*, which were broadcast in 2014.

When watching the scene it is immediately apparent there is a generational difference in approaches and styles. Michael Pennington as Gaunt, who had previously worked with Doran on *Timon of Athens* (2010), has a long and notable Shakespearean career, whereas Bolingbroke was played by Nigel Lindsay, perhaps best known for his role as ‘Barry the Islamist’ in Chris Morris 2010 film *Four Lions*. Pennington was thus steeped in institutional practice, whereas Lindsay was a newcomer to the RSC and his main theatrical track record was in musicals and contemporary plays. Pennington also has a far more expressive voice than Lindsay, whose range covers only a fairly narrow spectrum. Technical ability aside, however, there are clearly choices to be made in how each actor negotiates verse, a few of which I will now notate and analyse.

I observed in rehearsals for *Henry IV* that Doran placed particular emphasis on the importance of line endings, requiring that the last stress of the line should be marked in some way and the form observed, even if he left room for each actor present to interpret that how they saw fit. On the recording, in 1.3, Pennington almost invariably has a slight upward inflection on the final foot of each line, varying the pitch in order to pick out the stress, not enough to make it a question, but enough to make it noticeable. He therefore might appear to be taking Doran’s advice, although, in reality, Pennington has been speaking verse at the RSC since the 1960s and has undoubtedly come to his own conclusions about best practice, which happen to be largely in sympathy with Doran, rather than learned from him. Lindsay, by contrast, rarely marks the line endings other than by a general trend of a downward inflection at the end of the line (which Doran, as an actor, was also guilty of in 1987’s *Julius Caesar*).

Lindsay also marks punctuation and sub-clauses much more heavily than Pennington. At line 260, Gaunt says:

What is six winters? They are quickly gone.
(1.3.260)

Pennington pauses on the caesura, but bridges that pause with a small chuckle, and then resumes the line on the same pitch. The outcome is that the pause is suspended and the line, and thought, flow on. Bolingbroke’s reply is:

To men in joy, but grief makes one hour ten.

(1.3.261)

Lindsay plays the first clause as a discrete thought, with a downward inflection on ‘joy’ and a crisp word ending implying the end of the line. The second half of the line, after the caesura, then has its own energy and is divorced from the first. There is little sense of the overall line, and no apparent attempt to weight the two sub clauses against each other.

By the time the scene ends, and Lindsay plays the lines:

Then England’s ground, / farewell! / Sweet soil, / adieu – /
My mother / and my nurse / that bears me yet! /
Where’er I wander, / boast of this I can, /
Though banished, / yet a true-born Englishman.
(1.3.306-9)

his pauses, marked here with a ‘ / ’, are frequent and prolonged. We can see that it is a speech with multiple points of punctuation, at least in the Arden edition (the 1597 Quarto only lightly punctuates the line endings (Shakespeare, 1597)), but what is noticeable is that every pause that Lindsay takes is a heavy one. There is little attempt to suspend them with an upward inflection or by postponing the breath, instead each sub-clause is spoken in isolation as a separate thought. Lindsay’s delivery is metrically as one might expect for this speech, but the forward momentum of that rhythm is completely absent.

Overall, the scene follows a fairly regular metrical pattern, but again Lindsay’s delivery is not always what one might expect. On

I have too few to take my leave of you.
(1.3.255)

The metre suggests a regular iambic rhythm. Lindsay, however, plays

I have too few to take my leave of you.

And creates an additional stress on ‘too’, equivalent in weight to the words either side. Although it is perfectly possible to play the line with only a subtle difference in weighting between the ‘too’ and the ‘few’, Lindsay’s triple consecutive stresses of identical weight result in a laboured, forced delivery in which the meaning of the line is not clear.

A few lines later, on

My heart will sigh when I miscall it so,
Which finds it an enforced pilgrimage. (1.3.263-64)

Lindsay stresses it thus:

My heart will sigh when I miscall it so,
Which finds it an enforced pilgrimage.

By skipping the iambic stress on the pronoun 'I' to stress both syllables of 'miscall' he creates a phrasing that, to my ears, sounds odd. It is hard to understand the justification for this. Modern pronunciation would lean towards only a lightly stressed 'mis' with the emphasis on 'call', and if trying to adhere to a regular iambic metre (completely possible with this particular line), the weight should surely be placed on the 'I'.¹¹⁹ On the following line, his decision to stress the 'an' with only a tiny amount more weight than the 'it' maintains the iambic, yet the net effect of this is almost a pyrrhic foot. This, together with the irregular phrasing of the first line, implies an agitation not reflected in Lindsay's otherwise relatively impassive performance. Elsewhere in the scene, his delivery frequently seems to disconnect from the relatively regular metre, whilst Pennington's responsiveness to the rhythm is observable throughout, and each foot he stresses is clearly audible.

Lindsay's downbeat delivery counterpointing with Pennington's more cheerful one is, of course, in part a response to the pessimist/optimist dynamic of the scene. But Lindsay's delivery here is typical of his performance throughout the production. It implies a common policy, systematically enforced, has been absent from rehearsals. Whatever Doran's personal priorities on the matter, in this case it seems he did not assert them uniformly across the ensemble.

Verse-speaking clearly bears considerable importance to Doran, and, like Hall, he has a set of 'rules' that he applies to the way in which he works with his actors on Shakespearean language. Unlike Hall, he is not authoritarian in the ways in which these rules are applied; they are generally couched as suggestions and negotiated accordingly, which sometimes means they are not applied consistently. Crucially, such work is given a lower priority than the assignation of meanings through paraphrasing. Also, unlike Hall, although he speaks of 'clues' to be found in the text, he

¹¹⁹ Verse speaking orthodoxy suggests that pronouns should rarely be stressed, so it may be that a heavy-handed application of legislature is the cause here.

distances himself from the idea that his way is a 'Shakespearean' way. It is rather particular to him, based on his lengthy experience of working with Shakespearean texts within an institution such as the Royal Shakespearean Company. In other words, he articulates and conceptualises his 'rules', as his craft.

‘Crossroads’

I have a thing about crossroads. My sense is that each character comes to a point where because you know that they go that way you run over the crossroads and you fail to look in that direction yet the characters must be at a point where they have a series of choices and they make them, and the bad production forgets that there are other choices.

(Doran, 2014)

Doran’s use of the term ‘crossroads’ is a recurring one; several actors who have published narratives of their rehearsals with Doran refer to it as a key part of his process. Sher for instance, describes it as follows:

Whenever he directs Shakespeare he encourages his casts to seek what he calls ‘the crossroads’. What if we didn’t know these great plays inside out? What if events took a different turn?... It’s a method of rehearsal that can lead to the most invigorating discoveries: you learn to embrace the ambiguity and contradictions which govern much of human nature and are sometimes ironed out in stage behaviour.

(Sher, 2003, p. 98)

Essentially, it describes identifying the key moment around which the scene (or working more broadly, the play) pivots, and identifying what might happen if a different decision had been made. Sher’s description also raises three other issues: he portrayed locating the ‘crossroads’ as an act of collective endeavour rather than having them imposed by Doran; he suggests it is an attempt to reclaim the play as a piece of new writing rather than a canonical text with a substantial performance history; and it encourages the actors to embrace contradictions in behaviour.

The first of these aligns with many other elements in Doran’s process, promoting collective endeavour rather than imposing pre-determined outcomes (though the outcomes may contribute to a particular style of performance, as Sher’s third point appears to concede). Doran emphasises that defining the ‘crossroads’ is a collective act:

To try and heighten those moments needs not just the decision of one actor but the decision of everybody about what is at stake in that scene so you have to get everybody’s agenda applied to each of those moments for each of those crossroads really to work. If you get those right those moments in rehearsal then that’s what keeps the audience on the edge of their seats, even if they think they know the play.

(Doran, 2014)

Sher’s second observation aligns with Doran’s statement of intent that

I direct it for the person who doesn’t know what happens and for the actors you try and make them play it in the moment as though they don’t know what’s going to happen next...

(Doran, 2014)

For Doran the primary purpose is storytelling; if each ‘crossroads’ can be sharply defined in performance and carry with it an appropriate level of uncertainty and therefore tension over what is *about* to happen, then it will help to effectively portray the narrative of the play. In this the technique appears to build on Doran’s early rehearsal priorities of producing absolute clarity of meaning in performance.

Sher’s third observation refers to the technique’s promotion of ambiguities in performance. If it is commonplace throughout the kinds of actors’ testimonies in the *Players of Shakespeare* series that they articulate their performances as a ‘journey’, then the linearity suggested by the kinds of post-Stanislavskian understanding of character this suggests is potentially troubled by this technique. It is designed to encourage actors to ‘embrace the ambiguities and contradictions’ of the play. Sher configures such contradictions as belonging to ‘human nature’, but I would argue it is a strategy for negotiating the kinds of challenges that the early modern text poses to the modern subject. For actors used to the construction of character in a psychologically realist sense, playing the purely choric (as Doran had to in *Merchant*), or the theatrically self-aware (as Sher was in *Macbeth*), can be challenging; for Sher, ‘crossroads’ provides a localised technique which enables him to bypass the difficulties involved when attempting to consolidate opposing actions into an overall conception of character. I will explore Sher’s attempts to perform Leontes and Macbeth in respective productions of *The Winter’s Tale* and *Macbeth* over the coming pages, but I will also examine how the complexity of performance outcome suggested here is assimilated into Doran’s wider *mise en scène* in my study of *All’s Well that Ends Well* (2003), in Chapter Five of this thesis.

Doran gives an example of how a ‘crossroads’ emerged through happy accident in rehearsals for *Othello* (2004):

I remember a brilliant moment directing Tony as Iago when he had taken the handkerchief from Emilia and had no idea what he was going to do with it but stick it in his pocket and then the first part of 3.3. and he is really wobbling on his tightrope and nearly falls off, Othello nearly beats him up. What Tony did, who sweats a lot in performance, he literally just got out his handkerchief and wiped his forehead and realised it was the spotted handkerchief and put it away and said ‘Have you ever seen a handkerchief...?’

(Doran, 2014)

Thus, a pivotal moment in the play was portrayed as a split-second of inspiration when an alternative outcome could just as easily have occurred. In this example, the term ‘crossroads’ is understood in terms of character, privileging a post-Stanislawskian revelation from Sher. It is the collective nature of discussions amongst the company that is important here, though, that prevents the technique from being another potentially limiting assertion of the actor’s subjectivity on the performance. The whole ensemble is engaged in the determining of storytelling priorities, enabling a potentially more political and/or theatrical engagement with the work being performed.

This sense of uncertainty permeated the performances in *Othello* with ‘crossroads’ clearly signposted throughout the production, as Michael Dobson illustrates by giving another example in his review of the production:

...it was a death made the more upsetting by not seeming wholly inevitable: in 4.2, for example, the ‘brothel’ scene, Othello seemed briefly to regain his faith in his wife’s innocence at 4.2.90, and the two embraced on Desdemona’s ‘Heaven forgive us!’, pausing for long enough to give the audience a chance to imagine what might happen now if Othello had the sense to trust her after all before he abruptly lapsed into his supposedly righteous indignation against the ‘cunning whore of Venice/That married with Othello’ and stormed off once more toward tragedy.

(Dobson, 2005a, p. 283)

In *Othello*, Sher’s ‘crossroad’ arose as a moment of rehearsal inspiration that Doran recognised and developed. In 1997’s *The Merchant of Venice*, which Doran directed in the RST, there was a similarly striking moment performed by Philip Voss as Shylock, when, confronted by Solanio and Salerio, Shylock’s sudden, slow realisation of his need for revenge as he uttered the words ‘let him look to his bond’ three times in succession (3.1.44-47) could clearly be understood from his performance. As Robert Smallwood observes:

The second time he said it we saw, with startling clarity, the idea suddenly strike him – a brilliantly focussed moment.

(Smallwood, 1998, p. 240)

Here, pathways are opened up and made visible within the play’s narrative, in a manner which suggests an alternative narrative is possible, and the weight and importance of that moment is clearly foregrounded in performance, ensuring its meaning is clearly readable. In this case, it also establishes a political reading of the character, by emphasising that Voss’s Shylock is not motivated by greed, or a desire to regain his wealth, but was lashing out in revenge for his daughter’s act of betrayal in assimilating herself into an anti-Semitic society.

Returning to my observation of a rehearsal for *Henry IV Part I*, it was apparent that discussion of ‘crossroads’ was generally prompted and steered by Doran. Working on 4.1, Doran noted how when Hotspur learns of his father’s sickness and that this would mean he wouldn’t attend the impending battle, Hotspur is given a ‘get out’; potentially at this moment Hotspur’s armies could have been stood down. Doran noted that line 45 was a monosyllabic one¹²⁰ and that this invited a slow, deliberate delivery. That moment, therefore, crystallised Hotspur’s decision to calm down and proceed with the plan. In performance this was played out with a gradual build-up to hysteria throughout the preceding lines before a steady assertion of self-control on line 45. Thus, the ‘crossroads’ was made manifest for the audience.

Another turning point was identified two scenes later, when in 4.3 Hotspur launches a tirade at Walter Blunt (96-112). Blunt’s response at 113 (‘Shall I return this answer to the king?’) prompted these observations from Doran:

There’s something poised and honourable in contrast to the bickering of Hotspur and company. Everyone goes ‘Fuck you’ and Blunt replies ‘Shall I return this answer to the king’.

The turning point is how they are going to respond to the king – Blunt’s reply prompts a moment of reflection.

(Doran, in *Henry IV Part I* rehearsal, 2014)

In performance this moment was even more sharply defined than Hotspur’s previous ‘crossroad’. Confronted with Blunt’s ‘bluntness’, Hotspur momentarily advanced on Blunt as though intending violence, prompting a sudden reaction from those around him as they stepped forward as though to intervene and prevent him from causing harm. He reacted to this by moderating his behaviour and adjusting his response accordingly.

From my observations above it can be seen that ‘crossroads’ directly inform the resultant performance, not just in the inflection of a line or moment but in the staging too. It is also evident that although they arise in discussion and are not imposed as such, the process is definitely facilitated by Doran in a manner that allows his storytelling priorities to be realised. Doran

¹²⁰ In fact, it isn’t quite as it includes the disyllabic ‘present’, but the point Doran was making still applies.

incorporates and responds to innovations from his actors, but the discussion that I observed sought more to bind the cast into Doran's understanding of where the 'crossroads' might lie than allowed the cast complete freedom to identify them for themselves. It is, not, therefore, a truly democratic method in the way that it is applied, but it does, through negotiation, create a collective understanding of the repercussions of the choices made, and what the alternatives may be. In doing this, it is an enabling technique which allows the actor to understand both the political repercussions of those choices and the wider theatrical priorities of the performance alongside decisions made on the basis of an actor's understanding of 'character'.

Blocking

Seeking out ‘crossroads’ is one mechanism from which staging decisions can arise for Doran, as I have demonstrated above. It suggests an approach to staging where movement and the physicalisation of relationships arise from the discussions that are such a strong feature of early rehearsals, rather than a highly choreographed and pre-determined *mise en scène*. After rehearsing 4.3 for *Henry IV Part I*, Doran announced that ‘That scene will easily rise onto its feet next time we do it, now that the argument is kinetic’, placing an emphasis on finding the argument of the scene as the determinant of movement. The statement also suggests an approach where movement will organically emerge from the company’s exploratory work.

In all the narratives of rehearsals led by Doran that have been published, commentary on his method of assigning movement to the actors, or ‘blocking’, is notable by its absence. This seems to be because staging the physical action of the scene is the only part of his methodology which does not appear to be systematised. He does assign high value, however, to the needs of individual actors in this process, and recognises that sometimes those needs will be different;

I remember with *Henry VIII* Katherine of Aragon played by Jane Lapotaire had a very specific sense of wanting to shape the blocking. She didn’t learn it through the blocking but she needed to have a very particular structure whereas Ian Hogg who was playing Wolsey was Drama Centre trained had a completely different aesthetic, a completely different way of working... so Wolsey wanted to be instinctive and work off whatever was happening on the stage and Jane wanted to be moved on that line and moved across on that line. In the end the audience shouldn’t see any distinction between the two performances but you as a director have to be able to create that environment where they can both get to the performance they need in the way that they need it.

(Doran, 2014)

The above implies he therefore adapts his approach according to the actors concerned and the perceived demands of the scene.

This adaptability of method and willingness to engage with each actor’s individual training and process may imply that the performance outcome has an element of unpredictability, contingent on the training and ideology of the acting company. In reality, however, his process often leads to an essentially realist performance aesthetic, shaped by the kind of storytelling priorities that I have described. In the example cited above, both Lapotaire and Hogg worked in profoundly different

ways, yet both ultimately produced performances that were of a similar character because the parameters within which they were working, the structure and methods of Doran's rehearsal process, were the same for both actors.

Occasionally, Doran's process can give rise to a more expressionistic *mise en scène*; earlier I recounted how Doran compared the Archbishop in 4.4 of *Henry IV Part I* to Tony Blair as a man at the centre of things with impossible pressures surrounding him. In performance this was staged with the Archbishop delivering his closing speech from the scene as the King, Prince Hal, Lancaster, Westmoreland, Blunt and Falstaff entered upstage and stood in silent tableau behind him. The effect of this was to visually represent the mounting pressure on the Archbishop. It was a form of staging that directly resulted from discussions during the earlier rehearsal¹²¹ yet was non-realist in nature. Though not an unusual form of staging *per se*, it was a departure for Doran – generally Doran's aesthetic is realist and heightened movement or staging is relatively rare in his productions. The director's priorities lie in the areas I have already outlined: clarity, committed ensemble storytelling and detailed, realist acting informed by extensive textual analysis and research.

¹²¹ I asked Doran whether he had already decided on this form of staging for the scene before the discussion that I witnessed took place, but he maintained that the idea for the scene followed the discussion rather than preceding it.

The Winter's Tale

I will close this chapter by examining a production from 1999 that features Antony Sher, *The Winter's Tale*. In this example, Sher and his co-actors used extensive research in search of psychologically realist characterisations, but I will argue that, although the production was largely a critical success, in this case Doran and Sher's methodology created tensions with the play which were never fully resolved.

This production opened in the Royal Shakespeare Theatre on 6 January 1999, was designed by Robert Jones and had lighting by Tim Mitchell. It featured Sher as Leontes, Alexandra Gilbreath as Hermione and Estelle Kohler as Paulina.

Towards the end of 2.3 of *The Winter's Tale*, Antony Sher performed a stunningly virtuosic piece of physical theatre. After banishing his new-born daughter,

To some remote and desert place quite out
Of our dominions

2.3.207-8

he then turned his attention to the impending trial of his wife and the imminent arrival of judgement from the Oracle of Delphos, which he presumes will proclaim her guilt. After declaring that

...as she hath
Been publicly accused, so shall she have
A just and open trial

2.3.238-40

Sher began, slowly at first, to lean backwards. The lean evolved into an arch, there was a brief moment of stillness as his back almost appeared to bend double before gravity took its course and he plummeted to the ground in a dead fall. His back impacted resoundingly on the wooden floor on the stage where he rested briefly, allowing the moment to resonate, before he recovered and continued with the scene.¹²² The effect is startling, not just for those onstage, for as one critic noted 'The audience gasps' (Nathan, 1999) in astonishment.

¹²² Not having seen the original production, my account is here drawn from a performance at the Barbican Theatre that was filmed by Heritage Theatre and commercially released, where it is possible to view the

Georgina Brown in the *Mail on Sunday* was similarly impressed:

At the peak of his apoplectic rage, he falls flat on his back – Sher’s physical technique is superb – in a literal fit.

(Brown, 1999a)

Technical impressiveness aside, though, what Sher achieved was to make Leontes’ jealousy *physiological*. Sher’s Leontes was suddenly a man who appeared to be suffering some kind of medical condition and was not simply a jealous and authoritarian tyrant. Put simply, he was ill.

As I have argued, Doran places great importance on providing actors with the kinds of research and information that he considers necessary for them are able to play their ‘characters’ effectively. Sher’s fall provided a moment where that research crystallised in a moment of sublime staging, thus making visible for the audience the fruits of their endeavours. During his preparation for the role, Sher sought out a medical diagnosis for Leontes’ condition in a desire to define it and thus understand it:

In search of an answer, I spoke to many experts in mental disorder – a neurologist, a psychiatrist, a psychotherapist – and asked each to put Leontes on the couch.

(Sher, 2003, p. 95)

In the chapter Sher wrote for the *Players of Shakespeare* series he goes on to describe how he and a mental health expert diagnosed Leontes as suffering from ‘morbid jealousy’ or ‘psychotic jealousy’ (p. 93). This, a condition which affects men in their forties and strikes without warning or justification, seemed to Sher to instantly explain Leontes’ state of mind. It was, for Sher, *useful*.

It led to a performance which won praise for its technical virtuosity and meticulous detail, but in constructing a creature of psychological realism, Sher arguably created a tension with the nature of the play itself. Many critics referred to a failure of the production to *move* them:

Much of the production’s success – and also, perhaps, its final failure to pierce the heart – can be attributed to the presence of Antony Sher as Leontes. He is the most excitingly charismatic of actors, but the downside is that he never lets you forget that you are watching a brilliant show.

(Spencer, 1999)

performance in close up, and from comparing that performance with one in the RST which is filmed from a fixed single camera and which is available for viewing in the RSC Archive at the Shakespeare Centre.

Spencer's reference to 'virtuosity' appears linked to Sher's ability to construct and perform 'character', rather than a more bravura theatricality. Not having seen the production live, it is difficult to configure my appreciation of the production in terms of its emotional impact, though based on the video I concur with Bridget Escolme when she writes that Sher's performance is 'a world of mental illness quite impossible to penetrate' (Escolme, 2005, p. 2).¹²³

The play is not a play about mental illness, however, in the way that *King Lear* at least partly is (or at least an early modern account of such phenomena); it is a tragedy which climaxes with an act of redemption. The arc of Leontes' character demands that he transgresses with tragic consequences, repents and is ultimately forgiven. This cannot be the case here, as Escolme concludes: 'It is not a matter of forgiving this Leontes: he is a sick man and thus not guilty from the outset' (Escolme, 2005, p. 2).

Gilbreath's performance as Hermione was likewise meticulously researched, the 'given circumstances' vividly realised for the actor:

...I wanted her to be as 'ripe' as possible, as 'female' as possible. I wanted her to glow with the expectancy of the unborn child... It was also important to make it conceivable that she delivers the baby as a result of shock, and therefore the baby should be near to full term, making its survival in the wilderness as viable as possible. Having never been pregnant before, I took myself off to some pre-natal classes, which caused no end of mirth with the expectant mums. There was I, happily stroking my rehearsal 'bump', listening to the conversation, considering what was possible in terms of movement...

(Gilbreath, 2003)

Gilbreath appeared on stage heavily pregnant, providing an image of wholesome maternity that despite her warm and visibly tactile relationship with Ken Bones' Polixenes was a reassuringly desexualised picture of innocence and marital stability. Constantly holding her distended belly, Gilbreath looked at real risk of going into imminent labour, making marital infidelity at this juncture at the very least wildly improbable, if not impossible, and therefore emphasising the irrationality of Leontes' accusations.

¹²³ Escolme links her analysis to a wider argument for a more theatricalised subjectivity, embracing direct address as a part of this. Ironically, Sher records that he felt he had considerable success in *The Winter's Tale* through the use of direct address (see Sher, 2001, p. 345), although he always remained in 'character' whilst doing this.

Gilbreath's depiction of the discomfort and worry of a late stage pregnancy was impressive in its verisimilitude and clearly informed by the same principles of research and realism which underpinned Sher's performance. With Gilbreath, the believability of the pregnancy paid dividends, as her supposed sudden death in childbirth is a visible possibility from the moment she first walked onstage.

Clare Smout describes the production in the RSC edition of the play as carrying a 'strong, Ibsenesque flavour' (Smout, 2009, p. 157), and it generally won plaudits from newspaper critics for its depth of 'intricate psychological realism' (Clapp, 1999) and 'careful intelligence' (Billington, 1999b).

The play itself has a fable-like quality, however. As Adrian Noble, who has directed the play twice for the RSC, argues:

It strikes me that underpinning the play is a very traditional medieval morality story: of the Fall, of somebody almost unknowingly falling from grace, then repentance and finally redemption.

(Noble in Bate & Wright, 2009a, p. 164)

Many, including Noble, have positioned the play as a piece of anti-realism, as a fable, and drawn attention to the play as a piece of storytelling. The appearance of Time halfway through adds a supernatural dimension to proceedings, and the world of the play is confused and anachronistic.

The inaccuracy of the geography gives a further clue that all is not as it seems (Bohemia is

landlocked, yet Shakespeare gives it a coast), and the plot is laden with improbabilities. Even

Doran realised that the context he had sought for the production might encounter difficulties with such a play:

Shakespeare often resists it... Winter's Tale... I went 'oh brilliant', we're doing a Romanov production, it's going to be set in this particular period... my father was the Emperor of Russia... polar bears... all those things fitted, then something pops out and goes you've forgotten about me... the Oracle of Delphi... Suddenly how on earth do you fit that into a Romanov setting?... Sometimes if you've made it too specific there's always something that will pop out and bite you.

(Doran, 2014)

The Oracle is of course anachronistic in the play, yet as Doran realises, the more realistically

contextualised the production seeks to be, the more difficulties arise. Likewise, in Doran's

production Leontes' son Mamillius was wheelchair-bound and frail, making a sudden death seem

horribly plausible. This seemed to undermine the metaphysical presence of the gods, however; his death became the sad but inevitable outcome of his illness rather than an act of divine retribution. Again, an attempt to make the story more plausible appeared to have a strained relationship with the nature of the play.

This tension is apparent in the differing accounts of Sher and Gilbreath of the end of the play, when Hermione's statue must be restored to life in order to forgive Leontes:

On paper this looks unlikely... but in practice its power is irresistible; it works utterly. It works like a dream – literally; a dream come true.

(Sher, 2003, p. 101)

So why the statue? I needed some reason. I haven't seen Leontes for sixteen years. Of course Paulina has, during the years, told me how he has changed, but the last time I saw him he was destroying everything around me. Would you trust him? So I just gave myself a little reason: if I stand perfectly still, I can see for myself and it's my choice. I might not want to move; I might just remain where I am. So for me the scene wasn't just an allotted time in the script for me to move. I was living and breathing through every painful moment;

(Gilbreath, 2003, p. 88)

Sher speaks of dreams whilst Gilbreath is calmly rational. The actors' difference in emphasis (Is it magic? Is it elaborate sleight-of-hand?), which does not appear to have been resolved in the production, demonstrates an ambivalence over whether to embrace the fable-like character of the story, or to try and ground it in realism. If the world is a real one, then there can be no magic when the statue comes to life at the climax of the play, because in this world such a thing would not be possible. Hermione's death *must* have been faked, whilst she is spirited away and lives in seclusion for sixteen years, her fate known only to Paulina. However, if this lack of ambiguity, of the possibility of magic, is endorsed by rooting the play in a coldly rational context, then the reanimation of the statue and other potentially supernatural acts invite explanations which are not forthcoming from the play. As audience members we begin to demand believable grounds for acts that resist such explanations. In creating plausibility by giving us a realist production, paradoxically Doran makes us ask questions of Hermione's reanimation that merely stretch our credulity further.

My intention here has been to highlight that the Stanislavskian search for psychological detail can sometimes be resisted by a play that is not in any sense realist, and if early modern texts cannot

always be placed productively in this category, then this is especially the case with this particular text. Doran's process is seemingly designed to reconcile competing performance traditions, subjectivities and theatrical demands, but in the case of *The Winter's Tale* it led to, for me, a confusing reading of the play. The preparation that the actors undertook was undoubtedly *useful* to them in achieving their impressively detailed performances, but it also created a series of gaps between what function the play seemed to demand they perform, and the role(s) they were actually playing.

Doran's craft, which I have detailed here, changes little from production to production. In that respect it is a portable one and is not contingent on the challenges of a particular play (though it is frequently recalibrated in practice). Observing the institutional priorities of verse-speaking, Doran pays homage to the legacies of Hall and others, with a gentle insistence on the value of the verse line and in alignment with the teachings of Barton. He skilfully fuses this with an actor-centric approach which embraces the Stanislavskian inheritance of most actor training in England today, and, an awareness of storytelling and theatrical priorities. The 'two traditions' are thus synthesised.

Doran also embraces a level of actor engagement at every stage of the process, through encouraging extra-curricular research to switching roles to acting generously on cast suggestions. His rhetoric is democratic and he places great emphasis on a sense of inclusion for every member of the company. There is a clear attempt to create a sense of ensemble whilst also providing a strong sense of structure and priorities for the rehearsal process. If his approach is not quite democratic then it certainly eschews the model of heroic, authoritarian leadership that characterised some previous RSC regimes. In particular, his use of the 'crossroads' techniques provides a means by which cast members might collectively engage with the wider storytelling and political objectives of the production, and is an enabling and useful measure that can produce clear, focused, meanings in performance, thus opening up early modern texts for potential new audiences. In that sense, his craft has the potential to enable 'art'.

Chapter Four

Macbeth (1999): a case study

***Macbeth*: a case study**

I will now turn to Doran's production of *Macbeth*, which he directed in the Swan Theatre in 1999. I will adopt a bipartite structure for this section; firstly, I will build on the analysis of the previous chapter by studying the process that Sher and his co-actor Harriet Walter underwent in constructing their performances, arguing that in this case the resultant work was a richer, more theatrical experience than *The Winter's Tale* earlier that year; I will then go on to consider the *mise en scène* of the production, considering Doran's contextualisation of the play, his negotiation of the Swan stage and the meanings that were produced. In this, I will be foreshadowing key themes to be explored in Chapter Five.

Macbeth opened in the Swan theatre on 16 November 1999 where it played for two months before a short international tour and a brief run at the Young Vic, and was later filmed for the RSC and Channel 4 by Illuminations. This modern dress stage production was designed by Stephen Brimson Lewis, the lighting designed by Tim Mitchell and it featured Antony Sher as Macbeth and Harriet Walter as Lady Macbeth.

In Act One Scene Three of *Macbeth* (1999), Sher delivers his soliloquy (40-152) as the urgent articulation of a man trying to comprehend the incomprehensible. He engages the audience in his thoughts, but his reading is nervy, the snatched reasoning of a man who has other characters in earshot. When he comes to the following couplet, however, just before he re-engages with the other characters, the mood becomes playful:

Come what come may,
Time and the hour runs through the roughest day.
(1.3.159-60)

He half sings the lines in an approximation of the chimes of Big Ben, consciously finding the rhyme as he gets to it and using the comedy of the moment to achieve a dark complicity with the audience. Here he uses both the potency of the language that Shakespeare is giving him whilst tipping a wink at the audience that knows he is rhyming, yet maintains an interior through line consistent with a man contemplating the unthinkable and cracking a sick joke as a result. The film

version, also directed by Doran (2001), emphasises this switch further, by choosing the moment of the rhyming couplet to switch from a voiceover to a voiced delivery. Thus the cinematic device of the voiceover changes to something altogether more theatrical, and honours the shift in tone that Sher vocalised so clearly in the theatre.

Sher's performance, like those of the other cast members, for me, is simultaneously plausible and theatrically alive. Sher embraces metatheatricity, talking directly to the audience and consciously using the language of the play. He appears to be aware that it is heightened, poetic speech, yet he does so whilst convincingly portraying a flawed and complex man. It is an example of the dual 'perspectives' that Stanislavski articulated, which the actor must operate simultaneously; Sher is both playing a 'role' and 'being' an actor at the same time.

The rehearsal process for *Macbeth* began with a device that Doran often employs in similar form from production to production, asking the company to individually and collectively respond to a particular word or theme. In this case, Doran asked his cast to draw upon their own experiences of *fear*,

...because in that way we would get towards a society in which fear was rampant and a society which would create a manifestation of that fear in the witches.

(Doran, 2009)

Doran's technique is to focus on provoking an emotional response to the play that is significant to the actors. Harriet Walter describes it thus:

...we were each to think what truly terrified us and bring some illustrative story to the rest of the cast. As was hoped this exercise tapped something personal and authentic, which helped us all avoid generalized 'frightened acting' when it came to performance.

(Walter, 2002, p. 8)

Using a technique that bears some resemblance to Stanislavski's conception of 'Emotion Memory' (see Stanislavski and Hapgood pp. 163-192), Doran therefore starts by encouraging the actors to engage in the kind of individualistic, internalised acting using Stanislavskian techniques that Worthen describes as producing an 'individual, organic, non-commodified, spontaneous psyche' (Worthen, 1997, p.212). This, according to Worthen, politically disables the actor, so that they 'stand outside [the] dominant mode of ideological transmission', producing a performance of 'bourgeois' subjectivity. In other words, the immersion of the actor in a character removes the

actor's agency, preventing the kind of commentary in performance that would make visible the contexts in which the character is operating. It thus denies the potential for a more dialectical analysis of the play world and/or that of the those watching; the performance becomes about the individual rather than the society in which they reside. However, this does not, to my mind, occur in this production, as my analysis will demonstrate. The exercise did also foreground another key concern of Doran's from the commencement of rehearsals: that the production should be *scary*.

This early work also featured a company outing to visit the Crown Jewels, which, Sher claims, was 'in order to value *kingship*' (Sher, 2001, p. 336). As I have previously discussed, this kind of excursion chiefly appears to serve to break up the pattern of the 'table work' period of rehearsals and lend variety to the schedule, and to offer the ensemble the opportunity to bond. In this case, the experience also gives a material presence for the actors to an idea articulated in the play, in theory lending a sensory language to that which is most sought after by its characters: the crown. In this it is similar in purpose if lesser in scope to the research into flowers and plant life that Doran deemed so important during *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and, in theory, informs the delivery of the text.

Alongside such ensemble exercises Sher and Walter, encouraged by Doran, engaged in their own research project. As I have described, Sher had consulted a psychiatrist and discovered the pathological condition 'morbid jealousy' when rehearsing Leontes earlier that year, through which he found an invaluable route into playing the character. Sher saw Leontes and Macbeth as 'like brothers, or first cousins at least' (Sher, 2003, p. 92), so consulting psychiatrists was a logical early step for Sher and his fellow actor Harriet Walter to consider after Sher's experience playing the former. Here, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and psychopathy were the conditions investigated, and Walter asserts in her account of the production that 'Everything we learned from these is borne out in the play' (Walter, 2002, p. 24). In particular, her research informed her character's sleepwalking scene (5.1); she became convinced that the playwright himself 'must also have known about post-traumatic stress disorder' (Walter, 2002, p. 56).

For Sher, it is less the professional consultations than the experience of interviewing two real-life murderers that proved pivotal, and he quickly identified one of them as a model for Macbeth. This man was a killer haunted by his crime, who murdered a friend in the heat of the moment and in doing so was ‘crossing a barrier, going somewhere we’re not supposed to go’ (Sher, 2003, p. 105).

For Sher, even the man’s language echoed Macbeth’s:

‘And there’s me now. Alone. Naked in the world. For always’. It’s strangely like Macbeth’s naked new-born babe.

(Sher, 2003, p. 105)

Sher’s identification of his character with the unnamed criminal is a crucial element in building his performance, utilising the encounter to underpin his work. He uses the research specifically as well as generally. For instance, the interviewee speaks of a ‘blankness’ (Walter, 2002, pp. 24-25) which goes on to inform Sher’s delivery of the ‘Is this a dagger...’ soliloquy in 2.1 (40-71).

However, Sher’s research finally takes him in an opposite direction to Leontes, concluding that

Macbeth’s ‘diseased’ mind is nothing like that of Leontes. Leontes is afflicted with temporary madness. Macbeth is tortured by sanity, by clarity, by consciousness and conscience.

(Sher, 2003, p. 111)

In the case of Leontes, his research supported that diagnosis and gave it authority; in the case of Macbeth it took his characterisation in a very different direction. It meant that with Macbeth there was not the total immersion in interiority that Escolme found frustrating in Sher’s Leontes and he was always appeared able to reconcile the logic of his thought process more successfully with the theatrical demands of the text. Engaging in a playful, open relationship with the audience throughout, when he came to the ‘Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow...’ speech (5.5.17-28), the house lights came up and he stormed off the stage and out through the emergency exit, thus drawing focus back to Sher the *actor*. His performance at that moment simultaneously encompassed the meticulously constructed psychology of the murderer and the metatheatricality of the actor identifying himself quite specifically as just that, an actor. Sher’s presence is multi-faceted: simultaneously actor, murderer, early modern construct, Scottish King and Sher himself, the self-confessed outsider, Jewish, gay and South African. Doran’s skill is in facilitating this synthesis.

Elsewhere, the ‘given circumstances’ of the Macbeths’ relationship took on a central role for Sher and Walter:

The other theme that was to become central to Tony’s and my interpretations was that of childlessness, and for my interior psychological map this childlessness needed to be something irreversible by modern medical miracles.

(Walter, 2002, p. 26)

Employing rhetoric that is once more suggestive of a journey (‘map’), the actors have concluded that the Macbeths have definitely had a child together, and it has died and left her incapable of another. This development informs a number of acting and directing decisions, including Sher’s reaction to the image of his wife having taken the baby:

...while it was smiling in my face,
Have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums,
And dash’d the brains out...

(1.7.61-63)

This becomes the key ‘crossroads’ in the relationship, the moment of no return informed by their constructed backstory. For the two actors, the fact that it was *their* child is crucial in the way that they understood their performances, yet historical evidence suggests that if Lady Macbeth had had a child it was from a previous marriage. Walter had done the research, but found it wanting for her desired interpretation and constructed a completely fictitious backstory to support her playing of the role instead. Research here was therefore a point of stimulation, not an end in itself and rejected if not *useful*. Instead, constructing a logical, psychologically plausible and motivating backstory assumed priority.

Doran appears to support that which enables his actors to act, including building details into their performances that go far beyond what is actually in the text. In this case his staging builds on Walter’s sense of childlessness by adding in an extra stage appearance for Macduff’s wife and two children in 1.6. As they enter in the King’s party with their father, Walter’s Lady Macbeth gazes on pensively at the children as they pass and foregrounds the absence of her own offspring.¹²⁴

It is instructive to contrast this with Peter Hall’s approach to the need for such a backstory in Shakespeare. When Judi Dench, playing Cleopatra in Hall’s production of *Antony and Cleopatra*

¹²⁴ The film version emphasises this further with a close up on Walter.

at the National Theatre (1987), reported that she had discovered that the real Cleopatra was pregnant with twins at one point she is met by the following response:

Peter Hall smiles enigmatically: 'It's not in Shakespeare'.

(Lowen, 1990, p. 53)

The question of Cleopatra's children does not perhaps prompt the same acting demands as Lady Macbeth's, but Hall is also demonstrating his Leavis-ite roots, considering the play to stand alone from both the author and any historical source on which it might be based. For Walter and Sher, however, the impetus for this particular decision came from a perceived psychological need, seeking to make sense of the play from a Stanislavskian, realist perspective, rather than due to any desire on their part to honour any historical record. Notwithstanding Worthen's critique of the kind of approach that Sher and Walter took here, there is a long tradition of critical scepticism towards a tendency perhaps best exemplified by A. C. Bradley, that of attempting to studiously answer the absent biographical details in Shakespeare's plays. Bradley's discussion of the matter of the Macbeths' children (see Bradley, 1991, pp. 461-465) prompted L. C. Knights to later publish an essay satirically titled 'How many children had Lady Macbeth?' (Knights, 1933), in mockery of the 'type of Shakespeare criticism that Leavis and Knights objected to' (Britton, 1961, p. 349). In fact, Bradley finally concluded that such a question was 'immaterial' (Bradley, 1991, p. 461). As so often in such discourses, any consideration of what information the actor might consider necessary in order to actually *play* Macbeth or Lady Macbeth is completely absent due to the literary perspective of those scholars involved. For Sher and Walter, the question of whether their characters had a child together proved vital in understanding the terms of the relationship between them, and it was far from 'immaterial'.

From the way they discuss their performances, above, Sher and Walter pursued a post-Stanislavskian process in which modern, realist 'characters' were constructed, based on research and creative use of a backstory. In the production, however, I have already observed that Sher's performance was a much more theatrical creation. In part, this was no doubt due to Doran's process, which as I have already argued, facilitates multiple perspectives for the stage actor, and a clear sense of the story that is to be told. For further reasons, however, we might look to the aesthetic of the production, and the theatrical space in which it was first performed.

The production, which was staged in modern dress, was originally to be performed in Jacobean dress. Both Antony Sher in his autobiography (2001, pp. 340-342), and Harriet Walter (2002, pp. 23-26) in her account of playing her role, have described how the change occurred approximately two weeks into rehearsals as a response to (in Sher and Doran's eyes) the first read through, when they began to question the original design premise as mistaken. Sher articulated the problem as follows:

If we, the actors, can't identify with the material, neither will the audience. The play will simply be as it always is: risible or boring [...] The present plan is to set the play when it is written. But I've been less and less inspired by the Jacobean reference material we've seen in rehearsals: contemporary illustrations and portraits. Who are these people? I can't *read* them ...

(Sher, 2001, p. 340)

The decision was, according to Sher, driven by the acting priorities of the company, rather than the political priorities of the director; the determinant of whether the production is 'working' appears to be an inability to connect the actors' emerging idea of their 'characters' with the early modern text that they are performing. In Sher's account, Doran has been thinking the same things, and the production aesthetic is changed to accommodate their reservations, to make the emerging characterisations they are constructing work.

Camouflage fatigue costumes were therefore adopted in a broken down, post-conflict setting which rendered the *mise en scène* reminiscent of the then recent conflicts in the Balkans.¹²⁵ There remained, however, a lack of specificity, rather a variety of historical moments in a complicated collage, to the production and a lack of geographical and cultural specificity. The production therefore invited contemporary parallels, but was also a world 'that was not about mobile phones and e-mails, and that didn't provoke the questions that putting Shakespeare into modern dress often does' (Doran, 2009). For Doran, this meant that

... you could immediately recognise their social status, immediately recognise their function, their job, without them being in doublet and hose and yet not ask irrelevant questions 'Is this set in the Balkans/Where is this?' and Stephen Brimson Lewis, the Designer, he came up with a very wonderful solution I think which was to say this is a battle scarred world... the power lines are down, we're using candles, the war has gone on

¹²⁵ The production also featured some extremely contemporary behaviour from the ensemble, as Banquo and Macbeth were borne aloft on their first entrance by soldiers chanting their names in the manner of football supporters, establishing both the heightened male camaraderie of a conflict situation and the esteem in which the two victorious generals were held by their men.

for some time, the soldiers when you see them are caked in mud. This could be Passchendaele, it could be a much later conflict, it could be the Gulf war.

(Doran, 2009)

The production's relocation to a modern setting undoubtedly contributed to its immediacy and impact, but for some this lack of specificity was frustrating, with John Russell Brown leading criticism by declaring the production to be 'On the point of becoming a pacifist cartoon with some similarities to horror comics and violent video games' (Brown, J. R. & McCallum, 2005, p. 132).

Michael Dobson also mourned the play's detachment from its Scottish setting, stating it was

...blithely uninterested in Scotland but [it] came with a heavy-handed programme note needlessly underlining the play's resonances with recent power-struggles in the Balkans.

(Dobson, 2001, p. 251)

The programme note cited by Dobson was written by the foreign correspondent Fergal Keane and appeared to provide him with the specificity of context that Doran was anxious to avoid.

It is clear from Doran's comments about modern technology that transposing a play to different eras is not one that he considers merely cosmetic; it is important for him to find a parallel context in which the play can perform the function that he understands it to have; that it is still, recognisably and coherently, *Macbeth*. In this case, the relocation appears to have been broadly successful in those terms, with the world portrayed on stage maintaining a logic which synchronised well with the text performed. If Doran's updating perhaps lacks the precision or historical specificity of Richard Eyre's Nazi-set *Richard III* at the National Theatre in 1990, it is because he believes you should

Never sacrifice resonance to relevance... the metaphor is lost and people stop listening. But there are also productions where non-literal settings hijack the play just as badly. You don't know where you are.

(Doran, in Taylor, P., 1999)

Doran's reference to hijacking the play once more configures aggressively 'Konceptual' productions as somehow vandalising the play. This *Macbeth* does not do that, however; the late decision to locate it in a modern context and its non-specificity of period may have substantially altered the *mise en scène*, but it remained wedded to its traditional narrative and structure.

However, long before deciding to set the play in a broadly contemporary society, Doran had already determined that the production would be built around a different aesthetic, an idea that was as applicable to a Jacobean setting as it was to the one that was eventually used: darkness.

Perhaps responding to the warmth of the Swan auditorium and the acknowledged difficulty of creating the more oppressive atmosphere required for a tragedy, Doran decided to keep the level of ambient light in the play as low as possible. Observing how virtually the entire text is set at night, and that even in those scenes set in daylight there are references to its being unusually dark, he resolved to neuter the friendliness of the theatrical space by ensuring that the audience would see as little of it as possible:

It's a play that takes place mostly at night with the possible exception of the England scene. It's a play in which 'light thickens'. It's a play in which fear inhabits those dark corners of the room where the light doesn't reach and the dark corners of our souls. It's a play in which light has a shadow in which that shadow is inhabited by the dark side of all of us... I think that was a great help in beginning to define the world we wanted to create.
(Doran, 2009)

Doran argued both in rehearsals (see Walter, 2002, p. 6) and interviews given after the fact (see Bate & Wright, 2009b, pp. 165-166) that the playwright codified a series of lighting design instructions within the text of his plays. Doran's take on the play, one defined by the absence of light, is thus rooted in a kind of textual authority, but locating the equivalent justification in early modern performance history is more problematic as many of the play's early performances will have been outdoors. Although the exact details of the initial performances of *Macbeth* are speculative, they certainly predated the move to the indoor Blackfriars Theatre in 1608. John Wilders recounts how 'A theory has been proposed that it was acted for the first time on 7 August 1606 at Hampton Court' (2003, p. 2), so the play may well have premiered indoors, but many of the subsequent performances would have undoubtedly been in broad daylight at the Globe, where,

...in the daylight of the Globe its pervasiveness could be vividly imagined as a result of Shakespeare's repeated allusions to it.

(Wilders, 2003, p. 3)

Thus, Doran's argument that Shakespeare is intimating a darkened ambience through stage directions embedded in the text is at least in partial denial of the materiality of the circumstances for which it was written. According to Wilders the references to dark and darkness are not directing the company *staging* the play, but rather telling the audience *watching* the play to *imagine*

the absence of light. A more historicised production of the play would, by this reasoning, perform the play in daylight.

Nevertheless, the production commenced dramatically by setting the witches' (or 'weird sisters' as Doran referred to them throughout rehearsals) opening scene in an absolute blackout, one intensified by Doran gaining permission to temporarily switch off the fire exit lights. He also experimented in early previews with flying an unseen speaker over the audience at the end of this first scene, playing the 'weird sisters' final 'Hover through the fog and filthy air' (1.1.13) as it went. He cut this, however, before press night as he came to see it as a gimmick which produced a startling reaction but drew audience focus away from the scene that was to follow. Recounting his change of heart, Doran said he could hear his 'old drama teach Rudi Shelley wagging his ancient Jewish finger at me and saying in his Prussian drawl "Greeeeeg, don't want to be clever!" (Doran, 2007, p. 14). The darkness nevertheless dislocated the action of the play from the architecture of the theatre, in the process delaying a visible physical presence in this most intensely physical of plays. The 'weird sisters' were denied corporeal form, both emphasising their otherworldliness and skilfully deflecting attention from the substantial suspension of disbelief the play normally demands at its outset. By the time the witches *were* seen, in 1.3, the world of the play had been substantively established and the audience was able to see them for the first time as Macbeth does.

The darkness onstage continued to be all-pervading throughout the production, only occasionally punctuated by sporadic bursts of light, and the *mise en scène* more generally had a washed-out colour palette in which splashes of blood provided the only source of vibrancy. The overall intention was not only to negate the warmth of the Swan, but to create an oppressive and powerfully claustrophobic atmosphere throughout. It was thus the darkness and modern context working in conjunction which created the production's aesthetic. The darkness prevented the lack of specificity of the setting from ever becoming too vague, and foregrounded the supernaturalism of the play, for there was much in the dark that was unknowable.

As with *Henry VIII*, lighting was used, at times, to denote symbolic, even spiritual significance. Strong white shafts of light illuminated King Duncan¹²⁶ on his first appearance, a suggestion of Godliness emphasised by the manner in which Macbeth and Banquo prostrated themselves before him, lying flat on the floor in an act of complete submission. This was made all the more conspicuous by the military fatigues that they were wearing; their behaviour powerfully juxtaposing with starkly contemporary dress.

If Duncan was signified as Godly, then it was not the only religious signifier in the production's aesthetic. Following the king's murder the 'Devil-Porter' arose malevolently from a mid-stage trapdoor, again, as in *Henry VIII*, as though from hell, to torment the audience. The allusion was further emphasised by doubling the actor playing the porter (Stephen Noonan) with the character of Seyton (pronounced 'Satan') later in the play. As Macbeth killed God/King/Duncan, so Stephen Noonan's Devil/Porter/Satan emerged from Hell to claim his soul. Underlining the sacrilege of this murderous act, it was later made clear by the *mise en scène* that the Macbeths could expect no similar sanctification. Macbeth's post-coronation appearance, later in the play, during 3.1, was staged as a virtual facsimile of Duncan's first entrance, complete with Banquo's prostration, choral music and an incandescent aura of light. The newly-enthroned couple no longer sat easily in the light, however, and Macbeth appeared eager to exit from such an exposed situation, preferring instead to come downstage and talk to the audience from the comforting shadows. The upstage door with its spill of golden light remained open and illuminated throughout Macbeth's subsequent downstage conversation with the murderers, a witty juxtaposition aesthetically reminiscent once again of *Henry VIII* and a damning commentary on the gulf between the production's beatification of kingship and the bloody reality of Macbeth's reign.

In another echo of *Henry VIII*, Doran and his designer also transformed the Swan stage into a domestic interior through the use of laundry. For the scene when Macduff's family are murdered (4.2), the *mise en scène* showed an atmosphere of domesticity, with Lady Macduff doing the

¹²⁶ This echoed Peter Hall's 1967 RSC production, which 'focused on the powerful degree to which *Macbeth* is a Christian play' (Sewell & Brown, 2009, p. 133), and Trevor Nunn's 1976 production, which 'dressed Duncan more as a priest than a military king, so that he had an iconic, rather papal aura which not only suggested a prevailing religious conformity in the social structure, but accentuated the heinous and unthinkable quality to the murder.' (Nunn in Bate & Wright, 2009b, p. 152)

laundry whilst a baby could be heard crying offstage. A clothes horse draped with washing USL then provided cover for a murderer to silently approach and covertly stab young Macduff through drying clothes, a shocking incident which cruelly subverted the cosy domesticity of the preceding scene. In *Henry VIII*, the laundry had reshaped the space into a safe place of refuge from the violence and intrigue of court; for *Macbeth*, the imagery created the humdrum verisimilitude of family life, but then destroyed it.

This ultimate violation of domesticity was nicely underlined by the white clothes, which drying around the room, wound up blood-stained as if in a grimly earnest parody of a detergent advertisement.

(Dobson, 2001, p. 253)

The sleight of hand involved in the staging (we might know Young Macduff is going to be stabbed but don't think it has happened yet until he slides to the ground dead) cleverly sought to wrong foot the audience to achieve genuine surprise, and provided a reminder that Doran is quite capable of staging distressing and shockingly violent moments as and when the text calls for it.

The Swan Theatre seems to have been essential to the critical success of this production. The bare, thrust stage of the Swan allowed for rapid movement between scenes and dynamic and fluid relationships onstage, with regular use of the runways (or vomms) DSL and DSR through the audience to achieve a series of overlapping entrances and exits. The production also demonstrated a slightly more playful relationship between Doran and the theatre. I have already described how he immersed the audience in an absolute blackout at the start of the show, depriving them even of a fire exit sign. Once light returned, the brick back wall of the theatre was clearly visible in the gloom, a familiar sight for regular Stratford theatre goers. However, it was a fake, constructed by designer Stephen Brimson Lewis. At 1.4, when Duncan entered, a drawbridge clattered down from this wall USC, brightly backlit with a dazzling white light for King Duncan's entrance. Again, regular attendees at the Swan may have been aware that the back wall has no scope for an entrance and is a solid construction, but otherwise the illusion was largely maintained. At 4.1, however, spectral faces appeared to bulge out of what had previously been seen as a solid brick surface to deliver the apparitions' prophecies. As I did not see the production live, I can only speculate as to the impact this had in performance. Many critics mentioned the moment approvingly, though, with Vineberg describing them as 'faces trapped behind the elastic upstage

wall, like the terrifying demonic images in the film *The Frighteners* (2001). The device suggested a willingness to playfully subvert the audience's expectations of the Swan, by seeming to destabilise its permanence.

Linking *Macbeth* to Steven Pimlott's production of *Richard II* (2001) in the Other Place, Escolme has argued that the RSC at that time was undergoing a particularly metatheatrical moment at that time, when

...they were using the company's smaller spaces in ways that pushed intimate metatheatre to new limits for the company. Actors entered the auditorium, opened the theatre's doors to the world outside, demanded that the audience speak, stand, and encounter them directly.

(Escolme, 2005, p. 4)

For Escolme, the metatheatricality of Doran's and Sher's work on *Macbeth* is contingent on the theatrical space in which it occurs (see pp. 2-4), and she draws attention both to Sher's dramatic exit through the fire exit late in the play and the earlier entrance of Macduff and Lennox to watch the Porter's semi-improvised routine from the rear of the auditorium (see Escolme, 2005, p. 168).¹²⁷ Whilst this is a view with which I concur, I also consider there to be other factors influencing Sher's performance here: Sher's conclusion that *Macbeth* was sane rather than mentally ill provided him with a different, less absorbed interiority than he had immersed himself in for *Leontes*; Sher appears more comfortable with the richness of *Macbeth*'s language than the choppy speeches of *Leontes*, finding self-awareness and humour in them; after the period setting was changed the aesthetic provides a much more productive and resonant match with Sher's conception of his role. Crucially though, Doran's process, his balancing of supporting the actor's process of characterisation with more theatrical perspectives, seems better equipped to facilitate the synthesis of Sher's multiple identities for this particular play, and the Swan provides the ideal space in which production of those meanings can take place.

If I have concentrated on Sher's process as much as Doran's here, it is because, above all, Doran's methodology is based around enabling and supporting his actors to perform at their best. In this case, the craft of Doran's process appears to have facilitated a satisfying experience for the actor

¹²⁷ I could not see this on the video recording of the production due to the placement of the camera.

which resulted in a successful performance. If we might judge the efficacy of that process through the critical reaction to the production, then in this case the reception in the mainstream press was almost unanimously positive, perhaps best expressed by Michael Billington's review for *The*

Guardian:

Hang out the banners! Stratford has come up with its best Macbeth since Trevor Nunn's legendary production a quarter of a century ago. Gregory Doran's version thrusts the play into a modern, militaristic society without diminishing its theatricality, while Antony Sher and Harriet Walter perfectly trace the psychological arc of the Macbeths in their inexorable descent into madness and guilt.

(Billington, 1999a)

Other reviews were just as enthusiastic. The *Daily Mail* called it '... the most exciting, most compelling Macbeth I have seen in years' (Coveney, 1999), for the *Evening Standard* it was 'hugely enjoyable' (Curtis, 1999a) and the *Sunday Times* proclaimed that 'Gregory Doran's tremendous production explodes with an elemental force' (Peter, 1999). In fact, there was as close to critical unanimity in praise of the production as is probably possible, with many highlighting that it was one of the best *Macbeths* they had seen in years.

Chapter Five

Locating Doran's aesthetic: design, tradition, authorship

Locating Doran's aesthetic: design, tradition, authorship

If *Macbeth* provided the opportunity to move from an analysis of Doran's rehearsal process, and the likely performance outcomes that might arise from it, to a consideration of his wider aesthetic, then I will now shift emphasis to consider the Doranian *mise en scène*. In doing so I am embracing more fully both my own subjective response to the theatre he creates, as consumed both live and through archive videos, and the wider critical reception of each of the productions discussed.

I will begin by examining how Doran's craft manifests itself in different theatrical spaces and the way with which he works with designers. As a director he defines himself by way of his craftsmanship rather than his artistry, a craft that he claims has been developed through years of application. He has achieved particular success in the Swan Theatre (as opposed to the pre-refurbishment RST where his work has been less consistently praised), suggesting there is some compatibility between his process, aesthetic and the RSC's Jacobean-inspired playhouse.¹²⁸

Doran appears extremely alert to RSC performance history and frequently refers to what previous directors have done with a particular moment or scene in interviews about his work.¹²⁹ In exploring and defining Doran's aesthetic I will therefore then consider it in the context of the company's traditions of performance, examining when this results in simple imitation, and when the past is invoked to be varied or played upon in interesting or complex ways. This section will then move on to examine productions where he has adopted a less 'traditional' aesthetic, and study the resultant performances and what they mean for Doran's work and how it is understood.

My particular focus throughout is on the challenges inherent in staging early modern drama, and thus the productions that I have drawn my evidence from are all of plays written by Shakespeare

¹²⁸ See Reardon in Mulryne & Shewring (1989, pp. 9-14) for an account of the designing of the theatre. It is clear from Michael Reardon's account that though the brief was to design a space suitable for the 16th and 17th century repertoire, there was no real attempt to attempt historical accuracy. This was explicitly rejected on the grounds that 'the painstaking reconstructions of one age will always be found lacking by the scholarship of the next' (p. 9).

¹²⁹ I have also confirmed anecdotally in private conversations with various members of staff at the Shakespeare Centre library in Stratford-upon-Avon that he has been a regular visitor to their archives, and has frequently been seen researching previous RSC productions of plays that he is preparing to direct.

and/or his contemporaries. Much of this chapter will concern itself with defining Doran's aesthetic as an institutional director. The latter part then searches for a more distinctive authorial voice by analysing the depiction of religion, ritual and the supernatural; male sexuality and masculine camaraderie; and the use of music and dance. Drawing on the information I set out in Chapter One I will examine here how Doran's complex identity and the influences that he has been subject to manifest themselves in performance, and in what way his work is uniquely 'Doranic'. I will close the chapter by arguing that Doran's other, distinctive, act of 'authorship' during his career at the RSC to date has been his programming, directing, and championing of, plays from the wider Elizabethan and Jacobean repertoire. In instigating a series of successful productions of lesser known plays, he has almost single-handedly been responsible for a revival of this important element of the company's repertoire.

Over the course of this chapter I will argue that although Doran often makes theatre within an aesthetic framework that is rooted in a set of institutional and cultural traditions, there is actually a complexity of purpose and outcome embodied in the work that make reductive assumptions that it is 'conservative' or 'traditional' problematic. Through studying the aesthetic choices that Doran and his collaborators are making in the light of the contexts that they occupy, and developing tropes and themes already highlighted in case studies of *Henry VIII* and *Macbeth* earlier in this thesis, I will attempt to identify what exactly *does* characterise a Doran-directed production.

Design and use of space

The productions I have analysed as case studies so far in this thesis were both staged in the Swan Theatre. *Henry VIII* and *Macbeth* were popular successes there, and, as I have highlighted, negotiated that particular space remarkably effectively. For *Henry VIII*, the thrust stage gave Doran the opportunity to counterpoint scenes of opulence and pageantry with low political intrigue and satirical commentary; for *Macbeth*, darkness not only negated the warmth of the auditorium but created a powerfully claustrophobic atmosphere. In this section I will examine Doran's use of theatrical space in more detail, comparing the way in which he navigates the Swan with his use of space in the RSC's other main auditoria.

Before I begin it is important to note the role of the various designers in each production I discuss here. Of the thirty two productions directed for the RSC between 1992 and 2012, Doran has tended to work with a very small number of designers: Rob Jones nine times, Stephen Brimson Lewis eleven times¹³⁰ and Niki Turner four times. Doran clearly values the contributions of these collaborators and has returned to them time and time again. No consistent aesthetic signature is evident for any of these designers across their work with Doran, nor does he ask any of them to specialise in a particular genre or style of play. It is not straightforward, therefore, to identify exactly what informs Doran's choice of designer, but availability is almost certainly a factor. However, Jones's designs, in particular for *Merchant of Venice* and *Winter's Tale*, do tend to have an expressionistic quality to them, whilst Brimson-Lewis's tend to be simpler and usually feature a broadly realist aesthetic. This is inevitably a simplification, though; what each of them does is respond, in collaboration with Doran, to the challenges of the play as they perceive them. It is that collaborative process that I wish to highlight here. I have already described how Brimson Lewis redesigned *Macbeth* two weeks into rehearsal and relocated it in a contemporary militaristic context, betraying a responsiveness to rehearsal developments that is unusual in an organisation where design plans must normally be agreed before rehearsals begin. Rob Jones also describes an ongoing, collaborative process of design during *Winter's Tale*:

¹³⁰ Brimson Lewis has also, at the time of writing, been working on Doran's History Cycle, having so far designed *Richard II* (2013), *Henry IV Parts I and II* (2014), and *Henry V* (2015).

We began to look at lots of photography, paintings, of vaguely Romanov period, to decide where these people lived. We found a photograph of a room with no ceiling and a sky above it and that was one of those things that we both looked at and said that's our image for the play and it began from there.

(Jones, in Doran & Lough, 2005)

The partnership that Jones describes here suggests equivalence in the working relationship between director and designer. The 'sky' led Jones to devise a large piece of hanging silk which billowed oppressively from the ceiling throughout the court scenes. Having conceived this central motif, the silk then became a creative part of the rehearsal process:

I think in using the silk one of the really magical things about that is was because we had a large amount of silk in the rehearsal room it allowed Greg and the actors to actually use it and lots of things developed in the rehearsal room about how do we use that silk... it's that thing about setting up a toy box of parts for the set and then working it through over quite a long rehearsal.

(Jones, in Doran & Lough, 2005)

This led to a series of scenic transformations throughout the production, of which the most notable was when the action relocated to Bohemia at the start of 3.3. As the stage was shrouded with artificial smoke, the silk parachuted to the floor, providing an organic softness to the exterior *mise en scène*. Then, from 3.3.57, a shape began to form under and behind the silk that gradually grew in size malevolently behind Antigonus, until it occupied the entire upstage area and towered over him. Finally, it enveloped him in a fulfilment of Shakespeare's most famous stage direction, '*Exit, pursued by a bear*' (3.3.61). This impressive and imaginative piece of staging was, as Jones describes it, the outcome of a collaborative rehearsal process in which the materiality of the design was brought into the rehearsal process in a creative interchange, which then fed back into the design. It was an outcome, in my opinion, of startling theatricality, though not everyone was impressed: Michael Billington suggested it was more 'exit Antigonus pursued by the scenery' (Billington, 1999).

Whatever the merits of the piece of staging, however, this, along with the late change in aesthetic for *Macbeth*, suggests that Doran's relationship with his designer is similar to the way he works with the actors in his productions; it is a partnership in which mutual decision-making and flexibility combine with the trust and respect that result from long and continuing collaborations, to produce a series of negotiated performance outcomes.

If design is usually particular to the production concerned, often evolving during the rehearsal process, and resists clearly identifiable trends, then the relative permanence of the theatrical spaces at Stratford provides an alternative lens through which Doran's aesthetic can be analysed. I will therefore start with further examples of Doran's use of the Swan, followed by an analysis of ways in which he has navigated the RST, both before and after its reconfiguration. I will also consider his usage of the temporary Courtyard Theatre during the period when the RST was closed.

The Swan Theatre

When Greg Doran visited the Swan Theatre in 2010 in preparation for its reopening following a lengthy refurbishment process,¹³¹ he wrote:

Then we head over to the Swan, which like the rest of the building is being hastily prepared for Sunday's event. I can't help grinning. It's like recognising an old friend.
(Doran, 2012, p. 141)

Doran's fond re-acquaintance with this theatrical space reflects its status as his 'favourite theatre' (p.140), and the site where he has realised many of his most critically lauded productions.

Since it opened in 1986 the Swan Theatre has offered both a space in which to perform the early modern repertoire beyond plays written by Shakespeare, and a warm and welcoming theatre in its own right. Architect Michael Reardon described the intention behind the theatre as follows:

The new auditorium therefore was not to be a reconstruction of the Elizabethan Globe or Swan, but a new performance space to embody some of the qualities those early buildings possessed, and which we believe to have enduring theatrical value. In particular, we wanted to re-create the relationship that exists between actor and spectator, when both are contained within a common architectural framework.
(Reardon, 1989, p. 10)

The theatre's timber-framed auditorium was constructed on the site of the old Stratford Memorial Theatre that had burned down in 1926, behind the 1932 building, and had since been used as a conference hall and rehearsal space. The new thrust stage, relatively narrow at '24 feet across and 35 feet deep' (Shewring, 2012, p. 414), extends into the audience as a raised promontory. The stage is raised about 2 feet above the lowest level of the stalls, and although in theory this platform is removable, in practice the stage configuration has rarely changed throughout the theatre's twenty-seven year performance history. There have been occasional innovations, such as a promenade configuration for Dominic Cooke's production of *Winter's Tale* in 2006, or Michael Boyd's original staging of the *Henry VI* plays and *Richard III* in 2000-01, which remodelled the space into a theatre in the round. Doran has always utilised the theatre in its default form.

¹³¹ The final performance in the Swan Theatre prior to refurbishment was *The Penelopiad* on 2 August 2007, eventually reopening to the public on 24 November 2010 with a limited programme of events and productions. It officially reopened for full programming with Doran's production of *Cardenio* in April 2011. Whereas the RST underwent extensive structural modification, the Swan's improvements were largely cosmetic (new carpets and seat coverings) or improvements to backstage and technical facilities. The shape of the auditorium was left fundamentally unchanged.

The open stage theoretically promotes a close relationship with the audience as indicated by Reardon, although many actors have commented that the height of the auditorium and the platform nature of the stage mean that the actor-spectator relationship is not as easy as might be assumed.¹³² With audience members seated on three sides of the stage the platform also proves resistant to extensive scenery or stage furniture as sightline difficulties emerge when anything structural is placed on the forestage. There is an upstage area where no spectators usually sit, though this too can be problematic for staging action, as the further upstage the actor travels, the less of the space is usable without becoming invisible to many spectators. This, plus a tendency of designers to want to contribute a structural, conceptual, or simply more visible element to the performance, has led to a trend of filling in this upstage space and effectively using it as a backdrop to the onstage action and a place through which actors might exit and enter.

Two runways at the downstage right and downstage left corners are used for audience access, but are also regularly used by the actors to create alternative entrances, or simply to perform from occasionally.¹³³ The sense of inclusiveness with actors and audience sharing the same space is enhanced by the warmly reassuring woodwork from which it is built:

The honey-colored Douglas fir from which the theatre's galleries are constructed, the light red brick walls, and the mauve-brown seats provide a warm, inviting ambience.
(Adler, 2001, p. 35)

This warm glow of safety and reassurance sometimes can, for some, impose itself on the play, whatever the subject matter, to occasionally suffocating effect:

...the theatre is a vibrant space that evokes a 'never never land' of honest, decent, non-sophistication, a blend of the warmly domestic and sanitised rustic, far away from the grime of the contemporary grimy world.
(Chambers, 2004, p. 90)

¹³² For a fuller sense of what it is like to act, direct or design in the Swan consult Mulryne and Shewring's *This Golden Round* (1989), which paints a comprehensive picture of the successes and problems encountered during the first three seasons of performances at the Swan, and includes interviews with a number of prominent figures involved in those seasons. Actors who refer to the height of the auditorium in negative terms include Tony Church, Imogen Stubbs and Antony Sher, although in the context of their general positive assessment of performing in the new theatre.

¹³³ When actors perform from a runway they are invisible to most of the audience sitting in either gallery. The runways are used frequently however, both for actors to deliver information to those onstage, and more commonly for spectators to listen to those onstage delivering speeches. Though not ideal, this has the benefit of allowing the actor onstage to speak out front without downstage actors obscuring sight of them from the audience.

At its best, though, the space creates a sense of communion with its audience which perhaps reflects Reardon's background as a consultant and inspecting architect to a number of churches and cathedrals:

It's a remarkable theatre: intimate, but with a public and, if you like, spiritual dimension way beyond its size.

(Rintoul, 2004, p.71)

As per Reardon's brief, the theatre's intimacy, visible timber and thrust stage layout all suggest a theatrical space sympathetic to the style of a Jacobean playhouse, offering a clear rejection of modernity in its aesthetic as well as a challenge to the proscenium arch of the main stage RST at the time. In doing so it does not attempt the kind of reconstructive project underway at the time of writing at the indoor Sam Wanamaker Playhouse, attached to the Globe Theatre in London, where there is a clear attempt to investigate the materiality of early modern performance in a performance space heavily influenced by what is known about the Jacobean Blackfriars Theatre. For instance, whereas the Swan uses contemporary lighting technology for its productions, the Wanamaker Playhouse advertises itself as a 'candlelit indoor theatre' (Shakespeare's Globe, 2016), foregrounding the historical accuracy of the way in which its productions are lit.

In the early seasons of the Swan after it opened in 1986, designers sometimes found it a difficult space to design for. Bob Crowley, designer on *The Two Noble Kinsmen* (1986) and *The Jew of Malta* (1987) complained that

...it imposes itself, hugely, and no matter what you do, you design against it, at your peril... there's something about the Swan that can't yield.

(Crowley, 1989, p. 85)

This resistance to design, to the kind of conceptualised staging that was at this time becoming increasingly commonplace on the main stage, led designer Jill Jowett to conclude:

In my opinion, the best designs in the Swan have been those that have used little in the way of elaborate setting, stage cloths and hangings. The intimate space in that theatre, with its stage thrust into the audience, makes it possible to achieve striking visual effects in terms of colour and costumes...with the minimum of scenic clutter.

(Jowett, 1989, p. 90)

Twenty five years after Jowett made this observation it is striking to note how often Doran's aesthetic in the Swan is characterised by a bare stage; *Henry VIII* and *Macbeth* both featured little stage furniture other than that required by the text. The exception to this was when the director

wished to invoke domesticity, at which times the space was restricted, with laundry the scenic device of choice.

Another of Doran's Swan productions, *The Island Princess* (2002), designed by Niki Turner, demonstrated a different set of aesthetic priorities from those two productions. Here, the stage was also largely kept bare, but the main feature was a visible gamelan orchestra situated upstage, providing an ambient score and the exoticism that the Swan's interior palpably lacked. The musicians remained stationary and in view throughout the play in a constant reminder of theatricality, which helped to root the production in a culture of storytelling, locating the play's status as that of fable and therefore seeking to excuse its many implausibilities.

The action throughout was swiftly and efficiently staged, making extensive use of the theatre's USR and USL balconies as viewing platforms for characters to observe onstage action. Perhaps reflecting the limited rehearsal time and budget of the production,¹³⁴ but also Doran's pared-back aesthetic, this was a clear, straightforward presentation of the text with little interpretative intervention.

Although the costumes were broadly Jacobean, the production lacked any clear social or historical context, adding to the sense that this was not a story to be taken literally. Thus the Portuguese were dressed in broadly Elizabethan black, whilst the islanders were richly costumed in reds and golds, which coupled with a languorous and sensual mode of movement, especially from the female characters, exoticised and eroticised their sense of 'otherness'. Doran cast British Asian actors as the Indonesians and white British actors played the Portuguese settlers (see McManus, 2013, pp. 77-78). As the acting company was cross cast across the entire 'Jacobean' season, it resulted in an ensemble that was unusually diverse for the RSC at that time.

¹³⁴ *The Island Princess* was one of five plays performed in 2002 as part of the 'Jacobethans' season, a programme of plays written by Shakespeare's contemporaries and programmed by Doran. It was staged with relatively low cost with only four to five weeks rehearsal per production and no understudies (see Doran, 2002).

The islanders often sat, rooted, defining them as earthbound and therefore in harmony with their land, whereas the Portuguese remained upright and peripatetic, only sitting when consciously adopting the customs of their hosts. Even when the visitors did relax, at the start of the second half, they were draped in hammocks stretched across the upstage corners rather than lying on the ground, denying them the connection the islanders had with the land/stage. The warm glow of red and orange lighting that often suffused the stage further added to the sense of romanticised foreignness. The physicality of the actors, the way in which they engaged with the space, the music and the lighting all contributed to a *mise en scène* that was unmistakably exotic without ever being a realistic recreation of a foreign country, whilst the unconcealed timber features of the Swan continued to remind the audience that this was fundamentally a theatrical space.

The play, by John Fletcher, arguably has a problematic depiction of Islam,¹³⁵ and the political climate post-September 2001 had made producing it more so, but the production initially appeared to accept this uncritically. Doran's presentation of the play as a comic fable, for the most part, seemed disengaged from the troublesome colonial politics of the play. A post-colonial critique did begin to emerge as the performance progressed though, as the contemporary politics of 2002 began to assert themselves. Paul Bhattacharjee as the Governor of Ternata emerged disguised as a clear iteration of Osama Bin Laden at one point, a decision that brought, for me, the politics of the production and play into sharp focus, and sat oddly with the comic nature of the actor's onstage persona. There was also, however, a powerful and challenging moment towards the end of the production, when, in 4.5, the Portuguese settler Armusia violently rejected Quisara's suggestion that he converts to Islam (line 38). Here, the aggression inherent in the character's status as a representative of a proto-colonial power belligerently manifested itself, as Jamie Glover, playing Armusia, suggested a very real sense of threat, and viscerally articulated in performance the anti-Islam prejudices of the text (and carried the potential to articulate prejudices resident within the audience). Suddenly a dangerous clash of cultures, which seemed fiercely current, exploded from seemingly nowhere to confront those watching. It was not developed, though, arguably because the text does not allow it scope to do so, but also because it strained at the generic constraints of the

¹³⁵ See McManus (2013) for a detailed account of the ways in which the text depicts an early encounter between Christianity and Islam.

production. As with the play, Doran's staging was content to leave a sense of moral ambivalence around this, but then move on without resolution. This uncertainty of tone is arguably a product of the generic instability evident in much of Fletcher's output, what Gordon McMullan has termed the 'politics of unease' (McMullan, 1991). In this case, through the lens of contemporary geopolitics, Armusia's outburst created an uncomfortable moment which Doran and Glover invested fully in, but both production and play then proceeded to grant Armusia an un-ironic happy ending, leaving the production's attitude to the play's problematic politics finally unexplored and unresolved.

Antony and Cleopatra (2006) was notable for the fact that it was staged in the Swan at all. This was a play whose performance history at the RSC was dominated by productions in the RST.¹³⁶ Wilders asserts that Granville Barker's preface to the play, which argued for a fluid, continuous structure to the play in performance, unhampered by complex scenery and staging, had had a '... profound effect on the style of all subsequent productions and is still felt today' (Wilders, 1995, pp. 22-26). This influence is seen in most, though not all of the RSC productions since the 1960s, with Nunn's (1972) and Brook's (1978) in particular presenting a relatively pared back aesthetic which allowed for the pace and seamless transitions that Granville Barker sought (see Jones & Sewell, 2009, pp. 165-170). However, later productions in the RST, though they maintained a level of fluidity, still tended to be dominated by large scenic structures.

In the thrust stage auditorium of the Swan Theatre, Doran was able to work with a bare minimum of scenery, allowing for a fluidity of movement between the multiple short scenes of the play that the scenic requirements of the RST could never have allowed. A simple back wall motif of a map provided the only permanent feature of the stage, with occasional pieces of furniture brought on as necessary and a large sheet covering the stage at the opening that seemed chiefly to be there to cover the Soothsayer, who whilst under it appeared only as an indistinct lump to sit against. Later, he was to make a surprise entrance from under it.

¹³⁶ Adrian Noble had directed a studio production in TOP in 1982, but this was the first production of the play in the Swan. All other RSC stagings at Stratford had been in the RST.

The production also made extensive use of the theatre's balconies to allow actors to appear in positions of height as others left the stage below creating a series of seamless transitions. This use of the theatre's architecture became particularly important in the final acts, as the balcony across the upstage area provided a ready-made, elevated position for Cleopatra's monument. The actors playing Cleopatra, Charmian and Iras (Harriet Walter, Golda Rosheuvel and Emma Jay Thomas respectively) then mounted a suspended platform in front of the balcony, which was lowered to a more visible yet still elevated position from which they could receive Antony's hoisted body

(4.15). As Doran commented:

...to me one of the most iconic moments in Shakespeare is this great hero, Mark Antony, suspended between heaven and earth, just hanging there, vulnerable as a newborn baby. It's as iconic as the balcony in *Romeo and Juliet*. It seems to me that you need somehow to create that. And of course with this theatre... essentially you've got the balconies so you don't have to bring a great monument in, it's already here.

(Doran, 2006b)

Doran clearly saw the permanence of the Swan's architecture here as an advantage, negating the necessity for large and unwieldy scenery to be brought on.

In another of the production's intriguing use of levels, in 2.7 the design for Pompey's galley featured two large platforms suspended by ropes down the length of the forestage. These bore the paraphernalia of the banquet for the scene, but were also opportunistically employed by both Antony and Octavius Caesar at various points during the scene, jumping on them in order to gain elevation over the other characters as they downed their drinks in a display of virile masculinity. The platforms not only gave height as well as depth to the scene and allowed for an extremely rapid scene change as the platforms were flown in and out, but also cleverly suggested an impression of an unstable, undulating space, evoking the water-bound nature of the scene and the drunkenness of its participants. Later, when the assembled crowd danced the Bacchanal and the participants drunkenly swung back and forth, the platforms were flown out to rapidly create an open acting space in which the dance could take place.

From these examples, as well as my earlier analyses, we can see that Doran's use of the Swan is generally minimalist and often involves substantial use of the auditorium's levels, including regular employment of the balconies and runways as acting spaces. Stage furniture is limited and the

acting space is sometimes reduced in size to invoke domesticity. Structural scene changes which require lengthy breaks in the action are rare, with the momentum of actors' exits and entrances, coupled with lighting changes and occasional bursts of music, shifting the location of the narrative as necessary.

In Doran's 2003 production of *All's Well that Ends Well* in the Swan there was a moment of intense theatrical focus as Judi Dench, playing the Countess, slightly raised her palms in acceptance of her future daughter-in-law, Helena (Claudie Blakley). It had such an effect that it not only was the subject of a discussion after the performance between myself and the party of friends that accompanied me to the performance, but was also mentioned in reviews of the production (see Nightingale, 2003; Wolf, 2003). It was an example of the way in which the Swan's space can be used to draw the audience's focus in to moments of intricate detail, and Doran's skill in manipulating that focus. The director makes the following observation about the Swan:

What the Swan has brilliantly is it works like a film camera. You can go for the close-up, you can pull out for the epic wide shot, not quite as wide as you can in the RST obviously. It's harder to close in for the intimate shot in the RST.

(Doran, 2014)

Doran's use of cinematic language here is interesting, suggesting that he believes that he can mediate the gaze of the theatrical viewer in the same way as a film director can, and that the Swan Theatre is a particularly effective space for doing so. In the juxtaposition of the upstage and downstage areas of the stage, the theatre's unusual depth of performance space gives him an opportunity to position his actors in such a way he believes he can cue the audience to focus in on specific moments of detail. In this case, Dench was USC, standing next to Gary Waldhorn's King. Bertram was DSR and Helena DSL, effectively framing Dench as the primary focus for the audience. Blakley's tension as Helena was clearly visible in her body language, immobile but straining toward Dench in expectation of some confirmation of what her place in this family would now be. When Dench lifted her hands, we had been cued to look there, and our attentiveness was rewarded by a fairly small movement of Dench's hands that brought an overwhelming sense of relief. The moment was, of course, one of Doran's 'crossroads', but it was also his grasp of the way in which the proxemics of the characters on the Swan's stage can be employed to encourage the audience's focus on a particular moment, or to zoom in for a 'close-up'. The Swan alone does

not do this, of course, and in the moment described above it was the combination of the actors' positions in this particular space with their physicality, stillness and use of eye contact that created the effect I experienced when watching the play. Such moments are manifestations of Doran's theatrical craft, yet he uses cinematic language to define them, perhaps because, in instants such as these, he is transforming a theatre space into a site of filmic, psychologically realist performance.

I have given voice herein to practitioners who believe that the Swan works best when directors and designers work with the exigencies of the space and do not seek to impose an overly cumbersome design on it. Doran's design choices largely align with this; his preference in this theatre seems to be for a largely bare stage and a fluid style of performance with few scene changes, using material and furniture to reshape the space as necessary rather than more dominant, built scenery. He also appears alive to the verticality of the space, making effective use of its balconies and, in the cases of *Antony and Cleopatra* and *The Island Princess*, suspending people and action above floor level in mobile structures which suggest an airy transience, contrasting effectively with the permanence of the theatre that surrounds them. As I have suggested, his use of the stage also allows him to create moments of intense focus, deploying depth, eye contact and positioning to mediate the audience's gaze. His particular success in this space, however, is also related to the importance of the actor in his process and aesthetic. The auditorium places the actor, and the words they are saying, at the centre of the performance, so it is appropriate that he should have such critical success in this particular theatre.

The Royal Shakespeare Theatre (RST)

I will now turn my attention to the RST, examining how Doran negotiated the proscenium arch theatre prior to its closure and reconfiguration.

The Shakespeare Memorial Theatre opened in 1932, built from a design by Elisabeth Scott after the previous theatre on the site had burned down in 1926. It became the Royal Shakespeare Theatre after Hall rebranded the resident company in 1961 into the RSC. The proscenium arch auditorium regularly drew criticism from actors, directors and audiences for the distance between actor and audience, and was not always felt to be conducive to performing Shakespeare. There had been regular attempts to adapt it over the years, including building out over the orchestra pit to create a shallow apron, and various forms of limited experimentation with thrust stages and audience seating. Ultimately it resisted substantial adaptation, and the narrowness of the proscenium (which is part of the structural integrity of the building) compared with the width of the auditorium continued to create poor sightlines for spectators and a remote relationship with the stage. Finally in 2007 it was closed and internally rebuilt, reopening in 2010 with a thrust stage.¹³⁷

The old configuration also encouraged a pictorial approach, which, when combined with the trend for spectacular staging that had emerged throughout the eighties, led Terry Hands to conclude:

The Main House at Stratford is a designer's theatre. It demands a pictorial context. Even with the extended forestage which gives it a unique hybrid quality – combining 'reality' with 'illusion' – it remains as much visual as verbal. The layout and indeed proportion of audience to stage accentuates the feeling of cinema. Like any proscenium theatre what you see is as important as what you hear.

(Hands, 1989, p. 159)

As Hall characterises it, the proscenium arch works defiantly against the desire to foreground the actor rather than the picture:

If you have a picture frame then you have to make a picture. If you make a picture you have a detailed, rather complicated thing rather than the elemental concentration upon the actor.

(Hall, 2005, p. 13)

¹³⁷ For a full account of the process of demolishing and rebuilding see Ward (2011).

In the closing moments of *Timon of Athens* in the RST (1999), Doran provided a *coup de théâtre* of immense and unexpected power. This was a production which, whilst not specifically located anywhere, had seemed to encompass a blend of Roman, Jacobean and modern influences.¹³⁸ In 5.4, when Alcibiades arrived at the head of his army to assume control of the city, he did so not on foot, but was lowered into view from below the proscenium arch on a lighting gantry. Heralded by a sandstorm and howling wind, the implication was that he was descending on some kind of enormous military transport (helicopter gunship?), an impression heightened by the row of bright spotlights fixed to the front of the balcony, dazzling the audience, and the artificial amplification of his voice as though through a loudspeaker. As such, Alcibiades became a representative of modernity and thus a new order sweeping away the old. It was a striking and effective use of the performance space, clearly demonstrating the kinds of impact that can be achieved in this proscenium arch auditorium.

Doran characterises such set pieces as key moments of the production around which resources should be concentrated:

Geoff Locker, who was a great technical director here, he would say, ‘There’s your money shot, you’ve got this and that and then your money shot, and that’s all you can afford so decide what your money shot is’. That could be many different things.

(Doran, 2014)

Once more employing a ‘cinematic’ term, in its most vulgar usage this refers to a pornographic close up of male ejaculation, but it has also come to define a moment of pure filmic spectacle; the image that typically consumes the budget. If Locker here means it in the broader, less crude, meaning, then there is still a sense that the ‘money shot’ is both commodified and orgiastic, an emptying of resources on a single moment, presumably at the expense of other, less immediately gratifying, priorities. Although in *Timon*, the effect was dramatic, visually stunning, and theatrically exciting, the phrase Doran, by adopting Locker’s phrase, is thinking in increasingly cinematic, rather than theatrical language.

¹³⁸ In a briefing video for the production, which is available to view in the RSC archive, Doran described the aesthetic as ‘Jackson Pollock Jacobean’ (Doran, 1999). In fact it was an eclectic mix of Roman, modern and Jacobean, all set to a jazz score by Duke Ellington that had originally been used in a 1963 production in Stratford, Ontario, directed by Michael Langham.

I will now examine some of the other ways in which he has utilised the theatrical space of the RST, using examples drawn once more from *The Winter's Tale* (1999). Robert Jones's design for the production, in addition to the large piece of silk, featured a series of parallel panels down each side of the stage with exits between them. The effect was to telescope the stage and it provided an impressive focal point upstage centre for Leontes to make a series of entrances through. As the play progressed these panels moved inwards at the beginning of 2.3, adding to the sense of encroaching claustrophobia that was heightened by the dense cloud of fabric suspended overhead. For Sher, it was

... sort of like the inside of [Leontes'] head with strange entrances that people could just come out all the time. It was a kind of absurdist surrealist set yet had all that realism of modern context... it was fantastic for me because Leontes keeps trying to ground himself in the real world and yet he's spiralling so that combination of realism and nightmare, if you like, was fantastically helpful for my character.

(Sher, in Doran & Lough, 2005)

The critics generally praised the 'stylish, wood-panelled colonnade, under a sky of billowing drapes' (Walsh, 1999), though Susannah Clapp did remark that it

...bears some of the current RSC trademarks: dappling shadows, an Edwardian setting that allows the stage to be littered with frockcoats, gramophones and yards of billowing silk...
(Clapp, 1999)

If the *mise en scène* echoed earlier, frockcoated productions, though, it also powerfully reinforced Leontes' deteriorating mental state, as intended.

I will now explore Doran's grasp of proxemics in this space, through examining a particular piece of stage craft from this production. This sequence, early in the play, used Hermione's late term pregnancy to highlight Leontes' increasingly myopic perspective on events, as his jealousy began to take hold of him. In 1.2, as Leontes (Sher) studied some paperwork by his desk USL, Hermione (Alexandra Gilbreath) and Polixenes (Ken Bones) continued their conversation on a chaise longue SR. At line 79

Was not my Lord
The verier wag o'the two?
(1.2.79-80)

Hermione started the gramophone DSR, and Polixenes and Hermione gently began to dance as they talk. This ceased briefly when Leontes re-joined them a few lines later on 'Is he won yet?' (104), and embraced Hermione. There followed a moment when Hermione, relaxing her hold on Leontes

and holding out her hand to Polixenes, invited him to join them CS (131). Polixenes then crossed from SR and Hermione took his hand in hers, whilst retaining her husband's palm in the other. At the head of a triangle she briefly stood and encouraged them all to sway with the music, as though she wished to dance with both simultaneously. She was playful and mischievous, knowing her husband would find it uncomfortable, and so he did. Polixenes was placed in a position of equivalence with Leontes, then when Leontes indicated his tension at the idea of reciprocating the dance, Hermione and Polixenes broke USR behind the chaise longue and began to waltz, leaving Leontes alone downstage centre. Now Leontes commenced his speech to the audience DS:

Too hot, too hot!
To mingle friendship far is mingling bloods
(1.2.132-3)

At this point Gilbreath's Hermione suddenly clasped her pregnant stomach in visible distress, ironically at a time when Polixenes was not even touching her. Leontes continued talking without looking upstage, his imagination clearly providing a more salacious vision than that of the more mundane reality. He continued:

I have *Tremor Cordis* on me: my heart dances,
But not for joy, not joy.
(1.2.134-5)

Only now did Sher's Leontes turn upstage, as Polixenes reached out to steady the ailing Hermione and take her hand. What Leontes witnessed was a brief moment of support and friendship before Polixenes helped Hermione to a seat, but that was enough to feed his suspicion and allow his jealousy to grow. As Tatspaugh notes:

He mistook Hermione's deep sigh, very clearly associated with her pregnancy.
(Tatspaugh, 2002, p. 57)

The effect of this sequence was to bring Sher in and out of the action onstage, alternating between commentator and participant. It exploited both the framing of the stage and its depth, by presenting us with an image of Hermione and Polixenes that drew our focus through their gentle movement, and then demanded that we return focus to Sher for his comments.

Doran's craft was again in evidence here, his ability to negotiate a space and indicate where to look and how the audience should understand what is being viewed onstage. Sher's focal point directed

the audience's, framing the action and giving them the theatrical equivalent of a point-of-view shot. Again, the language is cinematic.

The Winter's Tale also highlighted another element of Doran's aesthetic that recurs frequently: a highly populated stage. For *The Winter's Tale* the cast size was twenty nine, and they were abundantly evident throughout. The opening to the play began with a Ruritanian display of royalty, as Sher in full royal regalia advanced slowly downstage surrounded by courtiers in semi-darkness who provided a whispering accompaniment. As the dialogue between Camillo and Archidamus began, the two kings, Leontes and Polixenes, drifted upstage with Hermione, presumably for a royal appearance on the balcony. As a demonstration of courtly ceremony and pomp, it detailed both Leontes' sense of self-importance and the authority he enjoyed in his everyday world. However, as the downstage dialogue continued, even on the video recording,¹³⁹ it is difficult to concentrate on the opening exchanges due to the extraordinary level of upstage bustle and movement and the constant clomping of feet on the wooden floor of the stage.

Similarly, at the start of 2.1 a large number of actors attended Mamillius and Hermione for their exchange. This left a number of seemingly redundant courtiers onstage to react to the exchange between the boy and his attendants. The intention was presumably to foster a sense of a public space, and to show how loved Mamillius is by his courtiers (though due to the decision to put the boy in a wheelchair it is possible to interpret this as pity), but even so there are two male servants positioned SR who have no discernible purpose and consequently looked ill at ease. Leontes then arrived with further personnel (I counted fifteen in his retinue on the video recording), who then provided an audience for the King's subsequent hysterical accusations.

Doran's enthusiasm for packing the stage had more positive consequences for the rural scenes in Bohemia, where he impressively choreographed a bawdy, rustic romp with an energy and wit that provided a burst of life and colour in contrast to the dark greys of the earlier court scenes. Charles

¹³⁹ This is my judgement based on repeated close viewings of both the multi-camera film of the production and the archive, single, static camera recording, filmed on a different performance. Inevitably, as I was not there, I cannot state with certainty that this was the effect experienced by audience members watching the production live, but I consider it probable.

Spencer was typical of many when he described it as ‘beautifully staged with a life-affirming mixture of sunshine, comedy, great bales of fleece and music’ (Spencer, 1999), and for Georgina Brown the sheep-shearing had a ‘Breughelesque charm and detail’ (Brown, G., 1999a), though for Maeve Walsh Act 4 was

Overcrowded and overstretched, the jollity of the sheep-shearing party gets lost somewhere between the towers of wool-bales and the auditorium.
(Walsh, 1999)

In 5.2 there were also advantages to the amount of people populating the stage, as the choric recounting of offstage events that set up the conclusion to the play took place with enough actors onstage to actually suggest a community discussing what has taken place. Here, the grouping and movement were significantly more fluid than in the court scenes, resulting in a crowd scene with an organic life and energy of its own. Doran had broken up the text, dividing the Second Gentlemen’s speech at 5.2.23-31, so that it was delivered by at least three voices, creating the sense of a genuine dialogue taking place, rather than one or two characters simply providing lengthy exposition to a passive audience. As the focal point of the scene shifted to whoever was speaking, so the groupings onstage re-orientated themselves accordingly.

In the final scene of the play, the onstage audience to the action provided effective amplification to the dramatic resurrection of Hermione. As the ‘statue’ was revealed to Leontes, situated DSL in an echo of Hermione’s location in the earlier trial scene, a semicircle of silhouetted onlookers gazed on, bearing candles to illuminate the dim light. As Gilbreath’s Hermione stirred, Sher’s gasp was amplified silently but powerfully by the gaping open mouths of this chorus, simply and effectively underlining the power of the moment.

The size of Doran’s company here is, for the most part, impressively handled, as it generally is when he works with large ensembles. In *Winter’s Tale* there are moments, though, where it is possible to discern cast members who appear to be there more to balance the stage than to fulfil a particular dramatic purpose; the opening of 2.1 is one of these. Where the quantity of actors is more strategically applied, however, as in the examples I have given above, the effect is to amplify key moments and direct the audience’s focus.

Doran asserts that

It interests me when people say your stage always seems more populated than any other directors... you seem to have more people on stage. I don't, I think it's just the distribution of the people on stage.

(Doran, 2014)

He is clearly aware that this is a criticism sometimes made of his productions, that they are over-populated, and it was certainly one made of *Winter's Tale*. Tom Wright, his assistant director on *The Tamer Tamed* (2003), tells a revealing anecdote of his time working with Doran:

I hadn't ever seen that many people in a room in a rehearsal... there were twenty odd. Having worked at the Young Vic and thought that eight was an extravagant size of a cast and I remembered on day one of rehearsal overhearing Greg on the phone to casting going 'No we're going to need more people...' and going 'It's day one of rehearsal, how are you asking for more people, its already more people than I've ever seen in a rehearsal'.

(Wright, 2013)

Doran's institutional status is evident here in two respects. Firstly, he considers it normal to have a large amount of actors at his disposal, even though in the wider English theatre industry it is clearly not; secondly, he has the authority and ability within the RSC to negotiate additional actors as and when he deems it necessary.

Where I consider Doran to be correct when he talks of the 'distribution of the people on stage', above, is that there is a dynamic at work in his casts which can sometimes make scenes with large number of actors onstage seem overly busy. The rehearsal process that he employs places a premium on involving and engaging every actor in the staging of the scene. Though this places an emphasis on ensemble storytelling by ensuring the key turning points of the narrative are clear, occasionally it can lead to an abundance of naturalistic detail, which can distract from the focal point that might be necessary to comprehend the narrative beats of the story. For instance, in *Henry IV Part I* (2014), staged in the new RST thrust-stage auditorium, the multi-level design of the Boar's Head tavern allowed a series of visible comings and goings which created a teeming depiction of London life that was impressively detailed, but also, to my eyes, sometimes distracted from the scenes in the tavern that were taking place further downstage. Doran's desire to direct the audience's gaze in the manner I have described therefore appears to be challenged more by the scale of the larger space than it is by the narrower, smaller stage of the Swan.

Although the old RST no longer exists, the examples I have discussed here indicate elements of his aesthetic which are also evident in his work so far in the new RST: a tendency to populate the stage with large numbers of people, which can amplify the power of the staging impressively, but can also distract if employed injudiciously; an ability to create a point of intense and heightened focus in a large space around a particular moment of narrative importance (or ‘crossroad’), even if this comes into occasional tension with other elements of his staging; and an eye for the spectacular stage picture, or in Doran’s crude analogy, the ‘money shot’. All of these point to an aesthetic in the RST that offers heavily populated stage pictures wedded to realist conventions, and is less likely to embrace the kinds of minimalism that is evident in the director’s Swan productions, or to feature the kind of metatheatricality found in Doran’s production of *Macbeth*.

The Courtyard Theatre

This 1045 seat thrust stage auditorium was built on the site of the Other Place and was the temporary main stage for the company during the RST's lengthy reconstruction. It opened in 2006 and was closed in 2011, although it briefly reopened during summer 2012 to host productions for the World Shakespeare Festival. It served as a prototype for the newly reconstructed RST auditorium and its success seemed to vindicate the company's decision to commit to a thrust stage in the company's main permanent theatre. Doran's use of it, therefore, provides some indications as to how his aesthetic manifests in such a space, which combines the scale of the RST with an open thrust stage.

In 2005 Doran directed a production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in the RST. In 2008, in repertoire with Doran's productions of *Hamlet* and *Love's Labour's Lost*, his production of *Dream* was revived in the Courtyard. Although the revival was essentially the same production, recast but with the same aesthetic and comparable staging, there were also differences, which I will highlight here.

The design for the original production was by Stephen Brimson Lewis, but for the revival, Rob Jones was credited with the 'Environment' and Frances O'Connor with the 'Décor'. Jones' primary contribution for the season was to design *Hamlet*, which featured a dark mirrored floor and back wall, whilst providing a theatrical space in which that season's other two productions could be realised. O'Connor was then given responsibility for adapting the space for the remaining two shows, although he effectively followed Brimson Lewis's aesthetic template for *Dream*. However, the mirrored surfaces meant that, despite occasionally allowing the magical happenings of the play to be reflected, they also gave a metallic, industrial sheen to proceedings which could never marry with Doran's desire to foreground the role of nature in the play.

By bringing the action out onto the Courtyard's large, open stage, much of the sleight of hand involved in the original staging was also compromised. Behind the proscenium arch RST, his feet

clouded by artificial smoke, Oberon was seen to glide on for his first entrance. Similarly Titania's bower was winched into the air without the obvious mechanics of wires and harnesses being visible. The performance was, therefore, illusory. In the Courtyard, Oberon was visibly pushed on, standing on a truck, by his fairy accomplices, despite the smoke (which quickly dispersed). The cables supporting the bower and the safety harnesses securing the actors were also clearly visible. The fairies carried glow flies with them in 2.2 on fishing rod-like devices, but what was elegant in the RSC became less so when deployed in a three dimensional space. By making the artifice of the magic so visible, however, the production did not appear to suffer (although I have only seen it on archive video, so it is difficult to make a final judgement on this); instead it rather emphasised the theatricality of a play that is, at least partially, about the theatre. It therefore changed what was illusionistic in intent into a metatheatrical experience.

The other pertinent difference between the two versions of Doran's *Dream* was apparent in the bergomask at the climax of the play. Staged as a rousing and celebratory finale, in the 2005 production it became a competitive exercise, with the mechanicals displaying much greater performative energy and aggressively foot-stomping their way DS at one point in an attempt to usurp the theatrical space from the court. In the Courtyard, however, the dance entailed linking arms in a circle, members of the court intermingling with mechanicals. The dance involved all, and maintained parity between the groups. In 2008, therefore, the bergomask was no longer a competitive reinforcement of class structures, but an act of theatrical communion and a celebratory ritual between cast, characters and audience.

The open, thrust stage, in which the audience surrounds the action onstage, therefore reshaped elements of what was essentially a duplication of the earlier production into quite different outcomes. The magic of the forest at night time in the RST became the visible magic of the theatre in the Courtyard, and, at the climax, what was hierarchical and competitive in 2005 became a communal act of celebration in 2008. The open stage of the Courtyard appears to have asserted its priorities, creating a potentially more democratic, open and transparently theatrical production as a result.

The New RST

By the time Adrian Noble conceived his plans to rebuild the RST, a proscenium arch end-on auditorium was no longer considered appropriate by the company's directorate. The company now desired a space more suited to performing Shakespeare's plays, which were seen as requiring a closer relationship with the audience, opening up the actor/audience dialogue, solving the technical problems of the space and (hopefully) staging their core repertoire more effectively (for a justification of the plans, see Wells, 2002).

Figures such as William Poel and Granville Barker, who had been hugely influential on Hall,¹⁴⁰ had argued earlier in the 20th century for a kind of historicised Shakespearean performance aesthetic that rejected the conventions of Victorian pictorial staging. They identified a thrust stage as the most effective configuration for performing Shakespeare, and advocated Shakespearean verse be approached as a muscular, dramatic form, rather than pleasingly poetical, and that it should be performed at pace. Hall had sought to emulate this at the RSC.¹⁴² The simple, direct and fast paced staging that Granville Barker had put forward in his *Prefaces to Shakespeare* was rendered problematic, however, by the clumsy design of the RST.

The new auditorium after the reconstruction featured the following key changes to the auditorium:

A new 1,040+ thrust stage auditorium, where the audience sits on three sides of the stage.

The distance from the stage to the furthest seat has almost halved, falling from 27m to 15m

New 7m deep stage basement, allowing actors, scenery and props to rise from beneath the stage during a production, and 15m flying zone created over the stage
(Royal Shakespeare Company, 2014a)

Doran has been effusive in his praise of the new space, saying he 'love(s) it' (Doran, 2014), whilst also conceding that it may still need some further adjustments:

We've been talking about all sorts of different ways about whether there are changes to the auditorium, I think were meant to be there. There was meant to perhaps be more flexibility built into the space than finally various budgetary restraints allow, which we're reverting

¹⁴⁰ See Hall, 2003, 193-5.

¹⁴² In fact, Hall's stated commitment to speed appears to be after the fact, and many of his 1960s productions at Stratford were actually criticised for their slow pace (see Corder, 2013, pp. 116-117).

to, so that we have a different kind of flexibility in the space. Keeping a thrust stage, but changing the possibility of vomms and sightlines and things like that.

(Doran, 2014)

Despite the possibility of future alterations, the new RST, along with the Swan, clearly coincides with Doran's performance priorities. They are performance spaces in which his desire to foreground the actor and the writer rather than the director or the designer can be fully realised.

We've created theatres in which the text is put at the front and that should be one of the things that we pride ourselves on.

(Doran, 2014)

At the time of writing, it is probably too early to make any firm assertions about how Doran might exploit the new theatrical space available to him in the RST since its reopening, though there are clues from his work there thus far. I have already referred to his production of the *Henry IV* plays, with its recreation of the Boars Head and heavily populate stage. For Doran's African-set production of *Julius Caesar* (2012), he and designer Michael Vale, employed differing levels to create a tiered space which gave both an overall acting space as well as a series of intimate areas.

With *Julius Caesar* design-wise I created a series of platforms so that you could get right out in the middle of the stage without having to traipse on from the side as it were and there was a platform in the middle so that it defined a smaller space and made the space feel smaller. It is an interesting thing about how this new design in that space and where you use levels in that space.

(Doran, 2014)

Levels increasingly appear to be becoming a preoccupation for the director,¹⁴³ who seems to see the answer to the challenges of the new, open, space, and the height of the auditorium, as laying in asserting a structural dominance over it, as though the bare stage which he uses so productively in the Swan is to be resisted in the reconfigured RST. No doubt, the potentialities of the new space are still to be discovered, but it suggests that there is a project to materially sculpt the space at work, subdividing it into smaller areas that can be focussed in on more clearly.

With *Richard II* (2013), this time citing a textual authority, he sought to exploit the height as well as the depth of the acting space.

We began *Richard II* thinking about the space and thinking about the vertical nature of the play and that it's about him always feeling elevated. *Richard II* was the first king to always insist on being called Your Royal Highness. His journey as it were around the medieval wheel of fate from the heights of Flint castle to the depths of the dungeons of Pomfret Castle.

¹⁴³ *Death of a Salesman* (2015) was also notable for its multi-level design.

This began simply, with David Tennant as Richard standing on the slightly raised platform on which Gloucester's coffin was mounted (1.1) to rule on the dispute between Bolingbroke and Mowbray. For the duel itself at Coventry (1.3), a highly elevated bridge was flown in on which Richard's throne was mounted. This then became the location of his power (so long as he had it) for the rest of his reign. In 3.2, on Scroop's lines

Have felt the worst of death's destroying hand
And lie full low, graved in the hollow ground.
3.2.134-35

Richard collapsed to the ground SR, and then slowly crawled to CS, where he sat cross legged on line 144. Even here, his physicality was tentative, as though testing the ground in order to see how it would feel to sit upon. Only when he reached the lines

For God's sake let us sit upon the ground
And tell sad stories of the death of kings:
3.2.150-51

did he finally sink into a low cross-legged position, shoulders hunched in an image of childlike regression. His companions sat at corners of the stage around him, keeping their distance and isolating him, focusing audience attention on Richard's lowly status, even as he tried to reassert himself by instructing his followers where they should sit. Although the speech invites the actor playing Richard to sit at this point, this performance indicated greater significance to the action, for Tennant curled his shoulders and rocked back and forth as though wanting to sink into the ground in a marked contrast to the long, lean silhouette he had cast throughout the earlier part of the play. For the closing scene in Pomfret, the ground genuinely did seem to swallow Richard up. The deposed king's prison was a pit, sunk into the floor, Richard only visible when standing from the thighs up.

All Doran's productions in the new RST, at the time of writing, have featured large companies (though in *Henry IV Part II*, for me, there were still insufficient actors available to portray the overthrow of the rebels in 4.1 convincingly). For *Julius Caesar* the professional acting ensemble was supplemented by an impressively sized community cast of volunteers. This made the opening of the play, which featured a lengthy pre-show filled with song and celebratory music, and the

scene of Caesar's funeral and Mark Antony's oration (3.2), extensively populated sequences. The tiered set worked to good effect here, allowing excellent visibility whilst creating a plausible crowd dynamic that surged with movement and life.

By contrast, *Richard II* was a relatively static production. The formality of the play, and the verticality of the set (as well as elevating Richard at every opportunity Brimson Lewis' design had a series of tall, vertical poles across the upstage area of the set) combined with ankle length costumes to create a series of stage pictures dominated by the upright. Groupings were formal, and movement often seemed constrained within this structure. Within the larger scenes only those holding power displayed any physical agency and were completely free to roam the stage. The production may have been elegant and, at times, beautiful, but it also exhibited a physical stiffness and lack of fluidity for much of its duration.

Doran's structural interventions in the new RST sit in marked contrast to his work in the Swan, and even to his work in the Courtyard which still largely featured a bare stage. His interest in using the full height of the theatrical space, however, was certainly evident in the Swan. The heavily populated stage, with large crowds of onlookers used to amplify and focus the onstage action, could be seen in several of his productions in the old RST. What all his productions have in common aesthetically is that, within an essentially realist framework, they suggest a space which can transform easily from the intimate to the epic (wide shot to close up), or occupy both spaces simultaneously (split screen), where the gaze is directed to key focal points. Doran characterises this visual language in cinematic terms, and I have adopted that vocabulary here, though his staging can only offer cues of where to look rather than actually mediating the gaze of the viewer in the manner of a camera. Sometimes he achieves this through counterpointing upstage and downstage areas (as with *Henry VIII* and *Winter's Tale*), sometimes through using smaller platforms within a wider space (as with *Julius Caesar* and *Henry IV*), or sometimes simply through well-crafted and disciplined groupings onstage used to focus audience attention on and therefore amplify key moments of narrative import (as with *All's Well* and *Richard II*).

Institutional inheritances, traditions and ‘Koncept’

If Doran’s theatrical work is shaped institutionally in material terms, by the size, nature and configuration of the auditoria in which he has predominantly worked, then, as I have previously argued, he is also heavily influenced by the RSC’s performance traditions. He therefore assigns high value to the ‘Shakespearean’ authority of the text and works within an aesthetic which is governed by values ‘proximate’ to Shakespeare, at least in a Stratfordian context. I have also suggested, however, that he negotiates these traditions in complex ways, and have provided a clear example of this through my earlier case study of *Henry VIII*. I will now develop my argument by examining how two productions negotiate RSC (and wider) performance traditions: *The Merchant of Venice* (1997) and *All’s Well that Ends Well* (2003). I will then go on to explore his more interventionist stagings of *Othello* (2004) and *Julius Caesar* (2012) in the light of their racial and sexual politics, and the director’s assertion that the latter is conceptual.

Doran’s 1997 production of *The Merchant of Venice* was the second Shakespeare play that he directed at Stratford (the first being *Henry VIII*), and his first in the proscenium arch Royal Shakespeare Theatre. It featured Julian Curry as Antonio, Helen Schlesinger as Portia, Philip Voss as Shylock and Scott Handy as Bassanio. I want to focus here particularly on a single interpolated scene, and that scene’s relationship with the play’s performance history, so after some brief but necessary contextualisation I will concentrate exclusively on this.

The 1997 production in which Doran and Sher had previously acted had become renowned for the viciously anti-Semitic Venice it portrayed, seeking, as many productions do, to contextualise Shylock’s behaviour by depicting it as a justifiable reaction to systemic intolerance and prejudice.

Miriam Gilbert in her performance history of the play at Stratford wrote of

...A Shylock as foreign as Antony Sher, one who was openly mocked and spat upon by Venetians, and outside whose ‘house’ a trio of street urchins (known in the promptbook as ‘freaks’) made mocking noises...

(Gilbert, 2002b, p. 39)

Gilbert refers elsewhere in her study to Sher’s Shylock as ‘a cultural as well as a religious outsider’ (Gilbert, 2002b, p. 22), noting that there is often a link between the signifiers of Shylock’s

Jewishness and how much there is a resultant ‘visible physicalisation of the verbal attack’ (p. 108) in the performance. She identifies this as a key choice of the production: how much should Shylock’s ‘difference’ be emphasised and how much should his Jewishness be part of the production?

The 1987 production answered this question thus: ‘a yellow star of David was sprayed to the wall at the back of the stage’ (Neill, 1997). However, by the time Doran came to direct his own production of the play he was wary of such strong identification with the post-Holocaust politics with which the play had become entangled. He believes that the Alexander production

...loaded the play in the post-Holocaust sense. It over-balanced it. The casket scenes went for nothing, but they are crucial because it is all about human values – Portia is a commodity too.

(Doran, in Neill, 1997)

Implying once more universally ‘human values’, Doran’s critique suggests he is interested in the play’s portrayal of capitalism and that this was neglected in Alexander’s staging. He goes on to say:

The play has been hijacked by history. We are putting it back into the world of Renaissance trade. We’ve started with the title: Shylock was a merchant of Venice. I wanted to take the swastikas and stars of David out of the play.

(Doran, in Neill, 1997)

Doran argues therefore that he wanted to emphasise the broader, mercantile world of the play rather than foreground anti-Semitism at the expense of all else. Shylock was still to be prominent – Doran’s identification of Shylock as the titular merchant rather than Antonio suggests that – but the production would situate Shylock’s narrative as one of a complex matrix of stories. Doran did this with a production that was historically located firmly in late sixteenth/early seventeenth century Venice in a *mise en scène* that seemed permanently misty, dank and foreboding, with only brief respite for the scenes in Belmont. Although darkly lit, however, the production was evocative and visually stylish, a fact noted by many newspaper critics of this generally well-reviewed production.

Yet again, two camps amongst the newspaper critics were discernible, those who identified the absence of a strong directorial reading (often defining that reading in purely visual terms), and

those who tended to see it as wholly unremarkable and thus to be responded to condescendingly.

For instance:

This is a staging that, for long stretches, comes across as just the latest thing to fall off the RSC's main-stage Shakespeare machine.

(Taylor, P., 1997)

Alternatively, there were again those who viewed the absence of 'concept' as a positive, especially

David Murray on viewing the London transfer:

It is straight – no “director’s concept” pressed forward, no kinks – but continually illuminating; better, in fact, than almost any *Merchant* I’ve seen.

(Murray, 1998)

Unlike *Henry VIII*, there wasn't an ironic reading that the critics had missed here; the play doesn't invite one. This was seemingly a production lacking any kind of substantial interpretative spin from the director; there was no concept by which to critically configure the production. However, the lack of an easily digestible signifier of concept does not mean that there was an absence of a directorial reading. On watching the recording of the production I found it to be a production rich with detail and believable human interactions (and transactions), often defined by touch. It was at times a remarkably tactile production with relationships established through a series of hugs, handshakes and arms around the shoulder, particularly amongst the male merchant class, but also between the various amorous friendships that develop during the course of the play. Such a strong visual language created a sense of trade being brokered in both personal and commercial contexts, suggesting a substantial overlap between the two. The potential of relationships, even those notionally based on love, to reverse abruptly was also demonstrated with a striking burst of aggression from Gratiano towards Nerissa on supposing her adulterous at 5.1.277, as he screamed the added words, 'Let me to my wife, let me to my wife', grasping at her violently and having to be restrained. This sour note introduced into the 'happy' ending was a stark reminder of a world in which relationships are commodity and therefore disposable, once the object of affection becomes damaged goods.

If relationships were defined in this production as much by touch as words then Shylock was noticeably absented from the bulk of them, at least beyond his immediate family. As Gilbert notes, Voss's Shylock was a man who

...who constantly stood too close to people 'invading their space', and who certainly touched Jessica (Emma Handy) frequently during 2.5.

(Gilbert, 2002b, p. 39)

His relationship with Jessica in this scene was warm, affecting and tactile, in contrast to his other relationships onstage, and their final parting moment was marked by an affectionate and touching kiss.

He also made his presence felt through other means. Invited by the exchange in the text:

Bassanio	Why dost thou whet thy knife so earnestly?
Shylock	To cut the forfeiture from that bankrupt there.
Gratiano	Not on thy sole, but on thy soul.

(4.1.123-25)

Doran and Voss worked in a chilling pause in the action of the scene, as all eyes on stage were gradually drawn to the slow repetitive sound of the knife being drawn across Voss's shoe. This is a device that has a precedent, with Sher having done something similar in 1987 and Peter O'Toole's RSC performance as Shylock in 1960 likewise employing a comparable piece of business. The 1960 production also featured the young Philip Voss, who played Shylock in Doran's version. Between Doran's links to the 1987 production and Voss's to the 1960 one it appears that there were multiple inheritances at work in the realisation of this moment.

The piece of staging in *Merchant* which received most critical attention was both the most theatrically striking moment of the production and the scene that drew most extensively on the play's performance history. It was Henry Irving who in his 1879 production at the Lyceum perhaps first created the modern tragic portrayal of Shylock, a man driven to extremes by the prejudices he faces. As John Drakakis writes in his introduction to the Arden 3rd edition of the play,

...he brought to the role a complexity that emphasized the tragedy of his plight at the hands of an insensitive Christian Venice.

(Drakakis, 2010, pp. 116-117)

Part of this complexity rested on a new, interpolated scene, where Shylock returns home to find that his daughter Jessica has eloped, allowing the audience to share in his agony. In Irving's production, this was the image of a solitary figure bearing a lantern 'returning to a deserted house' (Gross, in Gilbert, 2002b, p. 42), but more recently the tradition has been revived and embellished

significantly. By the time it came to Doran's production, 'Shylock's return', as Patrick Stewart refers to the extra scene (Stewart, in Gilbert, 2002b, p. 41), had often become an extended sequence of powerful theatricality.

For Doran's production it was one of the central moments of the performance. Located at the end of 2.6, Doran showed the masquers of the carnival in full, drunken revelry. Many of the revellers were wearing pigs' head masks that covered their whole heads, an image of considerable power in a production that had otherwise resisted strong visual signifiers of societal prejudice. As Shylock struggled through the crowd the visceral anti-Semitism of the imagery was explicit, even heavy-handed, and was all the more shocking for not having been signposted earlier in the production. The provocation increased dramatically as his daughter Jessica was seen at first fleeing through the crowd, then was assimilated into the carnival atmosphere and finally began partying with the other revellers. She seemed not just in denial of her father but her abandon as she danced ecstatically seemed provocative and transgressive of her Jewish heritage. As Shylock was jostled he took shelter in his cell, represented as a cage placed centre stage, which was buffeted, rocked and finally spun by the crowd. The power of the *mise en scène* here was rendered even more disturbing by the unusual closeness of the father-daughter relationship portrayed earlier in the play. The image was expressionistic and nightmarish, a manifestation of the journey into hell that Shylock was experiencing, and provided a context out of which his search for revenge could be born.

The notes in the programme that accompanied the production actually referred explicitly to the Irving interpolation, so Doran was clearly aware of the scene's antecedents, and foregrounding the performance history in this way had the effect of bequeathing a historical authority on the additional sequence. It marked a distinctive shift from the detailed realist setting of the rest of the production into a more expressionistic register.

Doran's homage to Irving's interpolation was a stunning *coup de théâtre*, but it also reinforces the perception that *Henry VIII* created, that Doran is not only alert to each play's performance history, but that he engages with it wholeheartedly. In the case of *Henry VIII*, he envisioned the play itself

as a far more ironic construct than the performance history (pre- Nunn) seemed to allow for, yet he also embraced much of that performance history's aesthetic. In the case of *Merchant of Venice*, he adopted the interpolated scene that Irving pioneered but developed it into a nightmarish, Bosch-like vision of Hell. Despite being an interpolated scene it therefore became the most distinctive feature of the production and the moment when the narrative of persecution and anti-Semitism in the play aligned dramatically with the Venetian trading society that Doran sought to evoke.

I will now turn to Doran's production of *All's Well that Ends Well*, staged in 2003 in the Swan Theatre.¹⁴⁴ Opening on 11 December 2003, the production was designed by Stephen Brimson Lewis with music by Paul Englishby and lighting by Paul Pyant. The cast included Gary Waldhorn as the King of France, Jamie Glover as Bertram, Claudie Blakley as Helena and Guy Henry as Parolles. Rounding off the ensemble and performing with the company for the first time in more than a decade, and twenty years since she had last played a Shakespearean role at Stratford, was Judi Dench as the Countess of Rossillion.

The production enjoyed substantial critical success, being described variously as 'a wistfully beautiful production' (Woddis, 2003), 'outstanding' (Coveney, 2003); 'the whole drama, effortlessly directed by Gregory Doran, is a laid-back delight' (Gore-Langton, 2003). In a review reflective of the majority of the critical response, at least in the mainstream press, Alastair Macaulay was to conclude that it was 'one of the definitive Shakespearean productions of recent years: this *All's Well* shows [Doran] to be one of the supreme Shakespearean directors of our era' (Macauley, 2003b). As I will explore here, it also exemplified many of the aesthetic tropes that have come to define Doran and was consequently criticised for its 'conservative' approach and 'traditionalism' even by critics who praised its other virtues. Michael Dobson, writing in *Shakespeare Survey*, was representative of a substantial minority of commentators when he called

¹⁴⁴ Unlike *Henry VIII* and *The Merchant of Venice*, I saw this production live, so my observations are inflected by the greater experiential awareness of the production that this allows as opposed to those only viewed on archive videos.

the production 'a National Trust reconstruction of Renaissance France' (Dobson, 2005b, p. 167). To Dobson, it was 'formally and ideologically highly conservative' (p. 167). The production undoubtedly did sit within an aesthetic many might associate with a 'traditional', 'conservative' style of Shakespearean production. The lighting was golden and autumnal; the costumes were designed in a beautiful recreation of 17th century styles, in a palette of greys, blacks and silvers, and the staging flowed artfully from one scene to the next.

However, for me, the aesthetic was more 'Chekhovian' than 'Shakespearean', with the level of realist detail, the melancholic score and the dim, golden lighting combining to create 'an elegiac quality to the Rossillion estate' (Taylor, P., 2003). As another critic, referring to the play's troubled production history, suggested:

... the play is now presentable as a Chekhovian tragicomedy of youthful folly and age in decline, and this is the approach chosen by Gregory Doran in mood if not in costume.
(Caines, 2004)

The inheritance that is at work here once more appears to be Trevor Nunn rather than any kind of earlier performance tradition, whose 1981 RSC production featuring Peggy Ashcroft was described as 'Chekhovian' by Michael Billington (Billington, 1982) in his review and has had the description applied to it in production histories of the play ever since (see Waller, 2007, p. 9, for instance).

Delivering a production steeped in period visual splendour was always likely to produce charges of 'traditionalism' of one sort or another, however, and Doran felt moved to state in a publicity interview that such an aesthetic 'doesn't mean it's 'heritage theatre'' (Hargreaves, 2008), suggesting that he was alert to such accusations being levelled at the work.

In this section I will argue that although the aesthetic of the production was indeed within the parameters of 'tradition' laid down by previous productions, it actually displayed a moral complexity that denied the easy resolution and ideological conservatism implied by such categorisation. In doing so, it also exemplified the contradictions of characterisation discussed in Chapter Three, which I consider to be an outcome directly related to Doran's rehearsal process. By encouraging an investment in each moment according to its own value and by allowing complete

reversals to occur around the ‘crossroads’ that have been identified in each scene, Doran and his actors here embraced a lack of consistency in their behaviour, with consequent moral ambiguity. For a play which has historically been defined in production by a directorial ‘search for unity’,¹⁴⁵ Doran’s embrace of disunity in performance provided a balancing adjustment to the romantic view of the play that his aesthetic seemed to endorse.

Dobson was not alone in interpreting elements of the production’s *mise en scène* as signifiers of conservatism:

It was charming, gentle and reassuring in tone, everything that a conventional Shakespearean comedy should be for the majority of London and Stratford audiences. Where Peter Hall’s RSC production ten years previously had seemed radical and edgy, reviewers of the Doran oozed nostalgia and reverence.

(Waller, 2007, p. 11)

Waller’s implication is that the production is morally simplistic and emotionally reassuring. This doesn’t appear to be purely based on the period aesthetic adopted (Hall’s staging was Caroline set); his later description of the production as the ‘Judi Dench extravaganza’ (p.28) betrays his suspicion of what he considers to be a production unbalanced by its star.

However, this relatively small part has been associated with a number of high profile older female actors at Stratford, including Edith Evans in 1959 and Peggy Ashcroft in 1981. The RSC’s own history of casting a senior high status actor in the role had therefore already shifted the focus within the play, increasing the role’s importance; Doran was following in that, arguably conservative, tradition by casting Dench, but Waller’s characterisation of Dench remains a pejorative one. Dench’s return as the Countess carried significance for other reasons. By casting actors that were too old to be plausible mothers for Bertram it emphasised the generational contrast in the play between the older, wiser heads of the King and the Countess and the younger characters’ recklessness. Also, by returning to Stratford to play this role Dench was completing her own cycle of great Shakespearean parts for women which began with the company decades earlier. This record meant that Dench had become an iconic figure in the RSC’s history, but had also been a high profile critic of Adrian Noble’s doomed plans for restructuring the company (see Chapter

¹⁴⁵ Joseph G. Price appears to have first used this phrase in relation to this play, in his book ‘The Unfortunate Comedy: A study of *All’s Well that Ends Well* and Its Critics’ (see Jones and Sewell, 2013, pp. 130-31).

One); her return was therefore always bound to be portrayed in the media as an act of reconciliation, and thus a seal of approval for the company's new leadership. (For a full account of Dench's return to the troubled company, see Kidnie, 2009, pp. 46-64). Undoubtedly it was a shrewd move for the company, which was rewarded with a performance of effortless quality by Dench. More than one critic took the production as evidence that the company was once more rediscovering a sense of purpose under Michael Boyd's leadership. It was, of course, not Boyd that Dench came back to Stratford for, but Doran, his deputy, newly minted as Chief Associate Director. The sense of continuity that Dench's return provided, so necessary politically to a company trying to re-establish its Shakespearean credentials after a difficult period, was also to feed a sense among some that the production was looking to the past rather than to the present or future.

Dobson's critique of Doran's production also noted that it lacked the class consciousness of Nunn's highly successful production, which had relocated the action to the Edwardian era.¹⁴⁶ Doran's production instead appeared to emphasise the personal rather than the political and Helena's struggle was therefore not so much one of overcoming disadvantage and class prejudice, but rather tenacity in the face of unrequited love. Dobson observed that

... no one except Bertram seemed especially bothered about the social gap between the poor physician's daughter and the count (which didn't even show up much at the level of costume, since both of them looked sumptuously courtly)...

(Dobson, 2005a, p. 270)

Dobson's observation of Helena's acceptance is largely accurate; this was a court that was remarkably accepting of the character's rapid social elevation. A closer examination, though, reveals a different emphasis: that although the court accepts Helena, it does not mean that she feels accepted as of an equivalent class and status. She may have been clothed extravagantly (as befits the adopted daughter of a Countess); but Blakley's nervous, earnest performance was in total contrast to the public-school boy assurance of Jamie Glover. Blakley never quite appeared comfortable in her dress, her body language was defensive and her movement tense and light-footed, as though she wished to go as unnoticed as possible; Glover dominated the stage, owning

¹⁴⁶ The interceding productions between Nunn's and Doran's were Barry Kyle's 1989 conceptualised 'toy soldier' version of 1989 in the RST and Peter Hall's highly formal Caroline-set production of 1992, also staged in the Swan.

the space into which Blakley intruded apologetically. Blakley's voice, cracking slightly in a husky echo of Dench's but without the assurance, often remained in her upper register and had an upward lilt that seemed to question the words she was speaking; Glover spoke with firmness and confidence throughout until confronted with his actions in the final scene. Although ultimately my reading of the performance is as subjective as Dobson's, the fact that Blakley's costume superficially indicated courtly assimilation surely served to enhance our appreciation of her *difference* from those around her rather than obscure it, as Dobson claims. The bland conformity of her costume is thus a role that Helena has assumed, but in which she never quite convinces. Her appearance may initially appear uncomplicated and in denial of her character's position in the world of the play, but Blakley's performance renders such an interpretation illusory.

The aesthetic of the production should also be contextualised within Doran's wider body of work, when it becomes clear that this was a production that represented a development of Doran's *mise en scène*, incorporating a number of new elements. There was a much greater use of stage furniture, for instance, often dressed with detailed properties, than had been previously employed by the director in the Swan. This contributed to a wider sense of realist detail, reinforced by delivery of the verse that seemed to privilege psychological realism over pace; Dench in particular often broke up her speeches with pauses as she searched for the next word or phrase, a clear departure from the fast-paced delivery that characterised most of Doran's other productions from this time. The action was underscored by a mournful cello with occasional lighter moments of flute and harp, which often lent a melancholy air to proceedings; Doran's use of music had thus far been specific and minimal, usually employed only for scene transitions and to signify unusual occurrences. Although Doran was superficially returning to the period aesthetic of *Henry VIII* there were substantial differences in style. Unlike *Henry VIII*, there was also no ironic distance to satirise the visual splendour of the production; the cast at times appeared to bask in the sumptuous beauty of the stage. However, although nothing in the playing of it was ironic, there was undoubtedly a strong contrast between the beauty of the *mise en scène* and the emotional complexity at the production's heart.

This is best demonstrated through an examination of the portrayal of Bertram by Jamie Glover. Potentially a shallow protagonist unworthy of our sympathy, in Doran's production Glover's portrait of the callow count was a nuanced and ambivalent account. There have, of course, been a number of attempts at rehabilitating this most troublesome character:

Many augment the text by using special blocking or gestures, cutting lines, even adding additional lines or speeches to fill out Bertram's part – and do so not only in the final scene, where there is little enough time, but from the play's start. Barton had Bertram smiling affectionately at Helena in the opening scene; Nunn started with Helena and Bertram playing chess as children; as Bertram left for Paris Hall had him give her a quick but not unaffectionate peck on the cheek.

(Waller, 2007, p. 43)

John Barton's 1967 RSC production, featuring Ian Richardson as Bertram, had certainly prompted a critical re-evaluation in some quarters, as demonstrated in this review from J.C. Trewin in the *Illustrated London News*:

...Bertram is transformed by one of the finest Royal Shakespeare actors, Ian Richardson: making no excuses for the man's weakness and arrogance, he does get us to listen.

(Trewin, in Jones & Sewell, 2011, p. 142)

Richardson's performance was in part shaped by the appearance of extreme immaturity, meaning his transgressions could be viewed as the rash acts of a young man rather than the more selfish and considered behaviour that Glover portrayed. Glover's physical and vocal presence not only lent him authority, but suggested rationalism rather than rashness in his decision-making. Similarly the cold timbre of his voice when speaking to Helena, clipped and lacking variance in pitch, betrayed a refusal to emotionally engage. Glover's strong yet essentially static presence in much of the court scenes only relaxed later when he was demonstrably happy and thriving in the excitement and comradeship of war. The difference between the Bertram of the first half and the one sighted astride a makeshift horse at the start of the second (3.3),¹⁴⁷ his face alive with exhilaration as he rode into battle, was tangible.

Occasionally Bertram's mask was allowed to slip in a loss of self-control. In a sequence midway through the first half, which I will now describe in full as it also demonstrates Doran's ability to

¹⁴⁷ Ingeniously achieved in semi-darkness and smoke by the actors either side of him holding a horse's head, ladder and blanket for a tail as he mounted CS. As Glover stood on the ladder, this was manipulated to create a reasonably convincing approximation of a horse at full gallop.

negotiate (and manipulate) the expectations of those watching, the ambiguity of Glover's characterisation was vividly demonstrated.

I will take as an example the moment in 2.3 when Helena has been granted agency over her choice of husband by the King of France. Doran staged her deliberations (77-103) over a sequence of prospective lords as a dance of courtship.¹⁴⁸ The suitors circled anti-clockwise around the rotating Helena as she, one by one, disqualified them before finally choosing Bertram. When the dance began on the night I originally saw the production, the audience, me included, gave a laugh (that was at least in part a groan) in response to the seeming incongruity of the moment. Up until now, despite Doran's protestations, the performance was shaping up to be what looked like a piece of 'Heritage Shakespeare', albeit visually beautiful and superbly acted. Here, at the heart of the production, was choreography that seemed to prioritise unsophisticated period recreation before dramatic need and consequently removed all tension from the moment of Helena's choosing. The dancing, which was replete with hops, skips and jumps, felt authentic, well-researched and inappropriately silly. It was as though my acceptance of the production's traditional aesthetic, which until now had been balanced by the excellence with which it had been executed, was challenged beyond repair by the apparent lack of sophistication shown in this moment. It was simply too much authenticity to take. As the scene progressed, though, a shift began to occur, and the playfulness of the moment became apparent. The dance, placed at the centre of the forestage, allowed the pained (and sometimes fearful) expressions of each of the suitors, as Helena deliberated, to be showcased before the audience. Helena's pleasure in gaming them gradually became clear, which became the audience's pleasure as the ceremony was debunked by the reversal it embodied; Helena, placed at the centre of stage and action, displayed a control of proceedings and a relish of that control which was refreshingly modern and a complete contrast to the archaic ritual being played out around her. This reversal provoked obvious fear in those who would be husbands, not because they necessarily recoiled in the way that Bertram did from her lack of breeding, but because the thought of a woman with power over them appeared to terrify them. If

¹⁴⁸ Again, this has a precedent in the Nunn production, which 'staged the scene like a child's elimination game of musical husbands, with the men circling round Helena to the music, which, when it stopped, cut them out one by one until only Bertram was left' (Styan, 1984, pp. 60-61).

the audience initially responded by laughing at what was presented to us, it soon became clear that Helena was laughing along with us and in doing so she channelled our reaction and shifted our perception. Gradually, what began as a risible moment became a charming and witty piece of stagecraft which appeared to recognise its own naivety and engage with it. It was simultaneously presenting a piece of heritage theatre whilst gently mocking its own aesthetic conventionality and narrative implausibility, yet it never descended into outright tongue in cheek or lost sight of the internal ‘reality’ of the scene. It was a moment when Doran appeared to be challenging the accusations of conservatism that he knew the production would provoke, not radically, but playfully.

Having established Helena’s agency in such a charming fashion, Doran and Glover held back the moment of Bertram’s realisation that he was the target of the exercise until the last possible moment. On Helena’s ‘This is the man’ (109), there followed a suspended moment of disbelief, followed by an unheralded and therefore shockingly dramatic shift in tone. Having gulled the audience into thinking they are witnessing a jokey formality in which Bertram cannot possibly say ‘No’, Glover’s performance gave full rein to the severity and anger of Bertram’s rejection, to create a powerful juxtaposition with what had gone before. The security created by Helena’s previous dominance in the scene was shattered by an aggressive reclamation of male authority, a moment of theatrical power that was entirely contingent on the comedic tone that had previously been established. It was followed by a similar rage in Gary Waldhorn’s furious reply as the King, asserting his greater royal authority in a surprising contrast with that actor’s earlier avuncular persona (and with his wider reputation as an established sitcom actor known for playing middle-aged, slightly befuddled and occasionally incompetent men).

If Bertram was cruel and heartless towards Helena, he was likeable and warm in other scenes. His visible discomfort at the thought of marrying her was balanced by the way he invested his relationships with his male friends, displaying warmth and sincerity. Parolles’ first entrance in 1.2 was marked by mutual back-slapping; Bertram’s banter with the Lords Dumaine in 3.6, encamped and sitting on stools, was informal and relaxed, and even the gaming of Parolles felt more in jest

than a genuine attempt to expose a liar and a coward (at least until the moment of exposure, which again prompted an abrupt shift in mood). In these scenes, Bertram was allowed to be likeable. Likewise, when wooing Diana, Glover did not play the cad, but rather approached his wooing with a sincere investment, as though he was a more straightforward romantic lead, in contrast to his brutal dismissal of Helena earlier in the play. This was reversed again in his brusque dismissal of her later in the play. All of this was lent weight and plausibility by the period specificity in which the production was situated; it historicised Bertram's decision-making enough to make it understandable if unsympathetic. For Bertram, his friendships with other men provided the (platonic) romance in his life, and the misplaced trust he placed in Parolles was matched by the clear and real sense of betrayal he showed on discovering Parolles' duplicity. Each facet of Bertram's personality was invested in equally, according to the moment, and as a result character and identity remained unstable and few conclusions could be drawn.

This meant that, when Doran staged the ending of the play as a moment of uncertain stasis between Bertram and Helena, it was difficult to draw an easy conclusion as to what was going to happen next. Having positioned Bertram DSR and Helena DSL with a gap virtually the full width of the forestage between them, they provided a dramatic visual contrast to the display of unity provided by Dench's Countess and Gary Waldhorn's King of France, standing together USC. Following the King's last line (5.3.369),¹⁴⁹ a moment of absolute stillness followed, as the supposedly reconciled couple gazed at each other across the space. It was held for twenty three seconds as the lights slowly faded to blackout, at least on the archive video I have seen. The stillness appeared to ask a question of the sincerity of Bertram's *volte face*, but the instability of Glover's characterisation throughout the play meant that the production had not only refused to answer that question, but had not even given the audience so much as a clue. Glover's face was a mask, as static as the tableau in which he was situated, as though caught in a moment of indecision. Other productions have often hinted that the marriage will be an unhappy one. This production merely held out the possibility that it could go either way. It was, in Doran's parlance, a 'crossroads'.

¹⁴⁹ The Epilogue was cut.

Having earlier quoted Michael Dobson's criticism, it is worth observing that Dobson went on to praise elements of the production, but seemed to draw a link between an aesthetic conservatism and the realist detail of many of the performances:

Glover gave the perfect realist performance, simulating real awkward behaviour for all he was worth, speaking even his asides as if completely confident that he just was Bertram and was not, repeat, not in a play.

(Dobson, 2005b, p. 167)

For Dobson, the lack of engagement with the audience emphasises an interiority of character, which, however well achieved, ignores the theatricality of the text. However, though the performance did not use direct address in any meaningful way, I would suggest that it also appeared to embrace the contradictions of the part in ways that would be limited by a post-Stanislavskian reading of the part, which conceptualised it solely in terms of a 'journey'. As I have argued, Doran's process marries the competing demands of psychological realism, heightened language, and through the use of the 'crossroads' technique, encourages contradiction and complexity rather than a limiting coherence of characterisation. If Glover's portrayal of Bertram is a rich, realistic but also, for me, theatrically satisfying one, then I would argue that is by directorial design rather than happy accident.

The rest of the cast, in the main, gave similarly nuanced performances: Blakley never sacrificed the character's single-mindedness in exchange for likeability; Waldhorn's King vacillated between benign patriarch and angry authoritarian; and Henry's Parolles was surprisingly likeable, not because his lies and cowardliness were understated, but in his droll, lilting delivery and weary exasperation he seemed to possess a strange integrity and self-awareness in the performing of them, hinting at a more theatrical reading of the part where he understood what his role was to be: the comic foil. All of these characterisations co-existed within the respective archetypes of romantic heroine, elder statesman and duplicitous rogue that might be assigned to these characters, producing a complex set of performative identities rather than a series of incomprehensible contradictions. There is undoubtedly textual evidence to support all of these interpretations, but what was evident here was how there was a refusal to soften the complexity of characterisation in the text by the reductive imposition of a coherent character. Doran's level of rehearsal detail,

coupled with an unwillingness to smooth away the blemishes that the text provides its characters with, resulted in a production that presented its people with very little spin.

There is one exception to this: Dame Judi Dench. Heavily foregrounded in publicity material for the production, she is allowed an extra-textual solo entrance at the start of the play (see Dobson, 2005b, p. 162-164), privileging her status in what is actually a small(ish) role. Her performance, with her husky yet gentle voice and stately yet unthreatening physicality, was warm throughout; the Countess' occasional waspishness softened by what was an expertly achieved though sentimental reading of the role. As though in recognition of her metatheatrical role as legitimiser of the company's artistic direction, when she welcomed Helena into the family at the play's climax with a pair of lightly upturned hands, she also seemed to be embracing the audience, the company and the space.¹⁵⁰ In this most communal of theatres, such an act was a warm embrace of acceptance for all enveloped within it and a powerful act of bonding. If the Countess's success in creating a contented community onstage was left open to question by the production's ambivalent ending, then Dench's gesture remained a powerful act of communion between the cast and those watching.

I have not referred to *All's Well that Ends Well* as a 'Problem Play' here, partly because the recent performance history of the play has made, in my opinion, such a categorisation largely redundant. Price and others have argued that there is a generic disunity to the play, which directors have for many years sought to resolve. Doran largely doesn't attempt this resolution, allowing each scene to tell its own story moment by moment, informed by the delicate and detailed exploration of the text that he and his cast have undertaken. Doran's achievement is therefore not so much to solve the supposed problems of the play by either removing them or deconstructing them; it is rather to create a sense of the revelatory through exploiting and even relishing in the text's inconsistencies. For Doran, the plays 'problems' appear to be opportunities. Rather than searching for unity and imposing a conceptual coherence from above, he has found a kind of unity in the play's disunity.

¹⁵⁰ It was the first time that Dench had performed in the Swan Theatre.

All's Well that Ends Well placed itself firmly within a performance tradition which it then re-nuanced through complex and detailed staging and performances. As with *Henry VIII* and *The Merchant of Venice*, it was clearly informed by the inheritances that it was subject to, and wore those influences on its metaphorical sleeve. All three productions make clear in different ways, however, that although there are signifiers in their respective *mise en scènes* that draw attention to the tradition of which they are a part, to see that as an absence of imagination or not worthy of theatrical interest is perhaps to miss the point. From *Henry VIII*'s ironic engagement with pageantry, via *Merchant of Venice*'s riff on a familiar trope, to *All's Well that Ends Well*'s moral ambiguity, it is clear there is an imaginative and multi-faceted response to these traditions at work here, and not merely a retread of what has gone before.

By contrast, Doran's 2004 production of *Othello* in the Swan Theatre was a provocative, modern dress reading of the play. It was designed by his regular collaborator Stephen Brimson Lewis with lighting by Tim Mitchell. Working once again with Antony Sher in the role of Iago, Doran also cast Lisa Dillon as Desdemona, Amanda Harris as Emilia, and fulfilling a promise made nearly a decade earlier when they worked together on *Titus Andronicus* (see Sher & Doran, 1996, pp. 52-55), Sello Maake ka-Ncube as the eponymous Moor. The production was programmed as part of Michael Boyd's initial season as artistic director of the company (to which Boyd made no directorial contribution) and followed immediately on from *All's Well that Ends Well*, though with a separate acting company.

Just as Doran's *Macbeth* was a stark contrast to the staunchly traditional aesthetic of the Doran production that preceded it in the Swan (*Henry VIII*), so *Othello* presented a radically different world to that of *All's Well that Ends Well*. The setting was broadly modern, though technology, as with Doran's previous collaboration with Sher in *Macbeth*, was largely absent, and the costumes seemed specific to the early 1950s. The set was minimal but effectively controlled the space and shifted the action from the domestic to the public and back again. A globe in 1.3 suggested a war room, a wire fence with gates denoting some sort of military compound was wheeled across the upstage area for 2.3 and then remained in place for much of the rest of the play, a rug and furniture were used to create Othello's private quarters in 4.2 and a bed swathed in translucent drapes was set for 5.1. The harsh metal of the fence, flat across the back of the stage, contributed to a hard, industrial *mise en scène* and gave the sense that there was a world beyond that needed to be kept out, a feeling given weight by occasional bursts of exotic scene-change music that hinted at an indigenous culture outside the compound fence.

The stage was softened for the domestic interiors by the use of lighting, reducing the acting space to the area of the rug, which emphasised the tiny size of the protagonists' quarters and added to the claustrophobia of the production. Exterior scenes were lit as though in a warm, Mediterranean climate, with the hot, orange sky behind the fence deepening to red throughout the second half of the play, as the plot motored inexorably towards its fatal denouement. The heat of the sun, in

contrast to the darkness of *Macbeth* that left much unseen or indistinct, drew attention to the meticulously constructed nature of the performance. Here, the sense of verisimilitude was palpable, with an intricately realised sense of time and place apparent in the *mise en scène*. It was a world in which a forensic and sometimes uncomfortable light could be shone on the racial and sexual politics depicted in the play.

The context of the production was overwhelmingly a military one, and once the action moved to Cyprus the stage clearly represented a colonial outpost. In the production's foregrounding of the play's military setting it echoed most clearly not just Trevor Nunn's 1989 RSC production with Willard White as Othello and Ian McKellen as Iago but also Sam Mendes' 1997 staging at the National Theatre featuring David Harewood and Simon Russell Beale respectively in the same roles.¹⁵¹

Emphasising the martial world of the play has become a recurring theme of many recent productions, so much so that it has become an orthodox method of staging the play.

Starting with John Barton in 1971, most recent productions have emphasised the military setting of the play.

(Brown, K. & Sewell, 2009, p. 168)

For Nunn, Mendes and Doran the military context created a recognisable world for the play to credibly exist in, and all three productions were marked by their realism. Foregrounding the essentially closed and hierarchical society of the play appeared to strengthen Iago in each case, emphasising the military structures and culture in which he thrives, the barrack room banter, the unquestioning nature of fellow soldiers that he can exploit and the repressed emotions that he can manipulate. All three actors in these productions conformed to the trope of the bluff, down-to-earth sergeant major, cleverly exploiting the tension between the instinctive trust one might feel toward such a man with the class resentment it is easy to believe is lurking underneath his avuncular exterior.

¹⁵¹ I have viewed the Nunn production on the commercially available video filmed in 1990 and saw the Mendes staging live in 1997.

Many critics drew comparisons between Doran's staging and the Mendes and the Nunn productions, perhaps invited by the superficial similarity of the *mise en scène*. Both the earlier productions took place in studio theatres, however (the Cottesloe Theatre at the National and The Other Place at the RSC), yet Doran's was staged in the Swan.¹⁵² Mendes' staging referenced the cinematic conventions of film noir whereas Nunn's presentation echoed the Chekhovian realism of his *All's Well*; for Doran the thrust stage of the Swan invited a more theatrical performance and a more open relationship with the audience. Nunn's army outpost, which suggested the American civil war,¹⁵³ was cool and formal, 'an almost loving recreation of a military camp' (Potter, 2002, pp. 188-189), whereas Mendes' *mise en scène* was 1930s and clearly colonial, with a relentless emphasis on the sweltering heat and costumes that suggested an Indian setting. Both productions were set in periods of British overseas power that gave the impression of a dominant and powerful military confidently in control of their surroundings, allowing a personal rather than political tragedy to be played out. Brimson Lewis's set was threadbare and dilapidated by comparison, and the fifties costumes emphasised that the days of this empire were already in decline. Thus, whereas in the earlier productions Othello's tragedy was largely personal, in Doran's more political staging the design reflected both the unsustainability of the status quo and the clash of cultures between colonial and indigenous populations.

Both the meta-narratives referred to above (empire in decline and clash of cultures) seemed to be embodied in the titular character and provided a thematic backdrop to his downfall. A number of elements served to heighten this: Sher and ka-Ncube were both South African, creating a political context for both actors and audience that heightened racial tension and added a metatheatrical edge to the white actor's hatred of his black superior officer; ka-Ncube appeared to adopt increasingly tribal mannerisms as his mental decline manifested itself, most notably in 4.1 as a precursor to his epileptic fit, stamping his feet in a primal, animalistic fashion (the prompt copy refers to this as a 'Zulu dance'); and for the play's climax ka-Ncube donned richly coloured native robes which pointed towards a return to his original culture and a rejection of that of his colonial masters. This

¹⁵² Although the Cottesloe has a similar seating capacity to the Swan, the height of the Stratford theatre and its long, narrow thrust stage in reality give it a completely different dynamic.

¹⁵³ Accents remained English, however.

sense of ‘regressing’ to an ‘other’ as the play progressed was troubling initially to watch, even on the archive video, as it seemed to give succour to the Iago/Brabantio worldview of racial and cultural superiority.

Though it is not clear from the quote below where the idea for ka-Ncube’s ritualistic behaviour emanated, Sher’s description of the rehearsal process suggests the black actor’s agency in the decision:

I remember, in rehearsals, you began reverting to an almost tribal ancestral behaviour, as if you were summoning the ancestors, which you do with stamping. That allows me, when you have your epileptic fit and are unconscious at my feet, to mimic and mock your tribal behaviour. That again, to me, feels very much from the South Africa of our youth, where white people would mock black people, or would simply not take you seriously, but would see something clown-like or apelike in that behaviour.

(Sher in Brown & Sewell, 2009, p. 164)

Sher not only co-opts ka-Ncube’s authority for this element of the performance here, but also cites both their South African backgrounds, creating a permissive space for Sher to indulge in the more provocative and aggressively racist elements of his portrayal. Beginning early in the first scene, the actor deepened his voice and affected a thick African accent to impersonate Othello when saying “‘For Certes”, says he, /“I have already chose my officer”.’ (1.1.16-17), then at 2.3.29-30 he played the line ‘would fain have a measure to the health of black Othello’ with a heavy stress on ‘black’, emphasising Othello’s outsider status and drawing attention to his ethnicity as an issue amongst his colleagues (even if Iago positioned himself as the nominal defender of his general). These were precursors to the behaviour referred to above, when, following Othello’s collapse, Sher performed an ape-like dance around his unconscious superior. Sher’s performance at all three points was conspiratorial, initially with Roderigo, then with his fellow soldiers, and finally with the audience; all three moments seemed to be played to comic intent and thus carried an implicit challenge to the audience to laugh if they dared.

The negotiations of race and culture were further complicated by Doran’s deployment of two further actors of colour. *Othello* is usually one of the few plays for which the RSC’s colour-blind casting policy is not applied for obvious reasons, but here Doran was able to use the diversity of his cast to good effect. By casting black actor Charles Abomeli as Montano, the Governor of Cyprus,

he gave a hint of repressed racism to Cassio's drunken persecution of the man, and by having Bianca played by Nathalie Armin, an actress of Persian appearance, he introduced a very visible representation of the colonised 'other' in a subordinate and sexualised role. Her lesser status was later emphasised when she was casually brutalised and punched by Iago and his fellow soldiers following the attack on Cassio in 5.1. The net effect of these casting and staging decisions was to create a wider sense of institutional racism and to render Cassio's innocence more problematic, seemingly possessed as he was of the same casual prejudices and attitudes about people of colour as Iago.

In the post-Iraq invasion world of 2004, with a *mise en scène* whose wire fence echoed the military enclosures of occupying forces from Vietnam to Afghanistan, this was an explicitly political production that posed a series of uncomfortable questions about race, integration and culture that were certainly unsettling to this viewer, and presumably also to its audience (though not, incidentally, to most of the national critics).

The declining and degraded military context also allowed the sexual as well as the racial politics of the play to be foregrounded. Sher observed that 'Iago can't seem to open his mouth without some sexual allusion spilling out' (Sher in Bate & Wright, 2009c, p. 194). He placed the vulgarity of his character's language as the heart of his performance, using it to construct a character with an extremely troublesome relationship to sex. Alternately obsessed and repulsed by the carnality of others, this was an Iago who seethed with repressed sexuality throughout, not of the homosexual kind (though there was a moment, recounting Cassio's sleep-talking (3.3.456-468), where he seemed to be reliving the experience as an erotic one), but rather a deep-rooted fascination with sexuality in all its forms. Pre-20th century performance history often cut some of the more 'vulgar' elements of the text, but this performance embraced them, in contrast to McKellen's implacable coldness and Russell Beale's sweating, self-loathing bureaucrat. Sher was initially gleeful in the way he relished lines such as 'making the beast with two backs' (1.1.125) but increasingly adopted an aggressively sexualised demeanour as the play progressed. An embrace with Desdemona lingered just a little too long to be entirely asexual, and when left alone in Desdemona's quarters at

4.2.189 he began to quietly caress her clothes before being surprised by Roderigo.¹⁵⁴ Finally, Iago's predilections climaxed in a moment of extraordinary brutality as he murdered his wife, stabbing her in the vagina as he met her gaze, as though to see how she would react.

Unlike Glover's performance as Bertram, Sher embraced the open, direct nature of the Swan's auditorium to establish a complicit relationship with the audience in a manner that was unusual in an otherwise realist production. Whereas Sher often played his character's racism for laughs, seeking a discomforting alliance with the overwhelmingly white Stratford audience, the actor rendered Iago's misogyny as compulsive, and therefore more aggressively shocking. It was this element of his performance, rather than his racial prejudices, that was much more strongly commented upon by the critics, perhaps because it was this element that felt like a much clearer directorial intervention; race is necessarily foregrounded by the play, whereas the sexual politics explored here felt like a matter of choice.

Othello's recontextualisation in a realist modern setting, more specific in its *mise en scène* than *Macbeth*, gave rise to a production that was also more explicitly politically charged. Race and culture were also a factor in Doran's 2012 production of *Julius Caesar*, which set the play in Africa with an all-black cast. The production, which was staged as part of the 2012 World Shakespeare Festival separate from the main RSC repertoire, received excellent reviews from the mainstream press¹⁵⁵ and was also screened on BBC television.

Julius Caesar was the most complete reimagining of a Shakespearean play of Doran's career in a conceptual sense, with the play comprehensively rethought for its African context. The design by Michael Vale recalled a dilapidated football stadium which had fallen into disrepair over years of civil conflict but was still used as a place for public meetings; Jeffrey Kissoon's *Julius Caesar*, imperiously dominating the stage in his white suit, suggested a Robert Mugabe-like figure who had once been popular but had increasingly become tyrannical; the all too familiar sight of a child

¹⁵⁴ This has a precedent in Donald Sinden's performance at the RSC in 1979, when he fondled Desdemona's underwear.

¹⁵⁵ See Halliburton, 2012; Mountford, 2012; Clapp, 2012; Bassett, 2012; Brown, 2012; for a range of extremely positive reviews.

soldier, gradually brutalised and co-opted into violence, became a recurring motif throughout the second half of the play; and the soothsayer was depicted as a recognisably African tribal healer in a world where the supernatural was made to feel tangible and earthly. The film version, broadcast on BBC television, developed the modernity of the production with Caesar's assassination being staged on an out-of-service escalator and a military standoff (5.1) located in a deserted and dilapidated shopping mall.

Doran was also able to attract a fine cast for the production, which no doubt contributed to the general excellence of its reviews. At the time it was staged, he had recently been named Artistic Director Designate, and it provided powerful evidence that he was capable of bold re-imaginings of Shakespeare plays as well as beautifully crafted ones. His rhetoric on the subject, which is often negative towards conceptualisation of this nature, suggests that this is not an indicator of a future artistic direction, however, but rather a specific response to that particular play:

I've just done an African production of *Julius Caesar* so what's that if not concept? I would say that if somebody says don't you think that Shakespeare should be done in modern dress or shouldn't Shakespeare always be done in period costumes I would say that each play has a different challenge, and each play has a different challenge at the time you are doing it and with the people you are doing it with and in the theatre you are doing it. To me, often my experience of seeing Shakespeare or having directed Shakespeare, the ideas come about because you go why is it that those bits don't work if you do it in that particular way so if you do *Julius Caesar* in a modern context it often feels as though the problem is that it feels as if it's a particularly obstreperous board bumping off their chairman rather than something that has more cosmic resonance if you like whereas in an African context soothsayers and natural prodigies and indeed lions walking round the street suddenly works perfectly and it just kind of fits and works perfectly and all sorts of other resonances occur after that...

(Doran, 2014)

In one sense, the production was a provocative and imaginative recontextualisation, which located the play in a clear and coherent alternative setting for the play, but I would argue that this is different from the kind of reconceptualisation that substantially changes the play's meaning, what Doran might refer to as 'Koncept'. Doran's argument, above, draws on a literary justification; he had found a way to make the play work, but had not substantively re-worked the play.

There was at least one dissenting voice amongst the mainstream critics: Linking the production's reception with the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II, Ian Shuttleworth wrote:

In fact while celebrating Shakespeare's universality, herein lies a danger that this kind of interpretation may inadvertently point up the contrast between host and subject cultures. Especially at a time of heritage-centred celebration like this, it may evoke complacent (not to say racist) self-congratulation that we ourselves are not prone to such African-style instability and conflict.

(Shuttleworth, 2012)

This is a serious critique and I will briefly address it.

The RSC has a relatively long history in 'colour blind' casting, but this, alongside an Indian set *Much Ado about Nothing* the same year which Doran did not direct, was a relatively rare 'colour conscious' staging in which the *mise en scène* was explicitly African and the entire cast was black. There is a developing discourse around this practice, which positions 'Colour blind' casting as potentially troubled by the production's inability to control the meanings received:

Because so much of the success of colorblind casting is based on the audience's willingness to suspend disbelief, the effectiveness of the practice lies in the audience's color-sensitive or colorblind eyes.

(Thompson, 2006, p. 12)

In Thompson's account, the cast may mean the production to be 'colour blind', but the audience may take it to mean something else entirely. In the case of *The Orphan of Zhao*, which I briefly touched on in the Introduction, the 'colour blind' casting of East Asian actors led the production to be accused of cultural insensitivity, through casting one actor as a servant and another as a 'dog', feeding into a wider discourse about under representation of East Asian actors in British theatre. With *Julius Caesar*, the welcome employment of so many BME actors, and the resultant increase in representation on the country's major theatre stages, does not entirely absolve the production from the responsibility of considering what the meanings generated may be. In the case of *Julius Caesar*, mapping the play onto a generic Pan-African country peopled with dictators, shamans, and child soldiers carries obvious attendant risks.

Although I believe, finally, that the production brought a depth of complexity and intelligence to bear on the performance that, for me, meant it largely escaped the kinds of meanings Shuttleworth attributes to it, it does suggest that in future the RSC, given its culturally dominant status, might more usefully consider such projects in terms of appropriation than adaptation. As Cartelli argues, below:

What differentiates the act of appropriation from these acts of adaptation is that one is primarily critical, and the other a primarily emulative act. Appropriation as I understand it here both serves, and works in, the interests of the writer or group doing the appropriating but usually works against the avowed or assigned interest of the writer whose work is appropriated.

(Cartelli, 1999, p.15)

Thus in Doran's production, the director's adherence to the literary authority of the text meant that it was effectively assimilating a version of African history and culture into a production of *Julius Caesar*, rather than allowing an act of appropriation to take place which would enable an alternative interest to use the play for more disruptive, resistant and challenging ends. 'Africa' was made to mean *Julius Caesar*, rather than *Julius Caesar* being used by 'Africa' to mean something new.

Andrew Hartley compared the production with Yael Farber's 2001 South African production, which was similarly Pan-African. He argued that, in the case of Farber's production

...the decision to use multiple African languages is crucial, and is part of the reason I don't believe the production can be reduced to an image of the formerly colonized studying themselves through the colonizer's lens.

(Hartley, 2013, p. 101)

For Hartley, this production's more radical intervention meant that it was 'claiming ownership of the play'. Hartley also argued, though, that although Doran's staging could not offer the same potential for appropriation, it nevertheless had a political importance which should not be understated, and with which I concur.

...its greatest political ramifications lay in what it meant for the future of the most visible Shakespeare company in the world to offer productions played entirely by minorities who have generally been marginalized by classical theatre.

(p. 101)

This institutionally progressive act, therefore, in employing so many BME actors in a production with such an internationally high profile, was a powerful statement of intent that potentially countered the kinds of opposing arguments put forward in Shuttleworth's review.

If *Merchant* and *All's Well* demonstrated Doran's craft at its most effective through skilful and nuanced negotiations with those plays' performance history, then *Othello* and *Julius Caesar* exemplified a less traditional side to the Doranian aesthetic. *Othello*, a largely realist production, was rooted in a specific context in which the attention to detail gave rise to a politically charged

staging, and the more theatrical performance by Antony Sher created a work that was notable for its exploration of misogyny as well as racism. *Julius Caesar* was less conventional in terms of performance history, but still recognisably realist. Although its postcolonial politics appear to have troubled some, it was a production that nevertheless represented a significant advance in the company's slow progress towards becoming a truly representative institution. All four productions, even *Julius Caesar*, which Doran labelled as conceptual, were bound in a sense of literary authority, justified through their relationship to the Shakespearean text.

Locating Doran's authorial voice: ritual, religion, sexuality

If much of my analysis of Doran's aesthetic has focussed so far on Doran as an institutional director, examining the ways in which he navigates the traditions, practices and spaces of the RSC and how they manifest in his productions, then I will now turn to the more uniquely personal elements of his aesthetic, and how he 'authors' the work, even whilst articulating it as 'Shakespearean'.

As someone with such a staunchly Catholic upbringing, one might assume that representations of his faith would be clearly visible throughout his work. As I will argue, this is certainly the case, but there is also a seeming reluctance to stage visible expressions of the supernatural that suggests a tension between the instincts of cultural Catholicism and that of the rationalist, secular, non-believer that he is in adulthood. Instead, visible signifiers of Catholicism are embodied through acts of ritual.

In *Macbeth*, I have described how lighting and staging were used to create a sense of the sacred, although with a play that undoubtedly invited it. In the case of *Henry VIII*, it was a more authorial intervention from the director and his collaborators, which imposed on the text in a manner that editorialised the characters and their actions.

In 2001's *King John*, there was a similar evocation of the sacred, but this time the rituals of the Catholic Church were evoked in order to lampoon them. At the start of 5.1, King John was seen to be received back into the community of the church in a ritual where he, clad only in underwear, prostrated himself before the Cardinal to receive forgiveness. This was staged with a high Catholic aesthetic, with choral music, candles, an entourage of monks watching proceedings and the opening lines between priest and monarch sung in a recitative. Henry's comically gaunt and gangly physical presence already threatened to tip the ritual into bathos, then Henry dramatically undermined the seriousness of the enterprise with the line 'Now keep your holy word: go meet the French' (5.1.6). As the lighting shifted sharply on the King's line from a warm, romantic glow

signalling the comforting embrace of the Catholic Church to a cold grey austerity, so Henry's delivery switched to a brusque, business-like tone, which in the performance recorded on the archive video got a substantial laugh from the audience.

Henry's quirky presence had cued the audience from the beginning of the play to expect an essentially comic performance, though in this case, the irreverence of the moment described above was startling. RSC performance tradition, evident in productions by Buzz Goodbody (1970), John Barton (1974) and Deborah Warner (1988), has been to take a generally satirical approach to the play (see Taylor, M., 2012, pp. 136-142), so in one respect this was nothing new. It is striking, though, when seen as one of a sequence of similar sequences across Doran's complete body of work, to see the rituals of Catholicism satirised in this way.

If we now move forwards to 2014, *Henry IV Part I* opens with King Henry, played by Jasper Britton, prostrated on the floor in prayer, asking forgiveness for his usurpation. A mass is sung, incense is heavy in the air, and the lighting evokes a cathedral. Again, as with *King John*, the scene is interpolated, but in this case the playing of it is without humour. This time, though, the scale of the RST lent it a depth of grandeur and ceremony, which is denied by the Swan. It was a powerful and immersive experience to watch.

I have described Doran's Catholic upbringing in Chapter one of this thesis, and it is important to remember that he now identifies himself as a non-believer. It is striking to note, however, how often the rituals and aesthetics of the high church are evident in his work. Even when the religion portrayed is not Christian, the signifiers often are. For instance, in *Sejanus* (2005), staged in the Swan, the ritual offering in 5.3 to Fortune may be Roman in origin, but the investment in ritual seems to signify Catholicism. Laden with signifiers such as candles, incense and choral music, the scene is a typically Doranian creation. Of course, plays from this era routinely feature scenes of religious ritual, but what is striking in Doran's work is the commitment to them. Whereas he may shy away from *actual* manifestation of the supernatural, his investment in the vestments of religion and their portrayal onstage is total. In a space such as the Swan Theatre, where those rituals can be

situated downstage amongst the audience in a warm, embracing space (designed by a church architect), it is not surprising that such scenes are often a focal point of Doran's productions.

Locating Catholicism in Shakespeare is not uncommon, and Alison Shell describes how

...several overtly religious readings of Shakespeare have taken the allegorical path: from G. Wilson Knight, arraigned by fellow Shakespeareans for seeing Christ-figures everywhere, to Clare Asquith's recent *Shadowplay*, which sees Shakespeare's writing as encoding Catholic rebellion within Protestant England.

(Shell, 2005, p. 3)

Doran identifies strongly with Shakespeare, who he has flippantly suggested was Catholic and gay (see Doran, 2005). This does not mean, however, that Doran has an overtly Catholic agenda in his work in the sense that Asquith and others attribute to Shakespeare. He has expressed a perhaps stronger identification with Shakespeare's sometime co-writer, John Fletcher, who was Protestant and gay. He does believe, however, that religion, and the rituals of religion, are a powerful element within the plays that he directs:

I think there is something in the, not necessarily the spirituality but in what place the pageantry of religion plays but also to some extent... how deep what was for Shakespeare the Old religion... that it wasn't just about decoration it was about a human investment in the process of worship whether that was because your grandfather paid for the stained glass windows or your mother had stitched the cushions... There was an investment in the trappings of religion which was not so much about the religion but about the communal sense of worship and togetherness and faith and a desire to articulate the unknowable. I think it's there in Shakespeare, I think it's there in the *Winter's Tale* profoundly.

(Doran, 2014)

For Doran, he justifies foregrounding these elements as embedded in the Shakespearean texts, and he is drawing out the religious imagery he sees within them into theatrical set pieces. I am still struck by the investment in them, though, and by how they often dominate his productions. It suggests that the rituals of Doran's youth hold a powerful resonance for him, which is consequently played out in his aesthetic, a point he concedes:

What I reach for when I'm trying to heighten that, or fix that in people's minds in quite a simple way, I reach for something that I recognise in my own background.

(Doran, 2014)

There is a sense that he is, in essence, cannibalising both his own background and the text for images and motifs that resonate for him, and, he hopes, for his audience. In this, as Shell argues, he could point to a similar tension in Shakespeare's writing:

... where religion and aesthetics start pulling apart is where a creative artist, without necessarily forswearing religious matter, sees religion not as something that artistic endeavour should serve, but as raw material like anything else.

(Shell, 2005, p. 19)

For Doran, his childhood Catholicism, divorced from spiritual belief, has become 'raw material' that informs his aesthetic, manifesting as the rituals and tropes of the 'old religion' in his work. In this sense, he is less drawing out religious meanings and a sense of ritual from the Shakespearean work, than he is authoring a Doranian performance.

It is not just religious sequences, however, but secular rituals such as music, song and dance that are often placed at the centre of Doran's theatrical productions. I have already described the musical set piece that was so effectively staged during *All's Well That Ends Well*, and have highlighted the bawdy invasion of Wolsey's chambers by the King and his followers in *Henry VIII*. *Winter's Tale* similarly presented a substantial piece of lively choreography for the sheep-shearing at 4.4. Here the dance was also an act of community and ritual, although it shared elements of courtship with *All's Well* and elements of bawdy with *Henry VIII*. (In common with the Tudor king, the male dancers in *Winter's Tale* sported prosthetic phalluses with which to chase their amorous targets.). From the bergomask in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to the sheep shearing of *Winter's Tale*, these are often acts of community and celebration, as well as courtship. I will shortly be examining Doran's 2003 production of *The Tamer Tamed*, which exemplifies a musical set piece of this nature, but in the meantime it is also worth commenting that, for Doran, sometimes he considers the impetus as purely theatrical: 'They are sometimes your money shot' (Doran, 2014).

Sexuality and destabilising the masculine

There has generally not been a concerted critical attempt to link Doran's status as a high profile gay man to an overtly 'Queer Theatre' aesthetic, perhaps unsurprisingly. It is not a term that the director has ever used to describe his work, and despite its unstable usage, if we look to Clum's definition, below, it is clear that Doran's rhetoric and practice are located in very different territory.

While 'gay' signifies a male who openly declares his desire for someone of his own sex, 'queer' has more complex, more politically charged connotations, a revelling in difference, a belief in performativity, a celebration of marginality

(Clum, cited in Carlsen, 2008, p. 14)

Doran's establishment position is not marginal in any sense, and he views Shakespeare through a lens of liberal humanist values where identity is innate rather than performed. However, as I have already suggested, Doran's sexuality is an important part of his identity; in that sense, he is a visible, gay director rather than a 'Queer' one. In a similar way to the role that his religious background informs his aesthetic I will now consider the ways in which his work is informed both aesthetically and politically by his status as a gay man.

When preparing for *Timon of Athens* (1999), Doran

...detected a very homosexual element in the play. This seemed to me to clearly reflect Jacobean society and the scandals of James, as a clearly homosexual man...

(Doran in Sewell, Sharpe & Wright, 2011, p. 263)

The production was suffused in the first half with a decadent sexuality, aided by Duke Ellington's atmospheric yet sleazy score and the opulent yet eclectic historical mishmash of costumes. The set piece which was to define the aesthetic of this early part of the production was the masque in 1.2. Here, as Timon and his entourage watched on, Cupid and a group of Amazons were flown in and then proceeded to perform an eroticised, sensual dance, which members of the court joined in. It quickly became apparent, however, that this was a drag act and that the entertainment was a performance of eroticised female gender rather than of biological sex. As the scene developed, it grew violent, and one of the unnamed guests amorously propositioned an Amazon, who rebuffed his advances. This led to violence, and an attack (and presumably the death) of the dancer, which brought a swift end to the proceedings. This made a series of connections, between violence, decadence, transvestism, camp and homosexuality that I found troubling, configuring, as it did, gay

and trans identities as eroticised ‘others’, temperamental and prone to loss of control. Gender and homosexuality were being very explicitly ‘performed’ here, but with potentially disturbing meanings, a decision that Doran justified by historicising it with reference to James I’s court.

The Amazon’s assailant was later revealed to be the friend of Alcibiades that was under sentence of death for the murder in 3.6. He is therefore the person that Alcibiades defends, resulting in his (Alcibiades’) banishment (3.6.105). In doing so, therefore, Alcibiades is not necessarily protesting an injustice, but rather protecting the decadence and privilege of an elite to behave as they choose.

Although many of the reviews were generally flattering towards the production, often making allowances for Alan Bates’ late withdrawal from the role of Timon due to illness (he was replaced by Michael Pennington), it is possible to detect homophobia in some of the critical responses.

Georgina Brown described how

Doran’s dancing girls (boys, naturally) twizzle down from the rafters in leopard print tutus and saucy bodices.

(Brown, G., 1999b)

Similarly, Patrick Carnegy made the following comment:

Here, as you might expect in a Doran production, the masque of Ladies as Amazons’ is one of handsome young warriors in drag armour, if you can imagine such a thing.

(Carnegy, 1999)

Nick Curtis was somewhat harsher:

Among these prancing twerps Pennington’s Timon looks uncannily like the Marquis of Bath: an indulgent hippie, unsurprised when one of his guests brings in a troupe of male ‘Amazons’ for a quick lap dance.

(Curtis, 1999b)

Apart from the clear distaste for the production (which the production potentially, if presumably inadvertently, invited in its association of homosexuality and transvestitism with decadence), the first two critics in particular appear to suggest a gay agenda on Doran’s part, and that an aesthetic such as this is par for the course in his work. Considering most of Doran’s high profile work at that time had not exhibited a similar aesthetic, the critics appear to be conflating Doran’s public identity as a gay man with his aesthetic as a theatre director. The one visible signifier, up to this point, of an interest in exploring homosexuality in his directing at the RSC had been a fairly subtle sexualisation of the relationship between Antonio and Bassanio in *The Merchant of Venice*. There

was nothing camp about this, however, and portraying the relationship between them as essentially a gay one has, in any case, become a common trope in productions of that particular play. It is noticeable, however, a short scene in *Sejanus* apart,¹⁵⁶ such visible representations of homosexuality, whether positive or negative, have been relatively absent from Doran's work ever since.

That is not to say, however, that Doran is not enormously interested in exploring both homosocial and homosexual relationships that he perceives in the plays that he directs. In fact, I consider such relationships to be some of the most vividly realised and sensitively portrayed throughout his body of work.

For instance, as well as Antonio and Bassanio in *Merchant*, there was an undeniable homoerotic subtext to William Houston and Trevor White's portrayal of the Coriolanus/Aufidius relationship in 2007's *Coriolanus*. Brutus and Cassius in *Julius Caesar*, similarly, had a sexually ambivalent relationship which strongly underpinned their memorable duologue at 4.3:

I think Cassius and Brutus is a case in point, the tent scene one of the greatest scenes in literature is a love story, it's so fiercely and intensely cruelly often played out. It's because they feel so deeply for each other... I'm not remotely saying that Shakespeare is saying that they are having a gay relationship or that either of them are gay although I think there'd be a strong argument Shakespeare thinking for Cassius being gay, as in Antonio and Bassanio or Antonio in *Twelfth Night* and Sebastian.

(Doran, 2014)

What is observable about all such relationships in Doran's work, which were universally portrayed with sincerity and intelligence, is that once more Doran draws on a literary authority in justifying them. As such, he is assimilating them into 'Shakespeare' rather than positioning them as a radical act of resistance or subversion towards the play. Doran's agenda is not to challenge conventional Shakespearean narratives, but rather to site them as a part of the full spectrum of life portrayed in Shakespeare's plays. In doing so, he is arguably absorbing gay identities into the cultural mainstream rather than taking a more oppositionist stance.

¹⁵⁶ At the beginning of 2.2, *Sejanus* (William Houston) delivered his opening soliloquy whilst mounted on top of the servant Lygdos in sexual congress, only ejaculating on the second to last line of the speech. The scene names the company devised for the production punned on this, titling the scene 'Comings and Goings'.

In *Richard II* (2013), Doran placed the Aumerle/Richard relationship at the centre of the production. In Oliver Rix's understated and slightly nervy performance, Aumerle was an ambiguous figure who shifted loyalties throughout the production. It enabled him to become a figure on whom, as an audience member, I was able to project my own shifting responses to David Tennant's Richard. Controversially, the production climaxed with Aumerle's substitution for Exton as Richard's assassin, but earlier their relationship had encompassed a remarkable moment of tender homoeroticism prior to Richard's abdication.

The build up to this moment began in 3.3, at line 121, as Richard gave his reply to Northumberland's entreaties. Standing beside Aumerle on the bridge above the stage, bearing orb and sceptre, Richard whispered his words one line at a time to Aumerle (121- 124) rather than speaking the lines directly to those on the main stage. Aumerle then repeated them to Northumberland, before adding the final couplet of the speech at his own behest:

With all the gracious utterance thou hast,
Speak to his gentle hearing kind commends.
(3.3.125-26)

This last plea, from Aumerle, betrayed a personal investment on behalf of Richard that we had not previously seen. As Richard began to talk of deposition, and death, Aumerle broke down, crying on line 154 and sitting on the bridge. Richard came to sit beside him, stroking his hair as Aumerle sobbed. At 'I talk but idly, and you mock at me' (171),¹⁵⁷ Aumerle turned round, bristling at the idea, and the two made eye contact. After a few seconds, Richard leaned in and gave Aumerle a long and tender kiss on the mouth. This then hung heavy in the air, neither man appearing to know what to do next. Eventually Richard picked up the crown and tried to place it on Aumerle's head, prompting more sobs, before standing up and waiting for Northumberland's return. This action took place in an extended pause between lines 172 and 173, in complete silence, apart from Aumerle crying, in a pause lasting one minute twenty three seconds on the commercially available video recording of the production.

¹⁵⁷ The production used the Folio's reading of 'mock' rather than the 1597 Quarto's 'laugh'.

Tennant's Richard, with his long blonde hair extensions, already presented a Christ-like figure. In retrospect, knowing that Aumerle was to be Richard's assassin, this was surely a 'Judas kiss', though in performance, even those of us familiar with the arc of the narrative would not have been aware that Aumerle would prove a killer. Even without foreknowledge of Doran's invention, it *was* possible to detect in Aumerle not so much grief at Richard's impending downfall, but his realisation that he would have to distance himself from his king at some point, and possibly betray him.

The kiss was a moment that emerged in rehearsals, without Doran's prompting, but it was one that he had prepared the ground for:

We had not discussed the kiss, when the kiss happened in rehearsal, and it just seemed absolutely right for that moment. I don't think Aumerle is gay. Richard I think is very confused about what his sexuality is...

(Doran, 2014)

For Doran, the kiss aligned with his schema for the rest of the play, which was that the relationship between Aumerle and Richard should be the 'shadow of a love story', which ended with Aumerle betraying the king.

It also demonstrates how, for Doran, sexuality in Shakespeare is unstable rather than fixed. As such, he is keen to exploit this instability as fertile ground for theatrical exploration, while characterising it as completely within the spectrum of everyday behaviour:

I don't think it's a political statement on my behalf but I think it's a reassertion of something that seems to be to just be there. I hate productions of *Merchant of Venice* that ignore Antonio and Bassanio's relationship. It seems to me be wanton and insulting to say 'oh when he talks about love he doesn't mean love he's being entirely platonic'. Of course there was, there were just gay men. The bollocks that's talked about homosexual relationships as if somehow it was all very different then, the urges underneath it all was the same.

(Doran, 2014)

Doran's passion here tells us that there *is* a political agenda, to situate gay relationships within the mainstream dominant culture, one he feels deeply, though he argues it in a universalising way that rhetorically distances the director from such a project.

I now wish to briefly discuss Doran's broader portrayal of male homosociality, and to do this I will return to *The Island Princess*.¹⁵⁸ This production was notable for the character of its onstage male relationships, which deftly combined warlike machismo with heartfelt mutual appreciation. The gentleness and straightforward loyalty on display here, and the platonic love it suggested, offered an engaging contrast with the hard-edged fickleness demonstrated by the main female protagonists. Onstage chemistry was therefore as much between the characters of Armusia and the King of Tidore, and between Ruy Dias and Pinheiro, as it was in the heterosocial relationships depicted elsewhere in the play. The camaraderie and banter depicted between groups of male friends such as the Portuguese settlers did not conform to the familiar masculine trope that configures such dialogue as a substitute for significant emotional engagement, but rather it became a signifier of meaningful and mutual affection. Thus, even as Armusia's supporters gave an appreciative roar at his line 'The women, which I wonder at' (1.3.34), the impression was less of a collective, lustful, male gaze, there being no women present, and more the mutuality of their affections for each other. Similarly, there was an openness and sincerity to the various masculine partnerships that emerged throughout the course of the play, built as they were on trust, mutual respect and a warmth that manifested itself without irony. In such a world it was perhaps easier to understand the King's instinctive acceptance of the disguised Governor as something other than gullibility.

In this production, and elsewhere in Doran's work, there often appears to be an attribution of what might stereotypically be characterised as feminine attributes (gentleness, sincerity, openness) to platonic male relationships. Thus, gender roles become destabilised and sexual identification is fluid. As with Richard and Aumerle's kiss in *Richard II*, this is less because of a clear sexual identification as gay, more as an extension of a deep and emotional need at that moment for each other. Of course, Doran has located in Shakespeare's work a series of deep and affecting male friendships, and gender instability is also a wider structural feature of Elizabethan and Jacobean drama, with boys playing girls and girl characters frequently dressed as boys.¹⁵⁹ Moreover, Doran

¹⁵⁸ Act, scene and line numbers are taken here from the Arden Early Modern Drama edition of the play (Fletcher & McManus, 2013)

¹⁵⁹ A number of contemporary companies have explored male sexuality and masculine beauty through Shakespearean stagings using all-male casts, an approach that Doran has eschewed so far. The most notable example of this in relatively recent times was probably the Cheek by Jowl *As You Like It* (1991), a production

has positioned Fletcher, the writer of *The Island Princess*, as a gay writer with whom he clearly identifies, writing whilst directing another Fletcher play, *The Tamer Tamed*:

Perhaps I see in his perspective on male-female relationships and bully-boy chauvinism in *The Tamer Tamed*, for example, an outsider's objectivity, which I assign to his sexuality because I am myself gay. Perhaps I want to counter what Katherine Duncan-Jones, writing about Shakespeare's sonnets, describes as "a determination to heterosexualise". I wonder: if I do claim Fletcher's place among the pantheon of writers who share my sexuality, will it alter the audience's perception of his work one jot?

(Doran, 2003)

Here, Doran is considering a more threatening manifestation of masculine behaviour in Fletcher's *Shrew* sequel,¹⁶⁰ but it is clear that Doran not only identifies himself as a gay artist, but feels a sense of kinship with the (probably) gay Fletcher.¹⁶¹ It is perhaps unsurprising therefore that homosocial and sometimes homosexual relationships are foregrounded in Doran's work, particular when he is directing a play by Fletcher. The director appears to embrace the sexual fluidity he sees encoded in the text by treating mutual homosocial affection with total sincerity:

I can't not see the potential larger view of sexuality in the plays which I think tends to get resisted or made into a cliché.

(Doran, 2014)

Sexual identification is not just destabilised, therefore, but a construct of secondary importance to the depth of the relationship being portrayed. In the case of *The Island Princess*, the friendships between the various male protagonists are portrayed as sincere, heartfelt and grounded in unaffected love for each other, a characterisation of friendship that is as distant from usual contemporary portrayals of masculinity as it is reminiscent of classical platonic ideals.

Doran's positioning of his directorial concerns as meanings that are encoded in the text, which resonate because they are universal, has led to this element of Doran's work being largely overlooked by critics. However, Doran's complex religious and sexual identity undoubtedly manifests itself in his aesthetic in many ways, both through tender and sincere male to male relationships, the destabilisation of sexual identity that accompanies them; and the clear attachment

which exploited the playfully erotic potential of both play and casting to the full without ever resorting to camp.

¹⁶⁰ See Chapter Six for an account of this.

¹⁶¹ Doran explained his reasoning for his assumption about Fletcher's sexuality in an article for the Guardian to accompany the production (Doran, 2003). It appears to have been based on the playwright's relationship with Francis Beaumont (they shared a house as well as a writing partnership), as well as Fletcher being buried in the same tomb as Philip Massinger.

to the rituals and tropes of Catholic worship. In that respect, they are authorial interventions on the part of Doran, decoding often implicit, suggested motifs in the text into something more visible in performance. There is a wider sincerity to the people and societies that he portrays onstage, though, an investment not just in the rituals of *communion*, but in *community*. His project, as articulated in his remark about Fletcher, above, is to reposition being gay within that community, not as an act of containment, but rather by creating a dominant cultural space, through the works of Shakespeare, in which different identities can co-exist unproblematically. In this, he appears to align with Chedgzoy, who suggests that

If Shakespeare comes nearer than any other English playwright to satisfying all the competing demands and desires to which the theatre is subject, it is surely not because his works succeed in reconciling or obliterating these differences, but because they offer a cultural space where conflicting desires – aesthetic, social and erotic – can be staged, explored and transformed through the medium of art.

(Chedgzoy, 1995, p. 2-3)

Chedgzoy is describing the appropriation of Shakespeare by a marginalised group. Doran's status is very different, but through his own assimilation into the dominant culture he arguably has the agency to affect a transformative shift in that dominant culture and the way in which it configures male sexuality.

Shakespeare's contemporaries and the Swan Theatre

This chapter has explored the way in which Doran works with designers, negotiates different theatrical spaces and traditions, explores race and sexuality onstage, and the elements of Doran's aesthetic that I have argued are signifiers of the director's authorial voice. I will close this section by examining a phenomenon which Doran has also been largely responsible for at Stratford, a substantial expansion in the programming of plays written by Shakespeare's contemporaries, an act of reclamation which I consider to be an act of 'authorship' at least as significant as any individual production he may have directed.

When the Swan Theatre opened, the Artistic Director at the time, Trevor Nunn, proclaimed it as a place 'where we're going to do the plays that influenced Shakespeare and the plays Shakespeare influenced' (Nunn, 1989, p. 7), a phrase which Nunn subsequently titled 'journalistic' and one that makes him 'shudder a little now'. Its stated purpose therefore was not for the performance of Shakespeare, but for plays written by Shakespeare's contemporaries.

As Adler describes, though, after initial successes with revivals of plays by Tourneur, Jonson and Marlowe as well as a season of Restoration plays, the Swan quickly became subject to commercial and artistic pressures to stray from its brief:

...gradually and inevitably, the lure of working in this theatre was so great that directors could not resist staging Chekhov, T.S. Eliot, Goethe, and Shakespeare himself in the Swan. The artistic directorate has acknowledged that rigid programmatic guidelines often prevent the flexibility necessary for accommodating a large number of artists producing works in a variety of genres, so the Swan's initial mission has evolved to embrace a broader range of plays.

(Adler, 2001, p. 15)

Increasing disenchantment by directors with the main stage and the seductive lure of the Swan meant that many of the company's greatest successes in Shakespearean production over subsequent years were in the Swan, several of them directed by Doran. Nunn's successor at the helm of the RSC, Terry Hands, was to actively encourage this migration of Shakespeare from the main stage for artistic rather than financial reasons, concluding after three seasons of performances in the new theatre that

In the Swan the public is too powerful, too present to be ignored. It demands participation. The actors can do anything except for one minute forget that they are actors performing to and for an audience. It is this realism, this honesty, which makes the Swan such a thrilling theatre. You can't just talk to the air in the Swan, it is full of people; nor *at* the audience, it must be *to* them. At every turn there are faces and their concentration is invasive. Which makes it a perfect home for Shakespeare.

(Hands, 1989, p. 159)

By the time Doran succeeded to the artistic directorship the theatre's programming had drifted so far from its original brief that Doran felt it necessary not only to restate the centrality of the Jacobean non-Shakespearean repertoire to the Swan's purpose, but also to suggest that there wouldn't be any Shakespeare staged there at all for the foreseeable future. In an echo of Nunn's 'journalistic' phrasing, Doran stated shortly after taking charge of the company:

The Swan will be dedicated largely to looking at the stable of writers who worked alongside Shakespeare; to the plays which inspired him and which he inspired; and to writing which matches his scale and ambition, providing a deeper context to the genius of our house playwright.

(Doran, 2013a, p. 1)

In doing so Doran was both reclaiming the space for its original purpose and cementing his status as a guarantor of RSC tradition. The fact that the RST had in recent years been remodelled to resemble, in some ways, a larger version of the Swan, enabling thrust stage Shakespeare to be performed in the main house, made this less of an artistic wrench than it might otherwise have been, but it still released the smaller space to concentrate on an alternative repertoire, that of Shakespeare's contemporaries.

Doran's first production from this repertoire at the RSC to be directed in the Swan was *The Island Princess*, which has featured already throughout this chapter. This was staged as part of a season of five plays in 2002, which he dubbed 'The Jacobethans', reflecting their mixed Elizabethan and Jacobean heritage. The other plays produced as part of the season were *The Roman Actor* by Philip Massinger, the apocryphal *Edward III*, *The Malcontent* by John Marston, and *Eastward Ho* by Ben Jonson, John Marston and George Chapman. Although Doran only directed the Fletcher play, as the producer of the season he was awarded an Olivier Award for 'Outstanding Achievement in Theatre'.

This was the first time that Doran had taken on the role of producer within the company, and had therefore shouldered responsibility for productions directed by practitioners other than himself. As such, it not only provided an early assessment of his ability to programme a season which is both cohesive and distinctive, but also gave an early preview of what a Doran artistic directorship might look like one day, and suggested that the latter might champion a similar range of texts. By linking the plays under a common title Doran invited them to be viewed intertextually, and the critical reception for *The Island Princess* should be viewed accordingly; a fairly straightforward production of a relatively minor play was given significant critical praise, as much because of its context as part of a wider season as for its individual merits. The ‘Jacobethan’ season was a project whose very existence was deemed a cause of critical celebration, a consideration which reflected substantial glory on the five productions that made up the season, as well as on Doran himself.

In 2005 Doran was granted the opportunity to repeat the experiment, this time with explicitly political intent.¹⁶² The plays produced, under the banner of ‘Gunpowder’, comprised four neglected Jacobean plays and a new play by Frank McGuinness, *Speaking Like Magpies*, about the 1605 Gunpowder Plot. The publicity image for *Sejanus*, which Doran directed himself, was an image of a falling statue designed to recall the toppling of Saddam Hussein’s statue following the 2003 Gulf War. If *Sejanus: His Fall* by Ben Jonson is a brutal expose of Machiavellian power politics, then *Believe as you List* by Philip Massinger covered imperialism, *A New Way to Please You* by Thomas Middleton and William Rowley, euthanasia, and *Sir Thomas More* by Chettle, Dekker *et al*, touched on immigration and civil unrest. Again, by linking the plays and branding them in this way, Doran created a context within which to view the plays; intertextually and through the lens of contemporary geopolitics

Doran’s *Sejanus* was staged in historically specific Roman dress and was highly acclaimed. In part, this was because the play had been performed so rarely, with Doran’s being the first major production in 400 years (though William Poel directed it in 1928 in a Sunday evening performance

¹⁶² I was unsuccessfully interviewed by three of the directors, including Doran, for an assistant director position on the ‘Gunpowder’ season, and in all three cases the desire to seek contemporary political parallels in the plays being staged was made explicit.

at the Holborn Empire (see Ayres, 1990, pp. 38-40)). Martin Butler, an advisor on the production, commented that

Sejanus has often been felt to be too scholarly for the stage, and it has scarcely ever been acted.

(Butler, 2005)

Doran's achievement was not only to stage it, but to render it theatrically exciting. Michael Dobson spoke for many when he described it as a 'superb production of Jonson's *Sejanus*, a play many of us thought we'd never see, let alone enjoy' (Dobson, in Doran, 2013b).

In a recent article for *Shakespeare Survey*, Margaret Shewring suggests that

The plays of Shakespeare's contemporaries, or near contemporaries, have formed the backbone of the repertoire at the Swan. Each has extended knowledge of the performance climate in which Shakespeare was writing as well as encouraging the audience to view Shakespeare's plays in a rich and sometime, directly comparative context.

(Shewring, 2012, p. 416)

A study of the *actual* repertoire in the theatre since its creation, as compiled by Shewring (pp. 423-428), reveals a more nuanced picture, however. In the decade from the Swan Theatre's opening in 1986 through to and including 1996 the Swan staged some eighteen plays from the Elizabethan, Jacobean and Caroline periods that were non-Shakespearean. Between 1997 and 2007, a similar length of time, this number fell to fourteen, if I include the plays *Sir Thomas More* and *Edward III*, to which Shakespeare is thought to have contributed. This represented a clear decline in numbers, with some years featuring no plays at all from this period. Of those fourteen, Doran's 'Jacobethan' season in 2002 contained five plays, and the similarly themed 'Gunpowder' season of 2005, likewise programmed by Doran, featured a further four. If we also include the Doran-directed *The Tamer Tamed* by John Fletcher (2003), then this means that, of those fourteen, ten productions were either directed by Doran or staged in discrete seasons programmed by Doran, many of them under conditions where they were denied the full resources of the company they might have expected. The Swan during this time did also feature a number of Spanish Golden Age plays and Restoration comedies; so it was not completely colonised by Shakespeare and other, later playwrights, but even so this is a dramatic slippage from Nunn's original intentions for the space. A shift in recent years since the theatre re-opened in 2010 has seen productions of *The City Madam* (2011), *A Mad World My Masters* (2013) and Doran's own reconstruction of Shakespeare and

Fletcher's lost play *Cardenio* (2011), but it wasn't until Doran gained full responsibility for programming upon attaining the artistic directorship that the company restored this repertoire to its original position at the centre of the Swan's artistic mission. In 2014 alone, the space featured productions of *The Roaring Girl*, *Arden of Faversham*, *The White Devil*, *The Shoemaker's Holiday* and *The Witch of Edmonton*. This is more than were staged in the entire period between the 2005 'Gunpowder' Season and 2014, a marked contrast, even if we allow for the space being closed for refurbishment for nearly three years of that time. If I characterise this as an improvement it no doubt betrays my own theatrical preferences, but it also is a development that chimes both with the stated purpose of the Swan Theatre as well as a wider perception of what the RSC is *for*. It remains to be seen whether commercial pressures will ultimately frustrate this new sense of purpose, but it is indisputable that Doran is mounting an aggressive challenge to the commercial imperatives and artistic priorities that have dictated programming choices in the space in recent years. Paradoxically, it is in an act of theatrical conservation, or conservatism, that Doran is at his most radical.

Doran's aesthetic can be broadly separated into two divergent, but linked elements. Firstly there is his craft. This is broadly realist and directly linked to his rehearsal process. His understanding of 'character', and the ways in which he works with actors, encourages a reading of each role that is detailed and precise, offering a psychologically realistic iteration of each role. In the Swan theatre, the dynamics of that space have tended to result in a more open and theatrical relationship with the audience than in the RST prior to refurbishment, though this is not consistently the case. The acting ensembles, however, show a clear sense of the storytelling priorities of the performance, and intended meanings are made specific and clear, especially in moments when traces of Doran's 'crossroads' technique are evident. In doing so, it means that Doran's theatrical language sometimes becomes more cinematic than theatrical in the way that he directs audience focus towards the stage, a trend that is reflected in the way he articulates his aesthetic. Doran's craft is also contingent on performance tradition, an engagement that is enthusiastic but not uncritical, and

his negotiations with the conventions of 'traditional' Shakespeare and the RSC's performance space are often playful, complex and self-referential.

If Doran's craft is the foundation for much of his success, then his more authorial contribution rests in his projection of his own values and personality onto Shakespeare, and Shakespearean texts. His aesthetic visibly manifests signifiers of Catholicism and ritual, and he is engaged in a more political project to foreground homosocial, and sometimes homosexual, relationships in his work. He has also made a significant contribution to the repertoire through his curation of seasons of plays by Shakespeare's contemporaries, attempting to destabilise Shakespeare's dominant cultural position by valorising the work of his contemporaries, and claiming ownership for the director over the RSC's smaller theatre in the process. For Doran, the Swan Theatre is, after all, 'home'.

Chapter Six

The Taming of the Shrew/The Tamer Tamed: a case study

The Taming of the Shrew/The Tamer Tamed: a case study

I will close this thesis by presenting a case study of a linked pair of productions that Doran directed in repertoire in 2003: *The Taming of the Shrew* by Shakespeare in the RST and *The Tamer Tamed* by John Fletcher, in the Swan. The two-play season in many ways embodied many of the concerns and priorities that I have identified over the course of this thesis: a surprising and multifaceted interpretation of a popular Shakespearean play embedded in a ‘traditional’ period aesthetic; the championing of one of Shakespeare’s contemporaries, in this case, John Fletcher; the use of research and ‘crossroads’ in rehearsals to create credible and complex characterisations; and the use of music and dance as a focal point for the production (in the case of *Tamer Tamed*). As such, the two plays are an ideal subject with which to conclude this study.

The two productions shared casts, with the principal roles as follows: Jasper Britton played Petruchio in both productions; Rory Kinnear was Tranio, Eve Myles was Bianca and Nicholas Tennant played Grumio. Alexandra Gilbreath played Katherina in the Shakespeare play and reappeared as Petruchio’s new bride, Maria, in *The Tamer Tamed*. The lighting was designed by Wayne Dowdeswell, music was by Paul Englishby and movement direction was by Michael Ashcroft.

They also shared an aesthetic which drew on Elizabethan costumes, but presented a design framework, designed by Stephen Brimson Lewis, of multiple, movable doors that was not located specifically in any meaningful context other than a theatrical one. In the case of *Shrew*, this both suggested that play’s theatrical roots in commedia dell’arte and signposted that a farcical performance style was to follow, but for *Tamer* the open stage of the Swan permitted only a few doors in the upstage corners and therefore its main purpose appeared to be a mild allusion to the sister production. Aesthetically at least, *Shrew* was clearly the dominant partner of the two shows.

A programme note foregrounded *Shrew*'s status as a 'problem play' with two pages of comments and quotations on the subject. It included such hostile statements as Shaw's 1897 accusation, that it was '...altogether disgusting to modern sentiments' (Shaw, in *The Taming of the Shrew* programme, 2003), and Michael Billington's 1979 question, asking

...whether there is any reason to revive a play that seems totally offensive to our age and society.

(Billington, in *The Taming of the Shrew* programme, 2003)

Tackling *Shrew*'s controversial reputation in such an upfront manner immediately raised the question of the play's, and the production's, validity; why stage the play at all if it is so morally problematic? Doran sought to answer this question in two ways.

The first was by staging it in repertoire with a revival of John Fletcher's 1611 sequel *The Tamer Tamed*, in which Katherina, the 'Shrew' of Shakespeare's play, has died and been replaced as Petruchio's wife by the seemingly pliant Maria. The play turns the tables on the bullying braggart and has him subjected to an array of punishments until he is subjugated, and an epilogue can spell out the play's purpose:

To teach both sexes due equality
And as they stand bound to love equally

(Fletcher, 2003, p. 101)¹⁶³

By staging this obvious riposte to the perceived sexism of Shakespeare's play, Doran's production of *Shrew* would therefore gain critical space, without having to be obviously revisionist in its portrayal of Katherina and her 'taming'. In fact, although the staging of this rarely-performed play was generally applauded, Doran observed subsequently that he felt by the time they reached opening night, the need for an apologia for *Shrew* had been lifted:

However, in rehearsal, as so often happens, our opinion changed. We needed no antidote after all. *The Taming of the Shrew* emerged as a very different play from the one we expected. Possibly because we stopped approaching it as a problem play, and allowed it to speak for itself.

(Doran, in Bate & Wright, 2010, p. 150)

The reason for this was a simple discovery:

Doran's shrew is based on a radical proposition: that Petruchio is far madder than Kate.

(Billington, 2003)

¹⁶³ Page references for *The Tamer Tamed* are taken from the RSC edition of the play, published by Nick Hern books to coincide with the production.

Jasper Britton here recounts how he felt when he was first approached to play the role of Petruchio, initially thinking it was for *Shrew* only: ‘My first instinct was, oh my god, please no’ (Britton, 2013), but Doran persuaded him based on the following premise:

[Doran] didn’t want to do *The Taming of the Shrew*, he wanted to do the play that he thought was beneath the centuries of calcification that had clung to it.

(Britton, 2013)

Doran was thus once more invoking production history of a play that he was directing, but this time his response to that history was to disavow it.

Conventional contemporary production wisdom frames the action of the play in some way: by adopting a revisionist approach in which Katherina clearly subverts her ‘taming’, ironically distancing herself from her final speech of submission with a nod and a wink to the audience; by brutalising Kate into submission;¹⁶⁴ or by retaining the difficult and unsatisfying framing device that Shakespeare provides. In this incomplete prologue,¹⁶⁵ the action is contextualized as a play within a play, performed for (or dreamt by) the drunken lout, Christopher Sly.¹⁶⁶ Doran’s production rejected the first strategy and actor Alexandra Gilbreath gave us a Katherina that was certainly ‘shrewish’, if by such we mean bad-tempered, mean, spiteful and angry, so there was little irony there. The framing device was also cut, denying the production the ironic distance that might have tempered the sexual politics.

Instead, from the beginning, Jasper Britton’s Petruchio was portrayed as a broken man, desperate with grief and completely lacking in direction following the death of his father. He was damaged goods, an outcast and social misfit profoundly uneasy in his own skin. From a position of such low self-esteem it therefore became plausible for him to bond with Katherina, and she with him, in a partnership of equals, for they both appeared genuinely in need of each other.

¹⁶⁴ Edward Hall’s 2007 production for Propeller was a recent example of the latter.

¹⁶⁵ The contemporaneous play *Taming of a Shrew*, either the source text for Shakespeare’s or a derivative from it, does contain an epilogue which is sometimes used in productions of Shakespeare’s play that retain the framing device.

¹⁶⁶ For an excellent and detailed production history, see the Arden 3rd Series edition (Shakespeare & Hodgdon, 2010). The RSC edition (Shakespeare, Bate & Rasmussen, 2010) also gives details of a number of RSC productions which exemplify the interpretative trends I outline above.

Britton suggests that Doran saw the play as ‘a romance between two misfits, rather than a misogynistic piece’ (Britton, 2013), and locating this within the text would be central to their approach to the play. Doran therefore laid down a strict rule for Petruchio and Kate’s first meeting: ‘There shouldn’t be any violence’ (Britton, 2013). Thus the ‘woo-ing’ scene (2.1) never descended into slapstick or aggression, but rather led to a playful, flirtatious, even lustful, exchange of wits. When Petruchio suggestively referred to ‘my tongue in your tail’ (2.1.221), his obscene pun was met not with violence, but with laughter. After Kate slapped him (223), the one piece of aggressive physical contact between them in the scene, Petruchio made to exit, forcing Kate to run and block him on ‘no cock of mine’ (231). Moments later the lack of violent intent was made clear as Petruchio wrestled her playfully to the ground and tickled her feet (253). As the pair proceeded to roll around the floor together the physical attraction between them was tangible. This was not a scene of ‘taming’, but one of mutual flirtation in which Katherina had as much agency as Petruchio. Finally, at line 275, Petruchio’s declaration:

And, will you, nill you, I will marry you

was not an intimidating statement of intent, but a sudden moment of realisation, a ‘crossroads’.

This is one thing about Greg, he always talks about crossroads... It’s where there are options for the characters to choose... It works particularly well for this play because we were always doing that... ‘You know what, I’m going to marry you’. It wasn’t a bullying thing, or a forced thing, it was, ‘I want you’.

(Britton, 2013)

Earlier in this thesis, I detailed the rehearsal revelation that led the actors and directors to conclude that from the moment Baptista re-enters at line 279, the two characters begin a complicit, *performed* relationship in the presence of other characters. Petruchio put on a show of dominance for the returning father and his companions, and later in the play it was clear they both were both engaged in a role-playing deception at everyone else’s expense. Even Kate’s final speech where she admonished all who would not submit before their husband was a playful contest between the two, each one daring the other to push the charade to its absolute limit. This reached its apogee when Britton raised his foot for Gilbreath’s Kate to place her hand underneath it, which she willingly went to do, albeit with a wry look, until he stopped her and pulled her into an embrace. Interestingly, this last sequence was an accidental rehearsal discovery, which Doran seized upon:

Petruchio’s gesture with the foot came, I discovered, from a rehearsal in which Jasper Britton had momentarily blanked on the line “come on and kiss me, Kate” – after

remembering “come on” he couldn’t remember the rest, and so put out his foot. The look he got from Alexandra Gilbreath was enough to convince him that the moment was absolutely right, and it continued to play beautifully.

(Gilbert, 2005, p. 333)

It was a moment that I found provocative to watch, as it seemed to threaten all that the production had done to create an investment in the couple’s relationship, with an ill-judged attempt at subjugation. The action, however, moved swiftly on as Petruchio was revealed to be teasing Kate, and the performance finished in less challenging territory than was briefly hinted at.

The production was also on perhaps more problematic ground during the scenes set in Petruchio’s house, where Katherina is denied both sleep and food as a part of her ‘taming’. As Rhoda Koenig wrote in the *Independent*,

When the two brawlers are wed, however, and the comedy darkens, I’m afraid not all Doran’s artistry can take away the nasty taste of the taming.

(Koenig, 2003)

Whereas roles can be played for public consumption, in the confines of Petruchio’s house there is nothing to be gained by pretence, and it was here that the production sometimes struggled to offer justification for Petruchio’s appalling treatment of a woman whom the production had earlier suggested he was in love with. Doran and Britton’s answer lay in his drinking, his hero-worship of his father, and falconry. His wedding night soliloquy (3.3.180-203), which begins ‘Thus have I politicly begun my reign’ (180), is often performed as a boastful and swaggering declaration of intent. Here, by stressing the pronoun ‘my’ as Petruchio adjusted his father’s portrait, it was clear that he was determined to break free from his father’s shadow. However, by sitting beneath the portrait of his father as he delivered the speech, drinking throughout, his father still dominated the *mise en scène* and, therefore, Petruchio’s thoughts.

Before rehearsals began, Doran had asked Britton to read T. H. White’s account of falconry, *The Goshawk* (White, 1973), which detailed White’s attempts at falconry. Picking up on references to falconry in the 3.3 soliloquy, Britton and Doran decided that the methodology of bird-taming provided both a means and a justification for Petruchio’s behaviour. When he asks

He that knows better how to tame a shrew,
Now let him speak. ‘Tis charity to show

(3.3.202-03)

it is, therefore a genuine question; Petruchio, according to Britton, knows how to tame a falcon and therefore that is the way he will ‘tame’ Katherine; he knows no other way. Britton’s research led him to discover that:

The important thing about falconry is, is not that you starve the hawk or that you don’t let it go to sleep... you force it to go to sleep, but the only way you can do that is by staying awake yourself. When you starve the hawk, you have to starve yourself also... The hawk will trust you if it falls asleep and if you haven’t killed it, that’s how it trusts you.
(Britton, 2013)

Britton’s reasoning allowed him to invest emotionally in these troubling scenes with a clear conscience, his Petruchio never visibly eating during the time that Kate is denied food. Whereas this undoubtedly assisted Britton in the playing of it, however, it is not clear that Petruchio’s self-denial was noticeable in performance for the bulk of the audience.

The performance undoubtedly led many critics to re-evaluate their perception of the play. Michael Billington, who had previously considered the play beyond the pale, wrote:

In place of an offensive comedy about “curative” wife –taming, we see Kate trying to rescue a madman she genuinely loves.
(Billington, 2003)

In Billington’s view, it was not Katherine who needs ‘taming’, but Petruchio who needs help. Billington was not the only critic to re-appraise the play in the light of Doran’s production, but what is interesting here is that a new critical reading of the play emerged from a production that was in many ways very traditional.

Doran’s production is a lesson that freshness doesn’t demand novelty, much less eccentricity. This is, in appearance, a traditional production, of the type we’ve all suffered through – Elizabethan dress, Fifties artistic style, dark-brown set of free-standing doors. But instead of the stuffy ho-ho-ho’s that usually go with this territory we get the hilariously insecure swaggering of Jasper Britton, an adorable Petruchio.
(Koenig, 2003)

Other critics went further, and attempted to reconcile the ‘traditionalism’ of the *mise en scène* with the originality of the characterisation:

Doran’s production has dusted down this warhorse of a play and reveals it as a great, humane comedy, perceptive, generous-hearted and tough as steel.
(Peter, 2003)

What is brilliant about [Doran’s] *Taming of the Shrew* is that the play stays uncomfortable even whilst it excites.
(Macauley, 2003a)

This is the first entirely traditional *Shrew* I have seen, and the wonder is that it works.

Spencer's comment reveals some of the critical ambivalence about the production; even whilst delivering glowing reviews many critics were unable to fully reconcile their appreciation of the staging with the fact that it seemed so 'traditional'. My judgement was that Britton's assessment of Petruchio as an innocent, bumbling along, beset by woes, enabled the actor to play the role in a genuinely fresh and intelligent way. Working with Gilbreath, whose mischievous performance signposted her character's complicity throughout, it was possible to watch the production and feel that, in one sense, the play had been 'solved'. However, whatever the merits of this particular production it is worth commenting that the play still remains fundamentally problematic for a contemporary audience; Doran and his company simply managed to negate its more unpalatable aspects for this particular staging.

I will now turn my attention to *The Tamer Tamed*, and the way in which it interacted with *Shrew*'s metatheatricality, as well as manifesting a vibrant theatrical energy of its own, best exemplified through a raucous and celebratory piece of musical theatre at its centre.

The play continues the story of Petruchio following the death of his first wife, commencing with his imminent second marriage to another woman, Maria. The scene is then set for a surprising reversal, with Petruchio forced to endure a series of ordeals as his new wife seeks to 'tame' him.

Fletcher's text contains a number of new characters alongside some familiar ones, but in order to impose greater aesthetic and narrative cohesion between the two plays Doran altered some of the names in *Tamer* to conform to their Shakespearean counterpart, as he outlines in the Preface to the published version of his acting text:

I decided to co-ordinate the characters' names. For some reason Fletcher has retained the names of certain of Shakespeare's characters – Petruchio, obviously, Bianca and Tranio – but changed others, although their function remains the same. His trusty servant Grumio turns up as Jaques, with a sidekick called Pedro. In this production, however Grumio and Peter return as Petruchio's servants. The fumbling old suitor to the younger sister in *Tamer* is called Moroso: we have resurrected Gremio for another 'tilt at the ring'. And whereas Petruchio's best mate in *Tamer* is called Sophocles, in our production Hortensio returns to fulfil his former function.

(Doran, in Fletcher, 2003, p. xi)

Notable here is the sense that Doran characterises his alterations as correcting a misjudgement on Fletcher's part; he does not frame his altered text as an adaptation of Fletcher, however minor. In making these alterations he appears to be embracing the intertextuality that already exist between the two plays to create a performance text that is directly contingent on programming; just as the two plays speak to each other in extant form, so the two productions will communicate and inform each other metatextually in ways that will create additional meaning. At its most obvious this is illustrated by two extratextual moments in the Fletcher production: when Alexandra Gilbreath as Maria is considering whether to embrace Bianca's rhetoric of resistance against male subjugation she turns to the audience for the line 'Stay, shall I do it?' (Fletcher, 2003, p. 8). Her delivery, low-voiced and knowing, is clearly informed by both the actors' and the audience's knowledge of *Shrew*. This feminist rebellion, for Gilbreath at least, seemed an act of retribution for what happened in the earlier play, and for which she is seeking sanction from the audience. Later, in a semi-improvised riposte, Britton interrupts his soliloquy in 3.3 after the lines

Had I not wife enough
To turn my tools to? Did I want vexation,
Or any special care to kill my heart?
Had I not ev'ry morning a rare breakfast
Of ill language, and at dinner,
A diet of the same dish?

(Fletcher, 2003, p. 57)

Responding to the audience's laughter at his highly subjective recollection of the iniquities of his previous marriage, in mock outrage he asked, 'Have you seen the other play?', creating not just a moment of comedy, but also one where both metatheatrical and intertextual narratives synchronise beautifully for both actor and audience.¹⁶⁷ Both Gilbreath and Britton's interventions here appeared as actors as much as characters, referencing not just the characters' past lives (literally in the case of Petruchio, intertextually in the case of Maria), but the company's experience of performing and rehearsing the other play. The performers, through engaging with the difficulties of staging *Shrew*, have asserted the right to comment on that experience whilst performing *Tamer*.

¹⁶⁷ I have confirmed in interviews with both Britton and the assistant director Tom Wright that this 'ad-lib' was in fact incorporated into most performances, and therefore was not as spontaneous a moment as might have been assumed from a single viewing.

If I have noted that much of Doran's work is characterised by the sensitivity of its homosocial relationships, and its resistance to depicting male camaraderie as boorish, then, by contrast, *Tamer Tamed* was to embrace an assertively masculine stereotype wholeheartedly. At the commencement of 1.3, Petruccio, Petronius, Gremio, Tranio and Hortensio punctuated their rowdy entrance with a collective upstage urination into the drop at the back of the raised Swan stage, thus asserting their masculine dominance of the performance space as well as simultaneously referencing a potent signifier of the contemporary stag night.¹⁶⁸ Throughout this early part of the play male movement and body language were expansive and accompanied by raucous, rowdy but often inarticulate extemporisations, whilst female behaviour was polite rather than defiant. Even the act of taking sanctuary by the female characters in the USR tower used to represent Petronius' residence appeared initially to be a relinquishing of space to the dominant male. This, however, was reversed later in 1.3 when Petruccio and others were forced to negotiate from a downstage position, facing upstage to the now spatially dominant female protagonists occupying the first floor balcony of the tower. Even Petruccio's aggressively penetrative act of throwing a condom at the women situated above, at the line 'I come not to use violence' (Fletcher, 2003, p. 17), appeared a futile and impotent one. At 2.4 this reversal was reinforced further with a spectacular reclamation of the main theatrical space, as women from the town engaged in an uproarious musical number extrapolated from the brief song included in the Fletcher text (Fletcher, 2003, pp. 38-39), whose main refrain is 'When the women shall wear the breeches'. Employing an arrangement of fiddles and improvised instruments including pots and pans, this was a rousing anthem of rebellion which made little pretence of realistically arising through circumstance and improvisation, but instead relished its own theatricality. As such it recalled the masquers' invasion of Wolsey's gathering in *Henry VIII*, as well as a similar example of machismo and posturing that Doran had included in his 1997 RSC production of *Cyrano de Bergerac*, which characterised the collective male solidarity of the Gascony Cadets. In *Tamer*, though, the assertion of dominance was achieved not just by switching genders, but by subverting clichéd tropes of 'female-ness' as an alternative to merely co-opting masculine traits. Thus, domestic cookery instruments were appropriated not just as musical instruments but flourished with violent intent to indicate their martial potential. Likewise, song and

¹⁶⁸ According to Britton, this was his idea, which Doran insisted they implement.

dance, early modern signifiers of courtship and female accomplishment, became a joyous celebration of sisterhood. The set piece climaxed with the baiting of a bear, led into the circle and ‘tamed’ by the collection of women before being led off compliantly, a clear signal that no male, however powerful, could stand their ground in the face of such strong collective action. Petruchio’s reaction was to relinquish theatrical and narrative space, retreating ‘into smaller and smaller quarters – first the upper chamber and finally his coffin’ (Chetty, 2003).

The significance of this event as the centrepiece of the production was not lost on the critics, many of whom singled out its theatrical vibrancy and accomplishment as a piece of staging. For Patrick Carnegy in *The Spectator* it was ‘a magnificent stamping song and dance of female solidarity’ (Carnegy, 2003), whilst Charles Spencer will ‘never forget the sight of the monstrous regiment of women who rally to Maria’s cause, clog-dancing, singing and beating pots and pans as they look forward to the time “when the women shall wear the britches”’ (Spencer, 2003). For most reviewers, it was the highlight of the performance, and an element of the production that virtually all national critics commented upon.

Assistant director Tom Wright, when interviewed, referred to *Tamer*’s ‘slightly more wild energy that fitted the Swan’ (Wright, 2013), and, as I have argued above, the depth of the stage and verticality of the theatre were exploited by Doran to both political and humorous effect.¹⁶⁹ As the rebellious women emerged onto the forestage, they also became at least partially surrounded *by* the audience, an act of immersion that allowed the foot-stomping musical routine to achieve a level of communal response that the RST’s proscenium arch might have resisted. In this sense, it became a secular ritual of communitarianism which echoed the acts of festivity often found in Fletcher’s plays (or ‘carnival’ as Gordon McMullan would characterise them (McMullan, 1994)),¹⁷⁰ and was as celebratory and gleeful as it was aggressive.

¹⁶⁹ Though Wright thought the Swan the more suitable venue for *Tamer*, he suspected the decision to stage it there rather than alongside *Taming of the Shrew* in the RST was a purely financial one.

¹⁷⁰ McMullan also suggests that such events were cathartic rituals allowed by the state in order to contain them.

Fletcher's play appears to change focus following this scene, as the subplot plays out and Maria's rebellion diminishes in scale from an ideologically framed battle of the sexes to a personal war of attrition with Petruchio. Karen Kettnich, the dramaturg of a subsequent US production of *Tamer Tamed*, recounts:

We found the shift the play makes from "public" event to "private" internalized drama difficult to navigate, for as the supporting characters become excluded from the contest of wills", the audience – readers and viewers alike – are often excluded along with them.
(Kettnich, 2011, p. 362)

Based on my own viewing of the Doran production (complicated by the sound problems in the latter part of the play on the archive copy available), it appears that Doran's musical set piece did combine with this moment of structural change in the play, to create an inevitable loss of momentum in the second half.

The director appeared to understand the pivotal role this set piece would play in production from early in the conceptual stages of development. Wright describes how from early on the staging of the rebellion was central to the director's thinking.

Conceptually it was completely [Doran's], he had that planted as a very central moment from before rehearsals. We didn't ever talk about [whether it should feature], so that's an assumption.
(Wright, 2013)

However, although the scene's central focus was a part of the production's original planning, Doran negotiated consent amongst the acting company for the stylistic shift it would require to be realised effectively, by encouraging research into the contemporaneous phenomenon of Skimmington rides, which from Wright's description heavily influenced the eventual staging;

He introduced the idea of the Skimmington Ride very early on, there was a lot of emphasis on it in the research. This was an actual thing that happened, the entire town would come together to humiliate a man of they knew that he was being cuckolded by prancing around, dressing up in dresses, clanging pots and pans. We all enthusiastically got behind that... I remember that being present in rehearsal quite early, it wasn't like a late thing that appeared... I think the energy of that, the fact that we'd been working on it for so long, because what's great about the production is that there's this anarchic energy to it, a wildness and I think having the Skimmington Ride that rippled out and affected all of us to the extent that everything else is as mad as it is.
(Wright, 2013)

Doran engineered two things to happen here, which were, from my viewing, clearly borne out in performance. Firstly, the research created an investment by the company in the sequence, which meant they committed to the generic shift to musical theatre it demanded. Secondly, and perhaps

more importantly, the acting company, in particular the female members of that company, were allowed a cathartic, ritualistic act in which *Taming of the Shrew* was overtly rebelled against.¹⁷¹ The object of the rebellion appeared therefore not just to be Petruchio and his contemporaries in *Tamer*, but *The Taming of the Shrew* and all that it represents. If the act of staging *Shrew* for a contemporary company inevitably involves grappling with its troublesome sexual politics, then that same company were here invited to cast it to one side in an act of canonical rebellion. Thus the act of rebellion became inter-textual (*Tamer* rebels against *Shrew*), inter-performative (production of *Tamer* rebels against production of *Shrew*), inter-spatial (the more humble Swan Theatre rebels against the expensive, pictorial RST), meta-theatrical (Gilbreath rebels against Britton, and her own performance in *Shrew*), and inter-authorial (Fletcher rebels against Shakespeare). Given such a nexus of performative complications it is small wonder that it became such a powerful and widely remarked-upon theatrical moment. Furthermore, by enacting this ritual in such an aggressive reclamation of the Swan's thrust stage, the audience were invited to share in a moment which speculated not just towards greater sexual equality, but towards greater parity for Fletcher. As Gilbreath/Maria defied Britton/Petruchio, so at least for a moment Fletcher was allowed the status that Doran appears to intend for him: if not quite equal to Shakespeare, then at least no longer in his shadow.

As I have suggested, Doran's main artistic statement in *Tamer*, aside from the play's programming, was to place an act of rebellion at the heart of the production far beyond that specified in the text. Ironically the aesthetics of that rebellion were closer to the kind of musical theatre that might be found in the West End of London, probably directed by Doran's predecessor Trevor Nunn, than the piece of angry agitprop its politics would seem to suggest. If, as McMullan's historicist viewpoint implies, such acts were state-sanctioned acts of subversion that could then be contained, then Doran has contained the radicalism of the subject in the form of commercial theatre. That is not to detract from the moment's impact in performance, merely to relate that even when Doran is being politically provocative, his aesthetic instincts are unerringly mainstream. As Taylor and Daileader

¹⁷¹ There is an unacknowledged tension here, with *Tamer*'s 'rebellion' against *Shrew* not acknowledging the rehearsal developments that occurred during work on *Shrew*, which, to an extent, supposedly negated the need for such an act.

remark in their introduction to the Revels edition of the play, ‘Audience members exited humming the tune’. (Fletcher, Daileader & Taylor, 2006).

Doran’s productions of *Taming of the Shrew* and *The Tamer Tamed* began their theatrical life with the Fletcher play programmed as an apologia for the Shakespeare one. Through Doran’s rehearsal process, though, a more complex and rewarding version of the Shakespeare play was presented. Many productions have attempted to resolve the ‘problem’ of the ‘taming’ of Katherine, but few have attempted to rebalance the play quite so successfully by recalibrating the character of Petruchio, and by doing so, envisaging the relationship between the two principle characters as one of equals.

Conclusions

In spring 2013 Gregory Doran took up the position of Artistic Director at the Royal Shakespeare Company and, at the time of writing, he is now over one third of the way through a six year cycle of production. Whereas it is, therefore, too early to tell what his long term legacy will be, it is possible to observe how his artistic and institutional priorities are being expressed.

His clearest impact has been to redesignate the repertoire specialisms of the main theatrical spaces in Stratford. As he pledged on assuming leadership of the company, the Swan has, once more, become a site for plays by Shakespeare's contemporaries and other early modern playwrights. The 2016 programme features new productions of *The Alchemist* by Ben Jonson, *The Rover* by Aphra Behn, and *Doctor Faustus* by Christopher Marlowe, alongside a new play by Anders Lustgarten, *The Seven Acts of Mercy*; the 2014 and 2015 seasons featured a similar range of programming. The main house, the RST, has in turn become the only site for Stratfordian Shakespearean production, and is in the process of hosting each of Shakespeare's plays just once; placing lesser known works alongside more regularly performed ones. The only exception to this is the collaborative play, *The Two Noble Kinsmen* by Shakespeare and John Fletcher, which is to be performed in the Swan during 2016.

There has been a series of high profile actors performing in lead roles during his tenure to date, many of whom have not worked with the company for several years, including Michael Pennington, Jane Lapotaire, Jasper Britton, David Tennant and, later in 2016, David Threlfall and Simon Russell Beale. At the heart of Doran's own directorial output has been his personal and professional partnership with Antony Sher, who has performed Falstaff and Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman* for the director, and at the time of writing is shortly to begin rehearsals to play King Lear. However, it is the emergence of a series of directors new to the RSC, and in some case relatively early in their careers, that is one of the most interesting developments. After a period under Boyd where the programme was dominated by Boyd, David Farr, Nancy Meckler and Doran, 2013-2016 has seen a number of new directors being given prominent opportunities. As well as

returnees from previous regimes including Maria Aberg and Loveday Ingram, these include Blanche McIntyre, Melly Still, Jo Davies, Matthew Dunster, Justin Audibert, Polly Findlay, Angus Jackson and Simon Godwin. Alongside Doran's Deputy Artistic Director, Erica Whyman, it should be noted that a majority of these appointments are women, perhaps beginning to redress a historic gender imbalance at the company.

If I have suggested within this thesis that the RSC's status as a site of cultural production that reinforces dominant values has led to accusations of conservatism and even cultural imperialism from some, then it is also pleasing to see developing approaches to casting that seem to suggest, building on the progress of the Boyd era, a move towards a more diverse and representative acting company. I am mindful of a narrative that sees casting actors of colour in Shakespearean roles as 'firsts', which seems, to me, to potentially reinforce difference in a superficial way rather than embed diversity;

Narratives of minority actors in Shakespeare plays that focus on firsts (the first black actor to play Othello in the United States; the first black actor to play Othello at the National; the first black actor to play Henry VI at the RSC, and so on)...

(Burt, 2006, p. 169)

It is still, however, gratifying to see the black (and relatively unknown) actor Paapa Essiedu cast as Hamlet in a majority black cast on the main stage in Stratford during 2016.¹⁷² The actor Hugh Quarshie, having publicly sworn never to play Othello as he considered it a racist part (see Daileader, 2006, p. 217-18), has also, recently played the role at Stratford (2015), in a production which innovatively featured a black Iago. In both these decisions one is beginning to see the emergence of casting strategies that are more, in the phrase that Doran uses, 'colour-conscious' than 'colour blind'.

'...its colour-conscious casting... with Othello it was absolutely extraordinary to see the layers of prejudice.

(Doran, speaking on *Antony Sher and Greg Doran in conversation with Sue MacGregor*, 2015)

In Doran's own work, his aesthetic appears to have stabilised rather than developed; his renditions of the history plays have been identifiably expressive of his usual concerns and aesthetic, and I have discussed *Richard II* and *Henry IV* elsewhere in this thesis. The overall company aesthetic

¹⁷² This is not without pitfalls, as my analysis of *Julius Caesar* made clear.

has been eclectic, with no evidence as yet that there are common or binding approaches being applied to elements of performance which have particular institutional and Shakespearean resonance, such as verse-speaking. There has also been no attempt to legislate against productions that have a more conceptual relationship with the text; ‘The Roaring Girls’ 2014 season featured productions of *Arden of Faversham*, *The Roaring Girl* and *The White Devil* (directed by Findlay, Davies and Aberg respectively) that were notable in the interventionist strategies taken by the directors towards the various texts.

It is therefore in programming that Doran has been at his most radical, challenging received assumptions about the status of various plays within the repertoire and their viability for major production. He has, in doing so, broken a cycle which had seen a relatively small number of Shakespearean plays performed in the RST, and substantially enlarged the repertoire of early modern playwrights that are being actively produced.¹⁷³ With a developing new writing programme under Erica Whyman, and the imminent reopening of *The Other Place* (scheduled for 2016), the repertoire is, in my opinion, the most interesting it has been for a considerable length of time.

This thesis makes an argument that he is an important director of plays, however, as well as a successful artistic director, and is largely based on his career before 2013. I have articulated in this thesis reluctance by some scholarly performance critics to engage productively with Doran in the past, driven in part by a perception that he is a conservative reiterator of dominant performance traditions, and in part due to his long association with the Royal Shakespeare Company; he is, therefore, inextricably associated with its hegemonic status. I believe this to have led to a reductive perception of his work, which raises wider questions, to which I am making a contribution, as to how scholars notate, analyse and theorise the work of mainstream theatre directors working within established traditions, without simplistically assigning negative value judgments to their work.

¹⁷³ It is worth noting that Doran’s choices from this repertoire, *Love’s Sacrifice* (2015) apart, are mostly plays that have been staged before by the RSC, even if not for some time. There has been less of the kind of excavation of little known plays to date that marked the ‘Gunpowder’ or ‘Jacobethan’ seasons.

Doran articulates what it is that he does as a craft, a learned skill, gained by a lengthy apprenticeship. That craft has a vocabulary, and, drawing on his own experiences as an actor and a director, it is a vocabulary which conceptualises performance in terms of ‘character’, ‘journeys’ and interiority. Doran speaks this post-Stanislawskian vocabulary fluently, and in this he is not unusual amongst English theatre-makers, but it places him in markedly different territory from most recent Shakespeare performance theorists. Combined with his rhetorical identification with Shakespeare and his emphasis on universality and immanent meanings embedded in the text, this rhetoric serves to create a perception that his agenda is a conservative one.

A detailed look at his practice, or craft, however, has revealed the picture to be more nuanced. Alongside his supportive work on character with his actors, which embraces psychological realism, he employs a series of techniques designed to focus the cast as an ensemble on overarching storytelling priorities, and the collective production of specific and focussed meanings at a granular level. Although no rehearsal process is ever truly democratic, he clearly makes concerted efforts to facilitate work which is enabling and supportive to his actors, and encourages them to work holistically and collectively towards mutually agreed performance outcomes. His use of the ‘crossroads’ technique is an exemplary example of this. If his casting of high profile actors in leading roles suggests that his is a hierarchical system of rehearsal, then his methodology is structured in such a way as to break down those hierarchies. His craft is learned, and therefore he is a synthesiser of traditions and practices rather than an innovator of truly distinctive techniques, but by systemising those techniques so coherently he has created a portable, and therefore important, model for rehearsing Shakespearean texts, within a framework which has an essentially literary relationship with that text.

His aesthetic is clearly within certain ‘traditional’ parameters, but there does not appear to be a particular desire to historicise, or to radically reimagine popular conceptions of what Shakespearean plays ‘are’. Despite eschewing aggressive directorial interventions, he does however have a distinctive authorial voice informed by his complex personal identity as a secular but culturally Catholic gay man. His aesthetic is also shaped by the RSC’s theatrical spaces, and he

enjoys a particularly successful relationship with the Swan Theatre. Here, the theatre's church-like ambience interacts favourably with Doran's aesthetic, which places scenes of ritual and community at the heart of the performance, and combines the director's ability to focus the audience's attention efficiently on particular details and moments with a more theatrical, less cinematic sensibility than that which characterises his work in the larger RST.

Doran is an institutional director, and in some ways a product of the organisation in which he has worked for most of his career. His work is undoubtedly inflected by the performance traditions that he has inherited. He also takes great care to research the performance history of each play that he directs. However, as I have demonstrated, the way in which he engages with this history is rarely purely imitative, but a complex negotiation of performative priorities in which a play's past lives are only one element.

Above all, Doran's rejection of concept, his actor-centric rehearsal process, and his embrace of the thrust stage, makes him in many ways ideal for the role he now finds himself in, given the recent reconfiguration of the RSC's main theatre space. Such a theatre, he says, foregrounds the role of the actor. This is a priority, I argue, which it shares with Doran, exemplified in the director's craft.

Appendix One: Gregory Doran RSC Biography 1992-2015

As Director

Play	Theatre	Press night
Derek Walcott's Odyssey	TOP	2/7/92
Henry VIII, or All is True	Swan	26/11/96
Cyrano de Bergerac	Swan	10/9/97
Merchant of Venice	RST	10/12/97
The Winter's Tale	RST	6/1/99
Oroonoko	TOP	28/4/99
Timon of Athens	RST	24/8/99
Macbeth	Swan	16/11/99
As You Like It	RST	23/3/00
King John	Swan	28/3/01
Jubilee	Swan	19/7/01
Much Ado About Nothing	RST	9/5/02
The Island Princess	Swan	2/7/02
The Taming of the Shrew	RST	9/4/03
The Tamer Tamed	Swan	9/4/03
All's Well that Ends Well	Swan	11/12/03
Othello	Swan	18/2/04
Venus and Adonis	Little Angel/TOP	10/10/04
A Midsummer Night's Dream	RST	14/4/05
Sejanus	Swan	26/7/05
The Canterbury Tales	Swan	8/12/05
Antony and Cleopatra	Swan	19/4/06
The Rape of Lucrece (Semi-staged reading)	Swan	10/9/06
Merry Wives – The Musical	Swan	12/12/06
Coriolanus	RST	6/3/07
Venus and Adonis (Restaged)	Little Angel/Swan	15/3/07
Dream (Restaged)	Courtyard	15/5/08
Hamlet	Courtyard	5/8/08
Love's Labour's Lost	Courtyard	8/10/08
Twelfth Night	Courtyard	21/10/09
Morte D'Arthur	Courtyard	17/6/10
Cardenio	Swan	27/4/11
Written on the Heart	Swan	2/10/11
Julius Caesar	RST	6/6/12

The Orphan of Zhao	Swan	8/11/12
Richard II	RST	17/10/13
Henry IV Part I	RST	16/4/14
Henry IV Part II	RST	16/4/14
The Witch of Edmonton	Swan	29/10/14
Death of a Salesman	RST	1/4/15
Henry V	RST	22/9/2015

As Assistant Director

Play	Theatre	Press Night
Romeo and Juliet (dir. Terry Hands)	Swan	5/4/89
Cymbeline (dir. Bill Alexander)	RST	11/7/89
Doctor Faustus (dir Barry Kyle)	Swan	10/5/89
Have (dir. Janice Honeyman)	Pit, London	30/1/90

As Actor

Play (role)	Theatre	Press night	Director
Julius Caesar (Octavius Caesar)	RST	8/4/87	Terry Hands
The Merchant of Venice (Solanio)	RST	19/4/87	Bill Alexander
The Jew of Malta (Bashaw/Don Mathias)	Swan	14/7/87	Barry Kyle
The Jew of Malta (Callapine/Don Mathias)	Barbican	23/3/88	Barry Kyle
The New Inn (Beaufort)	Swan	10/11/87	John Caird
Hyde Park (Rider)	Pit, London	8/8/88	Barry Kyle

As Writer

Play	Theatre	Press night
Uppies and Downies	Live Theatre, Newcastle	26/2/88

Appendix Two: Production Questionnaire

Production title

Henry VIII or All is True

Dates of Performance and spaces:

Swan Theatre opened 26/11/96, Newcastle Playhouse 6/10/97, The Pavilions Plymouth 18/11/97, Young Vic 18/2/98, Brooklyn Academy of Music 26/5/98

Key creative personnel:

Director – Gregory Doran, Designer – Robert Jones, Lighting – Howard Harrison, Music – Jason Carr

Lead actors:

David Collings (Cranmer), Guy Henry (Lord Chamberlain), Ian Hogg (Wolsey), Paul Jesson (Henry VIII), Jane Lapotaire (Katherine), Claire Marchionne (Anne Bullen), Jo Stone-Fewings (Earl of Surrey)

How is the production being viewed?

Video recording (RSC archive) – fixed camera recorded 28/11/96 in Swan

Brief description of production:

Period drama which alternates a series of spectacular state occasions with more subdued political exchanges.

What period is the production set in?

Historically accurate costumes and set covering events between 1520 and 1533

Is the setting of the production historically specific or ahistoric?

Specific

Does the production reference actual historical figures, events or situations?

Yes, although is not always accurate in its depiction. Subtitle of ‘All is True’ appears to suggest that it is an attempt to create a narrative of dramatic truth rather than absolute historical truth.

How does the set dictate the acting space?

Upstage doors emblazoned with words ‘All is True’ visible when shut. Forestage largely clear with limited furniture used allowing flexibility and keeping sightlines largely clear.

Laundry hanging upstage in Katherine’s chambers in 3.1 domesticizes the space and forces action slightly downstage.

How does the design respond to the theatre space?

Does not attempt to impose anything structural on forestage. Upstage area with doors used to create grand exits and entrances, as well as to show tableau in counterpoint to downstage actions.

CS trap used for entrance of masquers in 1.4 and subsequent exit of Henry with Anne.

What stage furniture is used?

Basic tables and chairs as required.

How are scene changes effected?

With as minimal fuss as possible, usually during musical interludes and by cast. Platform is rolled on at beginning and end of play with actors in situ as tableau.

3.1 laundry set during interval by ladies in waiting in character.

To what in the text do the scene changes correspond?

Act and scene divisions

Is the lighting naturalistic or non-naturalistic? Describe any specials that created an impression.

Lighting thematic and often religious in character. White light used to denote purity/Heaven, red light to depict Hell/licentiousness. The pageantry is usually bathed in gold light in contrast to other scenes.

At there any special staging effects that stood out? What effect did they create?

Opening creates majestic tableau at Field of the Cloth and Gold, with Henry astride an artificial gold-armoured horse, though it is wheeled off with indecent haste at crack of thunder undermining grandeur.

Is the casting realistic?

Yes, though also corresponds to popular perception, so Jesson's Henry is Holbeinesque, Wolsey is corpulent and Katherine ascetic.

How does the casting respond to the text and how does it change it?

Unsurprising, generally casting is to type.

Are there any political or material considerations evident in the casting?

Not really, though by casting a star as Katherine our sympathies are engaged automatically with her, though casting stars in this part is the performance norm.

Does the status of a particular performer affect the relationship between actor, audience and text?

Other than Lapotaire's, only Guy Henry, who brings a natural comic drollness to the prologue in addition to his playing of the Lord Chamberlain.

What is the nature of the actor-audience relationship? Are any specific characters privileged in this relationship?

In a play with few soliloquies asides are occasionally used to quip on the action, e.g. Katherine at 4.2.156 'Heaven knows how dearly'

In 2.4 Henry plays plea for understanding at 184 directly to audience. He is pleading for *our* understanding as much as the courts.

Does the *mise en scène* privilege any character or actor in a way that comments on or contradicts the text?

Henry virtually always bathed in golden light, to the extent that it becomes ironic. For example, Henry depicted upstage in 2.2 bathed in gold in his chambers whilst courtiers scheme downstage in dim, sombre lighting. Depicts gulf between pageantry and politics.

What is the style of movement of the actors and how does it relate to the text?

Generally naturalistic and period specific

How are actors specifically physicalizing the text (i.e. gesture)?

Generally naturalistic and period specific

How are the onstage relationships physicalised?

Often actors speak on diagonals with open space between them, minimising sightline problems and creating a spare elegance to the staging.

How are the actors articulating the text?

Briskly generally, although Lapotaire is slower and plays with a Spanish accent.

How are the actors responding to the language/verse?

Generally metrically alert. Not overly rhetorical in delivery. Pauses and in breaths generally taking place on ends of lines or caesuras.

What is the nature of any music used and its relationship to the text?

Sung choral music by cast and fanfares adds to grandeur and opulence of pageantry. Arrangement of song in 3.1 has Spanish arrangement emphasising Katherine's nationality.

Are there any points when it intervenes or provides a metanarrative to the text?

In 3.1 (see above) it creates a joyful scene of female solidarity and nationalistic pride that is arguably not in the text. Bombast of music supports overstating of pageantry, thus making it ironic.

What is the nature of any dance and its relationship to the text?

Dance in 1.4 is masked with boisterous, crude and drunken dancing, with an improvised air to proceedings. Men wear enormous phalluses and stage is bathed in red light.

Katherine's dance in 3.1 is flamenco-inspired and both an echo and a contrast to 1.4. Dance is similarly improvised but much more refined.

In both cases the production goes substantially further than the text and stage directions suggest.

How are the bawdy elements in the text communicated (action/emphasis etc.)?

Phalluses in 1.4 convey licentiousness of Henry's court. Anne Bullen depicted in this scene as willing participant, being kissed by Henry at line 123 and kissing him back at 133.

5.3 is retained (often cut in performance) and features physicalisation of phallic imagery on 'great tool' (34-35).

Are there any points where jokes/references/puns in the text are not clear in the performance?

Humour is often physicalised and emphasised to the point of coarseness, so no.

What is the rhythm of the exchanges of dialogue?

Generally swift, with cue lines picked up briskly. Katherine occasionally takes more time and slows pace.

Does this change, and if so in response to what?

Exchanges in political scenes are quicker and lighter, more bombast (mostly from Jesson) in state occasions. Katherine's delivery at Kimbolton when ill is very broken up and slow.

What is the rhythm of any scene changes?

Generally brisk and as seamless as possible, with exits, setting of furniture and entrances all overlapping.

What is the rhythm of lighting changes?

Gentle crossfades with scene changes

What is the overall rhythm of the performance?

Alternating stately, unhurried grandeur with brisk plotting and intrigue. Occasional burst of energy through dance to enliven pace.

What dramaturgical choices are being made?

Generally orthodox, although production is aware of play's attempt to foreground subsequent politics, particularly with regard to Elizabeth's subsequent reign. Cranmer's Christening oration is therefore heavily accented, played DSC to audience. Cuts are minimal, with occasional alterations to words for clarity and the excision of the epilogue.

Are there any dramaturgical or characterisation choices being made which strongly differ from the text's production history?

Spanish accent for Katherine.

How are any ambiguities in the text resolved by the *mise en scène*?

Mise en scène amplifies the ironies in the text through emphasis without significant metatheatrical commentary.

How is the plot of the text structured?

Play is episodic, alternating court scenes with pageantry of state occasions.

How does the *mise en scène* present/communicate/structure the plot?

The production presents both the pageantry and the politics in contrast to each other, allowing the contrasts to be clear.

Is the production located in a specific dramatic genre and is it different from that of the play?

Production seems conceived as a history play, although Gordon McMullan, who observed the production in rehearsal, has argued it has more in common with a late romance.

What story is being told by the *mise en scène*?

That you can't trust the pomp and circumstance of state occasions and that power is more about Machiavellian calculation than high motive.

How does the *mise en scène* relate to the play's production history?

Honours the pageantry of the past whilst retaining the ironic perspective of more recent productions. Does not go down Brechtian route of Davies's production.

How does the *mise en scène* relate to the performance space?

Uses depth of space to allow counterpoint between images of grandeur upstage and mundanity downstage.

What version of the text is being used and does it fall within normal orthodoxies?

Almost complete 1623 text with minor alterations. Includes final act which has often been cut.

How has the text been cut or amended for performance?

Simple alterations for clarity, e.g. 1.2.122 'commission' changed to 'taxation', 1.2.223 'Usurper Richard' changed to 'crookback Richard'.

How does this affect the performance?

Aids clarity

Are there identifiable examples of 'Crossroads' in the plot which are reflected in performance and the *mise en scène*?

In 1.1 tone of Buckingham and Norfolk appears sincere until Wolsey is mentioned as organiser (line 59), at which point tenor of conversation changes significantly, as they now refer to the day's 'fierce vanities'.

Are there examples where *mise en scène* replaces text that has been excised?

No, though there are significant two interpolations – Cranmer appears in spot at end of first half to signify he is the coming man and Wolsey will fall from favour and Anne Bullen walks to CS and draws a finger sharply across her throat at the end of the play, foreshadowing her eventual fate.

What presuppositions are necessary to appreciate the performance?

The play only provides episodes rather than a coherent plot, so both a working knowledge of Henry VIII and his wives as well as the subsequent reign of Elizabeth I are necessary to fully comprehend the play and production.

What is the role of the spectator in the production of meaning?

The spectator brings preconceptions about many of the principals, generally to have them met by the relatively orthodox characterisations the play and production provides.

How is the spectator's attention manipulated by the *mise en scène*?

The grandeur of the pageant scenes creates a sense of majesty, which is repeatedly contrasted by other scenes, and made to seem hollow and false. Katherine is repeatedly put in positions of strength on stage – even at her hearing in 2.4 she circles upstage of Henry before kneeling DSR of him, creating space for herself and making her supplication a strong position rather than a weak one.

We are also taught by the lighting that Buckingham and Katherine are holy (white) and Henry and Anne are sinful (red and gold).

What didn't make sense in the *mise en scène*?

Cranmer's appearance at the end of the first half is incomprehensible to anyone who doesn't have an idea who he is.

Are there any elements of the performance that did not work, in your opinion?

Occasionally the production falls into slightly staid rhythms and static configurations, and becomes pedestrian.

Final summary and comments

A confident first production in the Swan, employing many well-worn tropes but well-performed, clearly spoken and with an ironic tone to balance the play's pageantry and propaganda.

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