

of a sense that Katherine and Petruchio are something different from the other couples. Like Bianca, this Katherine was busy working out a deal with her mate (“you give me that—I can get you this”), which meant that we were watching haggling instead of sparring. Given that Kate and Petruchio, in this scenario, were really just negotiating the terms of their relationship, much as Bianca and Lucentio were, we perhaps didn’t really see why they should end up happy in their marriage while Bianca and Lucentio should conclude by throwing their drinks at each other.

It was clearly implied that the bet in the final scene was Katherine’s idea. She whispered to Grumio, who carried a message to Petruchio and back. During her main speech, she spontaneously bestowed a long kiss on Tranio, but then countered it with a pulled face and a shake of the head that showed he was no match for the man she had landed. The famous “submission” speech was part of the bargain: Katherine will make Petruchio look like a real man, and in return she gets to look as if she has won a better mate than the other women, and the two of them make a tidy profit along the way. At the end of the speech her hand extended to her husband was not seriously to lay it under his foot, but rather to invite him to follow her upstairs.

This production seemed to step around the knotty problems of this play in a most creative way, rather than attempting to untie them. Although this did create gaps in the production, it didn’t feel like a flaw; it seemed instead that it has been foolish of us not to realize how much this is a play about navigating transactions that are simultaneously business and personal. It was a performance of great dynamism and clarity that was well received by an Irish audience who saw plenty they recognized in the competitive groups of bragging men, who then have to learn to negotiate with women.



The Wars of the Roses.

Presented by **Northern Broadsides** at the **West Yorkshire Playhouse**, Leeds. March 24–April 22, 2006. Directed and Adapted by Barrie Rutter. Music by Conrad Nelson. Designed by Jessica Worrall. Lighting by Tim Skelly.

Henry VI

Dicken Ashworth (Gloucester), Tim Barker (Bedford, Mortimer, Salisbury), Roy North (Exeter, Simpcox), Bernard Merrick (Winchester), Mark Stratton (Talbot, Buckingham), Barrie Rutter (York), Phil Corbitt (Warwick), Andrew Cryer (Suffolk), Dave Newman (Somerset), John Gully (Dauphin

of France, Lieutenant), Andrew Whitehead (Henry VI), Danny Burns (John Talbot, Peter), Matt Connor (Messenger, Bolingbroke), Maeve Larkin (Joan of Arc), Helen Sheals (Queen Margaret).

Edward IV

Barrie Rutter (York), Phil Corbitt (Warwick), Andrew Cryer (Cade), Dave Newman (Somerset), John Gully (Clarence), Richard Standing (Edward IV), Andrew Whitehead (Henry VI), Conrad Nelson (Richard), Danny Burns (Prince Edward), Matt Connor (Rutland), Kate Williamson (Lady Grey), Helen Sheals (Queen Margaret).

Richard III

Mark Stratton (Buckingham), Andrew Cryer (Catesby), Dave Newman (Richmond), Simon Holland Roberts (Hastings), John Gully (Clarence, Tyrrell), Richard Standing (Edward IV), Conrad Nelson (Richard III), Roger Burnett (Rivers), Maeve Larkin (Anne), Kate Williamson (Queen Elizabeth), Jacqueline Redgewell (Duchess of York), Helen Sheals (Queen Margaret).

KATE WILKINSON, *Sheffield Hallam University*

The Wars of the Roses at the West Yorkshire Playhouse was a new adaptation by Barrie Rutter, the founder and artistic director of Yorkshire-based theatre company Northern Broadsides. The company is made up of actors from the north of England, specifically, and rather fittingly for this cycle of Shakespeare's first tetralogy, Yorkshire and Lancashire. Styled as *Henry VI* and *Edward IV*, the first two parts of the three-play cycle amalgamated the three *Henry VI* plays; the final play, *Richard III*, was Shakespeare's play as it is usually seen.

The stage was the same for the three parts: a large, sandy colored thrust with two set pieces consisting of concrete plinths upstage right and a scaffolding balcony upstage left. Although on first entrance the set appeared like a building site, it is perhaps more appropriate to refer to it as a renovation site, a ruined building being refurbished, a work in progress. The costuming for the first two productions was working-clothes—tunics and trousers; lords wore long coats, each identified by a symbol on the left breast representing his seat. Although perhaps suggesting Celtic clothing, the costumes were actually difficult to place in time; Margaret for example looked rather modern in her military garb. The costumes changed to modern dress for *Richard III*, characters now wearing smart suits. Juxtaposed with the unchanging set, these costumes created a sense of history as an ongoing story that reinvents itself; the characters were transitory and impermanent, acting within a larger, more determined temporal scheme. The three plays represented a unified whole:



Maeve Larkin (Joan) in Northern Broadsides's production of *Henry VI*. Photographer Nobby Clark.



A battle scene in Northern Broadsides's production of *Edward IV*. Photographer Nobby Clark.

the pieces overlapped, particularly in the adaptation of *Henry VI*, and they were clearly envisaged as a cycle rather than discrete plays. Rutter's title of *The Wars of the Roses* was apt in that the three productions were closely focused on representing the background to the civil wars, the civil war itself, and its after-effects: other extraneous events, such as the war in France, were reduced to the absolute minimum necessary.

The first half of *Henry VI* offered a rapid succession of scenes to illustrate historical background. The scenes in France were mostly reduced to one-on-one fights between Talbot and Joan. The production at this point offered a kind of cartoon history: the plot was significantly reduced while continuing to represent a large part of English history. An abstract representation of battles was established here using dancing and music rather than hand-to-hand combat or sword-fighting. This characterized the fighting throughout Rutter's trilogy; in this instance the battles involved Talbot being wheeled around on a simple wooden chariot while Joan clog-danced around him brandishing her sword. Although clever, at this point it was also funny, which had the effect of reducing the importance of these battles and characters. However, the battles continued to be represented symbolically in *Edward IV* using drums and choreography, and were a strong and memorable focal point of that production.

The emergence and development of characters and themes over the three plays was a key point to this cycle which, as was evident from the marketing campaign, was clearly meant to be seen as a whole. For example, the early presentation of Henry comically painted the king as an honest and childlike simpleton. Andrew Whitehead's Henry shuffled onto the stage, spoke with deliberate pronunciation, held his scepter and orb with obvious discomfort and uncertainty, and looked to his uncles for approval with a furrowed brow. Whitehead presented Henry as a child and although this presentation could be tragic, the staging and tonal habits of the first part made it funny: for example, Henry was often presented seated on his royal chair between impatient protectors standing and fighting over him.

But the tone of the production became much more serious in the second half: Henry developed into an intelligent, articulate, and compassionate man who increasingly spoke with anger and force in his grief. Whitehead's was a strong portrayal of a good man in the wrong job. Henry's maturity had clearly come too late for the character as others had now established their own positions of power. Thus Henry's grief at the banishment and death of Gloucester, which was shouted at times, was immediately undermined for the audience by the chastisement of Helen Sheals's petite Queen Margaret. The change in tone from the beginning



Kate Williamson (Elizabeth), Richard Standing (Edward IV) in Northern Broadsides's production of *Edward IV*. Photographer Nobby Clark.

to the end of the production was perfectly summed up by the closing image: Rutter's adaptation finished *Henry VI* approximately halfway through 2 *Henry VI*. Thus the first play concluded with the deaths of Suffolk (murdered stage left), Gloucester (body wheeled on stage right) and Winchester (died center stage): the three main influences on the king were now dead, leaving the way clear for the conflict between the Lancastrians and Yorkists to take off. This ending mirrored the beginning of the play where the characters bickered over the coffin of Henry V; now, Henry VI left the stage speaking the heavy prophecy "Yet may England curse my wretched reign" before the lights went down.

After a strong *Henry VI*, *Edward IV* was initially disappointing; with seemingly too much material to cram in, the second part of Rutter's trilogy felt rushed. A few moments at the beginning failed to make an impact, Jack Cade's rebellion being a good example. Played by Andrew Cryer, Cade was a powerful presence: his violent and bloody language came through strongly in part because of the harshness of Cryer's accent, creating a Cade to be taken seriously even if his easily swayed followers were not. It was helpful to this serious presentation that Cryer doubled the role of Cade with that of Suffolk in *Henry VI*. However, as with Joan in the previous production, this character was not allowed to make any lasting impact, as the whole rising was over and done with in the first fifteen minutes.

The tone of the fighting changed distinctly in this production so that this part of the cycle was characterized by impressive and powerful battles. The roses that the characters picked during *Henry VI* had been replaced with red or white collars and hoods, making each side clearly identifiable during battle and cleverly staging success or defeat as the reds and whites advanced or retreated, one hood representing both the individual character and many soldiers. The first battle consisted of the men onstage while the percussionists were offstage, the actors meeting center stage in formation and simply but forcefully banging their weapons together. The battle used simple movements such as large strides around the stage; the constant and forceful drums created an atmosphere of chaos and danger. At Tewkesbury the drums were the battle: four cylindrical drums were held over actors' shoulders in a line across the stage while the two red and two white soldiers played in a style reminiscent of the Shaolin drummers. In order to represent the Yorkists' victory, the drummers turned in circles and red-hooded soldiers were gradually replaced by white-hoods as they made the turn to the rear of the stage.

Rutter's envisioning of the plays as a cycle over which to develop characters was clearly seen in the emergence and development of the character



Kate Williamson (Elizabeth), Conrad Nelson (Richard III) in the Northern Broadsides's production of *Richard III*. Photographer Nobby Clark.

of Richard in *Edward IV*. The audience was initially presented with a sympathetic character concerned for his family's welfare: it was Richard who almost single-handedly influenced and persuaded York to fight for the crown after the deal with Henry. Clarence had a significant number of lines cut, especially before the death of York, making him appear slightly stupid. However, Richard increasingly developed his selfish and single-minded approach to the crown as Edward became a lusty, swaggering king. Conrad Nelson's Richard had a lopsided walk and a slight hump on his back which was less apparent during *Edward IV*, the use of suits in *Richard III* making it more visible. He had a useless left arm around which he wore a cuff from elbow to wrist; he wore a similar cuff around his left leg from ankle to knee. The presentation of Nelson's deformed Richard suggested influence by Richard Loncraine's 1995 film: Nelson's arm was useless and his hand shriveled in a similar manner to that of Ian McKellen's Richard. That the hump became more visible as a more evil and deformed character was revealed added an interesting, although perhaps unintentional, quirk to the character's presentation, suggesting a link between physical and mental deformity. There was clear emphasis placed on Richard's dissatisfaction with his physical shape throughout the second half of *Edward IV* and, of course, in *Richard III*, although this was not explicitly explored as a motivation for his behavior. Nelson successfully created a complicit relationship between his character and

the audience by establishing a balance between humor and seriousness, drawing the audience in with his self-deprecating wit but speaking lines such as “I have no brother” with a cold and threatening tone.

There was little new or challenging about Rutter’s *Richard*; rather, this was a very conservative approach to the play. Out of the three productions, *Richard III* felt the most like a standalone play, which may have been a result of *Henry VI* and *Edward IV* being adaptations of three plays. Although characters were doubled throughout the productions doubling did not happen with the expected characters: for example, Joan and Margaret were not doubled, nor were Suffolk and Richmond. However, with performances of each play on consecutive nights and all three in a day twice during the run, the audience spent a lot of time in the company of the same actors. This was the case at the performances I attended and I suspect that much of the audience also attended all three performances that day. This created a sense of achievement at the conclusion for actors and audience alike. Coupled with the very clear presentation of individuals in the productions and the engagement with the audience by characters such as Richard, this established a close relationship between the company and audience.

The use of northern accents in performances in a northern town consolidated this effect. The language sounded fresh, and more natural and immediate than Received Pronunciation. The intended result of Broad-sides’ accent project is, according to the company’s website “performance that has a directness and immediacy which is liberating and invigorating, . . . making the audience hear the words afresh.” It is to the company’s credit that this was the effect in this production and the strangeness of the accents was something that I stopped hearing after a very short while.



Richard III

Presented by **Seattle Shakespeare Company** at **Center House Theatre**, Seattle, Washington, January 6–29, 2006. Directed and adapted by Gregg Loughridge. Set by Rex Carleton. Costumes by Frances Kenny. Lights by Tim Wratten. Sound by Robert A. Langley. Fights by Gordon Carpenter. With Alyson Bedford (Lady Anne, 1st Murderer, 3rd citizen, Catesby), David Goldstein (Lord Hastings, 2nd Murderer, Lord Stanley), Lori Larsen (Queen Margaret, Brakenbury, Lord Ely), Todd Jefferson Moore (Richard III), Connor Toms (Richmond, Rivers, 1st Citizen, Tyrrel), Amber Wolfe (Queen Elizabeth, Mayor), Richard Ziman (Buckingham, Clarence, Moderator). Digital Actors: Andrew Litsky (King Edward IV), Conor McCarthy (Edward, Prince of Wales), Saul Goodwin (Young Duke of York), Ken