Talbot

Shakespeare's Doomed Experiment

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Summary

This thesis will seek to show how *1 Henry VI* was used as a vessel for character experimentation, and how Shakespeare attempted to create a new kind of heroic protagonist, inspired by, and in opposition to, Marlowe's Tamburlaine. It begins by considering some of the most common critical points which hedge *1 Henry VI* and the liberty afforded by the genre within which it exists. It goes on to consider *1* and *2 Tamburlaine,* and attempts to illustrate how *1 Henry VI* demonstrates its agon with Marlowe's superhero from its opening scene onwards.

Harold Bloom describes the *Henry VI* plays as a laboratory, from which only *Richard III* emerged. The thesis will seek to illustrate how, in *1 Henry VI* in particular, Shakespeare was mostly experimenting with finding a new, heroic main character which could be a more psychologically complex Tamburlaine for a new type of theatre.

In the second part of the thesis Shakespeare's protagonist Talbot is given a thorough analysis. The thesis illustrates how he struggles with the act of speaking, with living up to his great name and to find his place within the evolving world around him, as opposed to how Marlowe's protagonist had forced the world to succumb to his dominant personality.

It concludes by showing Talbot having outlived his usefulness, both in the emerging world around him, and to his dramatist, who allows him the most archaic of endings to emphasize his new-found alien status.

Preface

I am indebted to Professor Juan Christian Pellicer, for his excellent feedback and patient optimism.

I set out seeking to write about Shakespeare's treatment of suicide, but ended up writing something a little more life-affirming.

Contents

1 Histories

In the Catalogue (index) of the *First Folio* all of Shakespeare's "Tragedies" are named for one or more of their principal characters, the ones whom the purported tragedy strikes. The only exception is *Cymbeline*, which, like the other two late Romances (or Late/Last Plays as they are commonly known today) included in the First Folio, finds itself tacked on to one extreme of an uncomfortable category,[1] hinting that the compositors were uncertain how to place the plays which were neither clearly Comedies nor Tragedies.

One thing which separates *Cymbeline* from the plays with which it is now usually grouped (*The Tempest, The Winter's Tale, Pericles* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*) is its source and setting. Unlike the other four Romances, of which two were never included in the *First Folio*, *Cymbeline* is set largely in Britain, and deals with, is indeed named for, a British monarch.[2] The most famous tragic exponent of these qualities is *King Lear*, which is also set in Britain's mythical past, and is named for one of its ancient kings. Both plays rely on Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland* as source material. *The Chronicles*, a significant feat of Elizabethan scholarship, spans the history of Britain from Brutus' supposed landing on the isle right up to the reign of Mary, Queen of Scots, and is the main source for Shakespeare's History-plays, as well as *Macbeth*.[3]

Apart from sharing a common source with *Lear* and *Macbeth* it is difficult to see what makes *Cymbeline* more of a tragedy than *The Tempest* or *The Winter's Tale*.[4] One wonders why none of these plays which fell somewhere between a comedy and a tragedy were placed with the "Histories". *Macbeth*, though most commonly listed amongst the Four or Five Great Tragedies, might also argue for inclusion in this category, set as it is in Britain a mere century and a half prior to the events of *King John*. "Histories", a newly invented category, did not call for the clearly defined "tragic" or a "comic" ending, so would it not have been convenient to place plays which had neither of these there, between the two poles?

[1] *The Tempest*, of course, opens the *First Folio*, while *The Winter's Tale* is the last of the comedies.
[2] Its full title, as given in the Catalogue in the *First Folio* is *Cymbeline, King of Britain* while the actual title page, and page headers, reads *The Tragedie of Cymbeline*.
[3] Holinshed (1965)
[4] The death of young prince Mamillius, it might be argued, is far more tragic than any of the events of *Cymbeline*.

Evidently the compositors of the *First Folio* did not see the "Histories" category as a convenient middle ground, but rather regarded it as the one category, unlike the two classical ones, which had clearly prescribed rules for inclusion. *Macbeth* concerns itself with Scotland (but it was written after James accession), and is set before the Norman Conquest.[5] *Cymbeline* and *Lear* both deal with material which, at least today, is considered mythical, but which is set in what was by Shakespeare's time England. We cannot know precisely what caused a play to be excluded from or included in the "Histories" category, but the original ten plays included have remained exclusive, in spite of some modern critics pointing out that *Richard II* probably constitutes Shakespeare's "purest tragedy",[6] and that *Henry VIII* could be labelled a Romance with the other late Fletcher-collaboration *The Two Noble Kinsmen*.[7]

Shakespeare's history plays concern themselves with English monarchs, from King John to Henry VIII. The plays sometimes end tragically for the eponymous ruler, at other times with success. And, on occasion, with neither. These, although fairly arbitrary, are the only rules for inclusion we can be certain of. This leaves considerable freedom for experimentation and variation, with plays ranging from the purest tragedies to rambling chronicles. It is with the latter we shall be dealing in this thesis, and as it is unclear whether the plays in question would properly belong in either the "Tragedies" or "Comedies" we are grateful for the strangely restrictive, yet morally flexible middle category.

The chaotic menagerie known as the *Henry VI* plays constitutes Shakespeare's first foray into writing so-classified "Histories". These three plays have never ranked amongst the most highly regarded members of the *First Folio*. The vast majority of critics have followed William Hazlitt in finding them "inferior to the other historical plays".[8] Individual critics have discovered individual points of interest, but the plays are considered messy, immature and most likely co-written with "lesser" playwrights. So confused are the plays in fact that the order of composition, of what the *First Folio* presented as a trilogy, is one of the commonest debated questions. *1 Henry VI*, generally considered inferior to the other two, is typically placed at the end, its shortcomings (at least) partly blamed on the small part Shakespeare is considered to have played in its composition.[9]

[5] The historical Macbeth died in 1057.
[6] See preface of Ard3---
[7] This should be fairly easy to find.
[8] Hazlitt (1947), 178
[9] Burns (2000), 79-84

More nationalistically minded critics, led by E.M. Tillyard, have tried to incorporate the *Henry VI* plays into a vast, pre-planned national epic story-arch, commonly known as the "Tudor Myth", which splits eight of the histories into the "two tetralogies".[10] The first tetralogy concerns itself with the events from the death of King Henry V to the beginning of the Tudor dynasty; the second depicts Henry IV's "original sin" in displacing the rightful ruler, culminating in his son's glorious victories in France. In favour of this idea of a national myth on par with Virgil's *Aeneid* both Shakespeare's sole authorship and the logical order of composition are usually advocated, but even here only limited attention is paid to the plays prior to *Richard III*. The three plays are typically regarded as interesting, potentially illustrative of larger critical points, but are rarely treated as individual works of art.

Part of the difficulty in appreciating the *Henry VI* plays is precisely the scope of the plays. There are three of them, numbering nearly 9000 lines in total, and the character roster is as vast as it is bewildering.[11] Had Sir Philip Sidney not been killed on the battlefield, one suspects these abominations of the Aristotelian unities might just have done the trick. While posterity remains grateful to Shakespeare (and English renaissance drama in general) for bending or breaking the rules of classical drama, few theatre-goers would prefer the *Henry VI* plays over the more manageable *The Comedy of Errors*. The three plays, having been handed down to us as a trilogy, are most commonly performed as a single continuous narrative.[12] Though performed over multiple nights, sitting through the whole rambling work without being intimately familiar with the plays beforehand must be a bewildering and exhausting experience. Even in reading the plays one tends to grasp at the first character to stand out from the endless procession of near-identical courtiers, paying special attention to Joan Puzel for instance, as an historical character with whom we are at least partially familiar.

One explanation for the plays' disjointed, chaotic nature is given by Harold Bloom, who sums the *Henry VI* plays up as "a laboratory", leading gloriously up to *Richard III*:

"I am myself alone" is the Crookbackian motto, and seems to me the prime aesthetic justification for the Henry VI *plays. They do not live now except for the triad of Joan, Jack Cade and Richard, all Shakespearean exercises in the representation of evil, and all vivid comedians.* Richard III, *whether in its strengths or its limitations, owes its energy and*

[10] Burns (2000), 72.
[11] The three plays call for some 120 separate speaking parts, in addition to a long stream of servingmen, soldiers, keepers and messengers.
[12] Hampton-Reeves (2006), 1-10

brilliance to the laboratory of the three parts of Henry VI. *That is justification enough for Shakespeare's immersion in the Wars of the Roses.*[13]

In describing the trilogy as a laboratory, an experiment leading to the more successful *Richard III*, Bloom is putting his finger on a vital aspect of the *Henry VI* plays, but failing to apply his imagination or insight beyond the obvious. He is by no means alone amongst modern critics in passing quickly over the three plays, but since he intriguingly identifies them as a "laboratory" it is disappointing that he carries the thought no further. Bloom chooses *Richard III* as both his starting point and his conclusion, then looks at the *Henry VI* plays, and recognizes the salient characters as "exercises in the representation of evil, and all vivid comedians." *Richard III* is built on a platform the *Henry VI* plays helped erect, and that, to Bloom is justification enough for their existence.

Robert Y. Turner in his study *Shakespeare's Apprenticeship* outlines Bloom's type of approach:[14] "Just as the scientist traces biological change by postulating the human brain as a goal toward which lower forms of life evolve, so the literary historian can postulate a goal for a group of literary works and describe all its members as steps in evolution toward it. This goal acts as a standard by which all members of the group are judged, so that the claims of an individual work to be judged by its own terms are somewhat, if not largely, ignored."

Precisely what is meant by "the claims of an individual work to be judged by its own terms" is not altogether clear, but Bloom's decision to locate the "value" of the *Henry VI* trilogy as its culmination in a later play limits the interest they potentially hold. If all one looks for in *Henry VI* is *Richard III*, then that is all one will find, through a procession of fledgling Machiavel-characters yet to attain the later perfection.[15]

Yet when Bloom chooses the phrase "They do not live now, except for the triad of Joan, Jack Cade and Richard" he is not expressing a mere privately held conviction. Of Shakespeare's surviving plays few have been revived as rarely as the *Henry VI* trilogy, and a curriculum including them would be unusual to say the least. Parts of *3 Henry VI* have been regularly borrowed for (enduringly popular) productions of *Richard III*, and literarily inclined history students may have occasion to dip into the three plays for stirring quotes, but general

[13] Bloom (1999), 50
[14] Turner (1974), 4
[15] Incidentally, this is also one way of looking at Tillyard and his followers' approach to the *Henry VI* plays, as their role in the great design of "The Tudor Myth" assumes far greater importance than how the plays actually read.

knowledge of the trilogy is limited. If modern readers know of the *Henry VI* plays at all it is usually through one or more members of Bloom's "triad": Joan Puzel, Jack Cade or Richard III-to-be.[16]

Joan has attracted much attention from feminist critics, her character being chaotic and eclectic enough to pretty much carry any point argued with sufficient conviction.[17] The Cade-episodes of *2 Henry VI* provides this sombre play with some much needed relief, albeit in quite violent form. Jack Cade is certainly a lively inclusion, and stands out vividly from the seemingly endless procession of bickering lords which any reader of the full trilogy struggles both to separate and to care about. Richard of Gloucester, Shakespeare's most recognizable Machiavel-character, is a gradually glorious creation, who becomes ever more entertaining as the third play goes on. One can almost see his creator being surprised, then taken with his own creation, affording him ever more lines, and eventually feeling compelled to write him a whole separate piece, where he would be allowed to speak and act and play to his mind's content, as a less solipsistic, more malicious Faustus. The three are markedly different, fresh, and frequently funny. They are all terrible villains, but still within our modern, somewhat conciliatory, understanding of that word.[18]

The triad are Shakespearean representations of evil, but what of Shakespearean representations of good?

To claim that *Richard III* is "justification enough for Shakespeare's immersion into the Wars of the Roses" implies that this is also the *only* justification, but the *Henry VI* plays are not mere glimpses into the abyss. If we accept that the three *Henry VI* plays were, at least in part, laboratories, then surely something more would have been gained from three long plays than the perfecting of Marlowe's established Machiavel-protagonist? How can one perfect a Macihavel in a vacuum?

We started by looking at how Shakespeare's "Histories" has been treated as a fairly restrictive category from the *First Folio* onwards, but conceded that within those frames the Histories can be both Tragedy and Comedy. There are no star-crossed lovers (Richard II's love for Richard II perhaps coming closest), but *Macbeth* and *Richard III* could with equal ease be

[16] I use the forms of proper names and the text established by the Arden 3rd Series *1 Henry VI* (2000) throughout this thesis.
[17] Edward Burns discusses Joan's highly varied critical history in Burns (2000), 23-48
[18] Meaning that they are hardly evil personified (Richard a potential exception), but self-overhearing, exultant mischief-doers.

labelled tragedies or histories were the respective countries switched. While Shakespeare composed the *Henry VI* plays he may well have been attempting to write his first tragedies. After all, the period concerned depicts the end of the English presence in France, and the ensuing civil war, which Shakespeare's audience could have heard of first-hand from elderly relatives. With the exception of the (often historically inaccurate) temporary victories over the French in *1 Henry VI,* the three plays lend themselves largely to a long succession of national and personal tragedies, with the English scourges coming in various guises, be they French, English or French-English. Yet what dramatic purpose could these calamities serve if there were no good men available to suffer?

Bloom's ostensible intention with his book is to show how Shakespeare, starting with Faulconbridge the Bastard in *King John*, invented human character or personality. While this argument may be more of smokescreen than an actual objective Bloom is at pains to show us the first instances of "Shakespearean personality".[19] I believe we find that first in Talbot.

The later representations of evil, whether Edmund, Iago or Macbeth, are all faced by comparatively good antagonists – there could be no tragedy without them. The three *Henry VI* plays are "Histories", and so they may be excused from having a "good" counterpoint to their villains – Richard III has no obvious foil until the very end of his play – yet there are two obvious counterpoints to Bloom's axis of evil, in the characters of Talbot and the eponymous king. In this thesis I will argue that Shakespeare, through Talbot in particular, was experimenting with a new type of protagonist, and show how the laboratory of the *Henry VI* plays afforded room to experiment. These experimental characters may not have the obvious context that Richard of Gloucester presents us with, but in claiming him as the result of the *Henry VI* plays, rather than as their precursor, Bloom has missed a significant point.

[19] Bloom (1999), 51-58

2 The "Islands" of *Henry VI*

How would it have joyed brave Talbot *(the terror of the French) to thinke that after he had lyne two hundred years in his Tombe, hee should triumphe againe on the Stage, and have his bones newe embalmed with the teares of ten thousand spectators at least (at several times), who, in the Tragedian that represents his person, imagine they behold him fresh bleeding.*[20]

Written by Thomas Nashe, another of the supposed collaborators, *Piers Penniless his Supplication to the Devil*, sets out to prove the virtue of plays, and singles out the martial protagonist of *1 Henry VI* for particular praise:

Piers Penniless was published in the summer of 1592, and although it contains no direct reference to Shakespeare, it clearly concerns itself with the play *1 Henry VI*. The impressive detail of "ten thousand spectators at least (at several times)" is most probably an under-estimation, as the play outperformed other famous "hits" that season, Marlowe's *Jew of Malta* and Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy* among them.[21]

When Nashe chose a noble character to defend the stage it was natural that he would choose one from among the success of the most recent season, and reasonable that he would choose an historically inspired English hero to do so. It is nonetheless interesting that he only later in the text proceeds to describe how glorious it is to have "Henrie the fifth represented on the Stage, leading the French King prisoner, and forcing both him and the Dolphin to sweare fealty".[22] Many modern Shakespeare enthusiasts would be left bemused by any reference to "brave Talbot (the terror of the French)", but none would be ignorant of the glorious Henry V. Even for those of us with no vested interest in English military history Henry V stands out as a shining beacon of a warrior king, on par with Richard the Lionheart (though this may be in large part due to Shakespeare).

[20] Burns (2000), 1
[21] Ibid., 9
[22] Ibid., 2

As early as the *Henry VI* plays Shakespeare was creating more enduring national symbols than his much circulated chronicle sources, in which King Henry V is unsurprisingly given precedence (both chronologically and in terms of sheer praiseworthiness) over Talbot.[23]

Bloom found the only "point" of the *Henry VI* plays in *Richard III*. While *2* and *3 Henry VI* can arguably be seen to lead towards *Richard III*, it is less clear what the first part of the trilogy is then in aid of. The issue has been confused by the frequent attribution of the play to an array of playwrights other than Shakespeare, and by the difficulty of its dating.

The current fashion tends to place the composition of *1 Henry VI* after the chronologically later plays, which makes the play appear even more of a dead end. Shakespeare, over the course of *2* and *3 Henry VI*, "discovered" Richard of Gloucester, writing asides and soliloquies for him which serve limited purpose in the plays, but which lends substance to the character, building him up for a future play. The playwright seems to be enjoying himself in the act of composition. To return to an unnecessary foregrounding, introducing new protagonists and a new atmosphere makes neither artistic nor popular sense. Why should Shakespeare, or his audience, desire to have *1 Henry VI* interjected before bringing the Machiavel-character to its logical conclusion? Harold Bloom locates nothing to immediately foreground Richard III in Joan Puzel, and thus prefers to suggest, without pausing to really argue his case, that the three *Henry VI* plays were written in sequence, and that *1 Henry VI* may well be Shakespeare's earliest surviving play. Bloom's reasoning, at least the only one he offers before his book-length task carries him away, is that the play is so bad that we should not lament the loss of any earlier effort. Talbot is described as "brave and tiresome" and as a "bully boy",[24] with Bloom suggesting that the poet may have been "unmoved" by his own creation.[25] Ironically, by citing Richard's "I am myself alone" as "the prime aesthetic justification for the Henry VI plays" Bloom is overlooking the pre-existence of just such a sentiment in Tamburlaine, and failing to focus on what Shakespeare's actual innovations were.

No man is an Iland, intire of it selfe; every man is a peece of the Continent, a part of the maine; if a Clod bee washed away by the Sea, Europe is the lesse, as well as if a Promontorie

[23] Holinshed (1965).
[24] Bloom (1999), 45
[25] Ibid., 46

were, as well as if a Mannor of thy friends or of thine owne were; any mans death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankinde[26]

John Donne's famous and somewhat overquoted Devotion XVII was written just three decades after the Henry VI plays; it could not have been written thirty years before. Shakespeare's plays may not singly have enabled Donne to write as he did, though Harold Bloom would certainly argue that to be the case. The morality plays had featured largely representative figures, emblems, while John Lyly had written plays of careful courtly lovers. Then came Tamburlaine, and theatre changed. "Marlowe's play concentrated all of the world's driving ambition in a single charismatic superhero".[27] Happily coinciding with the emergence of the "star actor" Edward Alleyn, Marlowe's Tamburlaine spoke unlike any previous man, and the impact was significant.[28]

Tamburlaine is as much a continent unto himself as he is an island. His love for Zenocrate, and the later desire for a legacy do not constitute any genuine involvement in "Mankinde", they are merely extensions of Tamburlaine. Marlowe's superhero exists in an emotional vacuum; the world answers his desires, never the other way around. Tamburlaine is not a mere man, and in this lays his enduring fascination.

The representation of a superhuman, a man who possesses powers beyond those of ordinary men, still captivates audiences, as witnessed most recently by the record-breaking opening weekend of the Hollywood blockbuster *The Avengers*, where a posse of superheroes join forces to fight similarly omnipotent foes.[29] As opposed to when Marlowe's play first appeared the representation of these characters now constitutes a break from the established representation of realism. Marlowe effectively established the theatrical superhero, but what he broke from was not a realistic norm of representation, the island that is Tamburlaine was at the time one of the most realistic, or at least most convincing, men to appear on stage.

Part of Tamburlaine's "realism", such as it is, lies in the huge proportion of lines attributed to him in his plays. His view dominates reality, because he has the strength to impose it – dissident voices are quelled or swept along in his wake, like the Sultan at the end of the first play. The central mantra of "might is right" continues to hold the day. "[T]he core of its

[26] Abrams (2000), 1278
[27] Greenblatt (2004), 197
[28] Ibid., 190-191
[29] Smith (2012)

appeal" writes Greenblatt, "is its incantatory celebration of the will to power".[30] Tamburlaine, like a more primitive Hamlet, *is* his entire play.

Anthony Nuttall, in his book *Shakespeare the Thinker*, writes about the Shakespearean knack for constructing dramaturgical "islands" in his plays.[31] These can be large or small (in Nuttall's rather impressive phrasing) counter-formal moments of naturalist mobility and ambiguity.[32] Nuttall wrote well, but we are grateful for examples, and he provides a few from the *Henry VI* plays:

In *1 Henry VI* Gloucester is refused entry to the Tower on Winchester's orders, and fighting between the two rival factions erupts in the street. The Mayor arrives, and manages to disperse the belligerents – a stressful task for any man but Othello. The Mayor is a comical figure, appearing briefly and insignificantly among the great feuding nobles, and we may smile when he closes the scene by admitting that "I myself fight not once in forty year", but as Nuttall points out this moment provides a pause in the action, a glimpse of "a human individual and another mode of life".[33] It is extraneous, unnecessary detail concerning a character with little to no bearing on the main plot or characters of the play. He is, in a throwaway line, made human, because the playwright *can*. Shakespeare's ability to endow individual characters with autonomous identity is one of the traits that sets him apart from his peers.

"This alertness to the possibility of a *completely* different view of things is one of the features that have enabled Shakespeare to survive beyond his immediate ideological context."[34] Some of the audience will laugh at the puny Mayor, but others (one should think most) will identify and sympathize with him, however briefly. Nuttall demonstrates the presence of many such "islands" in Shakespeare's early plays: Mrs. Simpcox, in the midst of the general merriment at their misfortune wailing "Alas, sir, we did it for pure need" (*2 Henry VI,* II.i.154), or Cade expiring in Iden's garden with the words "Famine and no other hath slain me" (IV.x.60). These are lines granted to individual characters to surprisingly underline, their humanity, their individuality, and to remind us that in the midst of the predominant view there may exist alternative perspectives.

[30] Greenblatt (2004), 197
[31] Nuttall (2007), 43-45.
[32] Ibid., 45
[33] Ibid., 28
[34] Ibid., 43

The final example offered of an "island" in the *Henry VI* plays is King Henry's great meditative moment, as he contemplates the horrors of war and his own kingship, sitting on a molehill near the raging battle of Towton. This "island" is not a naturalistic one like the others, but offers a counterpoint to the main theme in a fairly stylized, formal pastoral. Henry wishes for the unattainable idyllic life of a lowly shepherd, in a form familiar to Elizabethan audiences (through, among others, Sidney and Lyly), but the pastoral is very surprising here. Somehow it does not feel unrealistic or out of place, in spite of breaking so definitely with the ongoing battle. Nuttall makes the point that Shakespeare's "islands" do not have to be naturalistic – they can be formalized, as this sequence clearly is – but they provide us with an alternative insight into reality – in this case the reality of civil war tearing up families – which the main action sweeps past.[35]

Finding "islands" in a text is incumbent upon being willing to look for them. Nuttall is a very strong reader of Shakespeare, and also a very generous one. In his readings of the much maligned *Henry VI* plays he begins by taking on board some of the most common criticisms of the plays and suggesting why these may actually be void, by applying his considerable learning and imagination.[36]

Although it is possible to argue for why this should not have to be the case, much of the willingness to find plausible excuses for these plays' apparent shortcomings rests on the belief that Shakespeare is responsible for them. By finding these "islands" scattered throughout the texts Nuttall also finds proof for Shakespeare's sole authorship, but one could argue that his argument becomes a circular one. Would the "islands" still be "islands" if a large group of people had simply written a scene or a line each which was later assembled into a complete play? The defence against this must be that the "islands", although they break from the general perspective of the scene or the act would be a convincing alternative perspective regardless of authorial inent. Most academics will be more prepared to dedicate their time to a close reading of what is initially believed to be the creation of Shakespeare, and the more layers of interest are uncovered the more convinced they will become that Shakespeare was the only man brilliant enough to create a specific passage or play, creating a sort of self-fulfilling prophesy.

[35] Nuttall (2007), 45
[36] See his treatment of «Primitive» staging for instance, Ibid., 25-26, 45

The “islands” Nuttall outline, in their various guises, are all instances of Shakespeare opening up the text to new perspectives. This may not be immediately identical to the island of John Donne’s famous Devotion, but Donne’s meaning is not far distant. Being a man-island, metaphorically, entails shutting oneself off from the input of others, from others’ thoughts and feelings. Donne’s island implies isolation, being cut off from the world, and on one level this is also what the “islands” of Nuttall do. The breaks with the dominant perspective are little islands breaking out of the dominant whole, offering a unique take on individual experience.

This is the diametrically opposite approach to what Marlowe had done in *1* and *2 Tamburlaine*, where all potentially divergent perspectives are made to conform to the single dominant one of the main character. Tamburlaine will tolerate no “islands” in his plays. One might equate *Tamburlaine* with Tamburlaine.

Tamburlaine in effect *is* an island, in both Donne’s and Nuttall’s sense of the word, because he is exceptional, but he is so exceptional that he becomes the standard to which everything around him must conform. Nothing and no one can influence him, merely join him. Like Shakespeare’s later creation, Tamburlaine is “constant as the Northern Star” (*Julius Caesar*, III.i.60), but even more all-pervading.[37]

Take Tamburlaine from *Tamburlaine* and you would be left with a loose episodic sequence of successive warlords preparing for battle.

[37] Caesar’s name is mentioned more than 200 times in his play, nearly twice as many as that of any other Shakespearean character.

3 The Authorship Question

One of the chief questions surrounding *1 Henry VI* is that of authorship. The frequently negative responses to the play have contributed to the search for alternate authors, to share responsibility for a play often regarded as Shakespeare's weakest. Collaborative dramatic efforts were certainly not unheard of at this period, and history plays were often farmed out to various playwrights in order to speed up the process of getting a play on stage. Edward Burns, editor of the most recent Arden edition of the play, outlines the process: "A company, or an entrepreneur like Henslowe, might well hit on a likely subject, find a text to work from, and then group together a set of writers, settling their fee and fixing a deadline."[38] There are many examples of this practice in Henslowe's diary, and the stylistic evidence in *Edward III* and *Sir Thomas More* both suggest Shakespeare took part in such projects.[39]

We know that collaborations were common, and we can be fairly certain that Shakespeare took part in them, both early and late in his career (several of the late Romances were collaborative efforts). What indications are there that *1 Henry VI* forms part of this tradition?

The first Arden editor of *1 Henry VI*, H.C. Hart, writing at the beginning of the previous century, crystallized the problems perceived by the play's more severe detractors:

All critics, all readers, will probably agree or have agreed that it is one of the least poetical and also one of the dullest plays in the Folio. It is redeemed by few passages of merit – its verse is unmusical, its situations are usually poorly developed – and were it not for the essential interest of the subject-matter, to any English reader it would be unreadable.[40]

This sounds somewhat old-fashioned in its strongly worded convictions, but Hart did contribute valuable work on identifying certain scenes with specific writers. In assigning 2.4, 2.5 and act 4 to Shakespeare, and also identifying George Peele and Robert Greene as likely collaborators, he established a precedent which continues to guide academics. More recent

[38] Burns (2000), 76
[39] See the Oxford Shakespeare for brief discussions on Shakespeare's probable contributions to these works. Wells (2005), 257, 813
[40] The final comma is correctly placed. The implication appears to be that to any non-English reader the play actually *is* unreadable. Burns (2000), 74

scholarship[41] identifies Thomas Nashe as a likely main collaborator, a view to which the most recent Arden editor largely conforms[42].

The theory of shared authorship does have its detractors. The editor of Arden's Second Series' editions of all three *Henry VI*-plays, Andrew Cairncross, made his stand in the opposite camp, though his position as the editor of the full trilogy arguably renders him partial[43]:

There can be little doubt that Shakespeare … set himself, and achieved, the ambitious task of staging, in his country's finest hour, it's quasi-Biblical story, from the original sin of Henry IV to the grand redemption of the Tudors … the unity is there, and Shakespeare has everywhere taken great pains to draw the links tighter.[44]

Shakespeare's name, in the penultimate line, could arguably have been replaced by Cairncross' own, as the text he presented to the reader had been heavily edited to offer a greater uniformity of metre and diction. Cairncross decided to restore a "corrupted" text, rather than accept its inherent weaknesses as authorial, in an attempt to render it more strongly "Shakespearean"[45].

Cairncross certainly believed in the single author, and chose to regard the text as corrupt as a sort of excuse for its shortcomings, hoping that Shakespeare's perfection had become accidentally distorted in transmission.

Edward Burns, in his Arden Third Series preface, sums up the typical positions in the long ongoing authorship-debate:

To make a broad distinction, editors and critics who have valued the play have tended to present it as by Shakespeare, those who haven't see it as by a group of writers who may or may not have included him. Further, scholars of the first persuasion tend to see the three plays as a planned three-part sequence.[46]

[41] Burns (2000), 75
[42] Ibid., 76
[43] That being said, H.C. Hart before him had also been elected to edit all three *Henry VI* plays, and had reached the precise opposite conclusion. Intimate knowledge of all three plays cannot definitely dispel the uncertainties.
[44] Ibid., 74
[45] Ibid., 74
[46] Ibid., 73

Arden-editors often excel at illustrating the scholarly progress made since previous editions by picking out some less than balanced quotations from their esteemed predecessors. While this can be helpful, the technique deliberately sets the "moderate", modern editor apart from the "extremists" who preceded him, helping to validate his opinion (assuming most of us prefer to shy away from extremism). Burns, to summarize his position quickly, sees plenty of value in *1 Henry VI*, at least he finds plenty of fascinating point for debate or scholarly enquiry, but he also believes many of the play's weaknesses can be traced to a shared authorship. He does not believe *1 Henry VI* preceded *2* & *3 Henry VI*, but was added as an afterthought due to the successes of these two plays[47]. Burns' evidence is plentiful and compelling, particularly when compared to his less measured predecessors', yet he cannot provide any definitive solution.

One of the main arguments for shared authorship is the uneven style in which *1 Henry VI* is written, with Hart having found recurring verbal details in this play and those of the aforementioned Greene and Peele. Burns rather denigrates Hart's attempt, claiming "as a scholarly method, this is unconvincing", yet finds some value in that "it may intuit a process of writing and devising more plausible than the assumption of the planned authorship of an epic cycle."[48] Hart's original attempt to recognize potential collaborators through the use of reading has by now been superseded by computers capable of infinitely more complex pattern recognition. This method was utilized by Michael Taylor, the editor of the Oxford textual companion to *1 Henry VI*, who detected a large number of collaborators, Nashe and Shakespeare chief among them. Burns is largely in agreement, though he feels that Taylor leans too heavily on statistics at times, and is willing to "tamper with the evidence" in a fashion similar to Cairncross, who so heavily edited the text of The Arden Second Series edition.[49]

All of which leads us to the rather lame conclusion that close readings and comparisons with the suspected candidates for collaboration yields up definite similarities, just as a computer can point to one author above another, but that the text will always need some tampering with to obtain an unequivocal positive. Perhaps the strongest conclusion to draw from these attempts is that everything but post-Romantic blind faith in the solitary genius of Shakespeare points scholars in the direction of collaboration, in spite of a marked lack of definitive results.

[47] Burns (2000), 85-90
[48] Ibid., 75
[49] Ibid., 75-76

Harold Bloom is fond of describing himself as a Romantic, gleefully embracing Shaw's rather negatively charged term "Bardolator". It is unsurprising then, that Bloom advocates for single authorship in his brief chapter on the three *Henry VI*-plays. What is slightly unusual is that Bloom, with characteristic abandon, both argues for single authorship and dismisses the first plays as downright poor. [50] Shakespeare, he argues, was still the only playwright, barring Marlowe himself, capable of such a good Marlovian impersonation as in the opening scene of *1 Henry VI.* Intriguingly, the scene Bloom uses as burden of proof for Shakespeare's sole authorship contains the very passage Coleridge chose to illustrate how Shakespeare could never have written the play:

Hung be the heavens with black, yield day to night!

Comets, importing change of times and states,

Brandish your crystal tresses in the sky;

And with them scourge the bad revolting stars

That have consented unto Henry's death!

Henry the fifth, too famous to live long!

England ne'er lost a king of so much worth. (I.i.1-7)

Read aloud any two or three passages in blank verse, even from Shakespeare's dramas, as Love's Labour's Lost*, or* Romeo and Juliet*; and then read in the same way this speech, with especial attention to the metre; and if you do not feel the impossibility of the latter having been written by Shakespeare, all I dare suggest is, that you may have ears – for so have another animal – but an ear you cannot have,* me judice.[51]

It requires less time and effort to dismiss something than to seriously consider it. Coleridge falls prey to the habit of his time, similarly to how Hazlitt did in his criticism of the play, and isolates lines which destroys the overall effect. No one would claim that the lines represent Shakespeare's finest hour, yet they are hardly awful, and they form an integral part of a consistent whole. They are, more than anything else, "passable Marlowe"[52], though arguably overdone. The opening of the play, from which this speech is lifted, drives home this

[50] Bloom (1999), 43
[51] Coleridge (pre-1912), 99
[52] Bloom (1999), 44

impression, Bloom pointing out that if one were to replace Henry V's name with that of Tamburlaine the scene would read more naturally. The long drawn out funeral orations are recognizably Marlovian in tone, but dramaturgically the scene is so singularly awful it is difficult to believe it was ever intended as anything but farce.

Bloom, like Hart before him (though for opposite purposes), considers the potential authorship of Greene and Peele,[53] but dismisses it using Hart's own method of comparative reading.[54] The Marlovian parody on offer is *too good at what it does* to be done by anyone but Shakespeare, although Coleridge is correct in recognizing it as atypical Shakespeare.

Bloom is writing briefly on each of Shakespeare's plays, and affords the trilogy a mere eight pages, most of which are filled by long quotations, and so his argument can hardly be said to be very thorough. All of the subsequent passages which Hart attributed to Greene or Peele are passed over, and the recently favoured candidate for the authorship of act 1, Thomas Nashe, is not mentioned at all. This is Bloom's appeal, and his curse. His literary criticsm tends to raise a great many interesting points, but rarely provides the necessary tools to carry the points against the inevitable "sea of troubles". His enjoyable mellifluousness carries the points on the first reading, but this is rarely sufficient for serious academic dispute.

The most thorough work on this subject has been done by Brian Vickers, who writes a very convincing essay, arguing for shared authorship.[55] His argument is split into four parts, the first illustrating how renaissance artists frequently shared tasks between them, citing painting and bronzeworkings as interesting examples. In the second part he cites various works of literature wherein collaboration occurred. He then moves on to the third part of his argument, which gives a very convincing, very scientific analysis of why authorship of *1 Henry VI* was most likely shared between at least three playwrights. Finally he deals with the recent critical tradition, picking on some of its weaker members for summary demolition.

Vickers' arguments in the third part of his essay are excellent, sound and backed up by a well of indicative evidence. The essay is weakened somewhat by its unnecessary foregrounding; pointing out that collaborations really were quite frequent during the Renaissance does not read as necessary for making his point. More than this preamble, the combative closing

[53] Michael Taylor 's essay explaining why he believed Nashe and Shakespeare to have been the two main contributors to *1 Henry VI* was published three years prior to Bloom's *The Invention of the Human*, but Bloom has stuck with the traditional suspects for his argument.
[54] Thus rather proving Burns' point that Hart's method does not hold up to academic scrutiny.
[55] Vickers (2007)

section raises further questions, when Vickers decides to pick apart the already rather implosive Cairncross of the Arden Second series, whose "orgy of emendations" makes him ather easier prey than the current incumbent, who basically agrees with Vickers, but who is somehow pointed to as yet another editor denying shared authorship. Burns is at pains throughout his introduction and footnotes to refer to "the dramatists" rather than to Shakespeare.

This unnecessary critical aggression draws attention to Vickers' essay's weaker points, such as denying the probability of Shakespeare having written the word "Mahomet" since he does not find occasion to employ it in any of his later, less contested plays.

On a whole, Vickers' decision to pick on every editor he can name undermines an initially strong position, alerting the reader that there are many dissenting voices.

In a play as early as *1 Henry VI* the question of authorship is naturally muddled by the uncertainty over whether inconsistencies are caused by experimentation/emulation by a single gifted but inexperienced playwright, or if several different artists are contributing to the same project.

I believe that the play's critics' continuously shifting positions and Vickers' awareness of his embattled position in spite of his seemingly sound scientific points combine to make a case for reasonable doubt over whether Shakespeare wrote *1 Henry VI* alone or whether the play is a collaborative effort. For the sake of this essay, which purpose is not to establish a single author but to suggest how a new type of character was created, I will refer to the playwright(s) simply as Shakespeare.

4 Talbot and Context

When Shakespeare wrote the *Henry VI* plays he chose for himself a setting that catered to the very opposite type of character to the one *Tamburlaine* had presented. The world of the Wars of the Roses (and the end of the Hundred Years' War) has no fixed centre, no major presence that sweeps the others along in its wake. One candidate may be said to emerge with Richard III, but for most of the three *Henry VI* plays the King, the natural centre, is a child and, later, a religious weakling who never bends anyone to his will. The trilogy is, as Greenblatt would have it, "full of Tamburlaine-like grotesques", but there is no single near-omnipotent presence.

It is a brave man who attempts to follow *Tamburlaine*. A braver one still who does not replace the first charismatic protagonist with another. One must give the people what the people want, particularly when one is only just starting out as a dramatist. Shakespeare gave the people something they did not know they wanted, in the form of Sir John Talbot and, somehow, they were not disappointed.

There are countless Tamburlaine-wannabes (to put a decidedly modern phrase to a new use) in the world of the *Henry VI* plays. Talbot stands out because he is the only character who finds himself in a position to compete with Tamburlaine. He is lauded, from the opening scene onwards, by every major English character; he wins decisive victories and acts as a rallying call for his nation's soldiers. He thunders at the French, spitting blood and gall, but in all his potential similarities with the great stage presence of the time he also becomes the character which breaks most decisively with Tamburlaine, the one who ensures *1 Henry VI* stands apart from Marlowe's plays.

While contemporary Elizabethan audiences appear to have felt Shakespeare succeeded in his representation of Talbot; modern critics generally feel he did not.

Talbot is not an "island", or a continent, as Tamburlaine was. Yet the role incorporates into it countless little "islands", which render Talbot both interesting and, at first sight, inconsistent. Thus the critic Sigmund Burckhardt is not alone in making points such as:

"It is the Countess, not Talbot, who in this scene speaks the language of the play."[56]

and

"We must be clear that this is the Talbot of the episode, not that of the rest of the play."[57]

Talbot is a strange character, an unusual one, and because he has no immediate predecessor or obvious heir it is more difficult to see what his particular "experiment" may have been in aid of.

Bloom's target, as we have seen, is *Richard III,* and Talbot thus holds very little interest for him as he races past. It is interesting to contrast Bloom's approach with that of an earlier critic.

William Hazlitt, although limited by the practices of his time, finds some alternative points of value in the *Henry VI* plays, and singles out the first play for extended quotation when writing about the trilogy:

"They have brilliant passages, but the overall groundwork is comparatively poor and meagre, the style flat and unraised. There are few lines like the following:

Glory is like a circle in the water:

Which never ceaseth to enlarge itself,

Till by broad spreading it disperse to naught."[58]

Hazlitt chooses this quote in part as a transition to a few lines on "the Maid of Orleans", but the image of glory spreading, then dispersing, applies more poignantly to the character he introduces immediately afterwards:

Talbot is a very magnificent sketch: there is something as formidable in this portrait of him, as there would be in a monumental figure of him or in the sight of the armour which he wore. The scene in which he visits the Countess of Auvergne, who seeks to entrap him, is a very

[56] Burckhardt (1967), 141
[57] Ibid., 153
[58] Hazlitt (1947), 178

spirited one, and his description of his own treatment while a prisoner to the French not less remarkable.[59]

SALISBURY

Yet tellest thou not how thou wert entertained.

TALBOT

With scoffs and scorns and contumelious taunts;

In open market-place produced they me

To be a public spectacle to all.

'Here', said they, 'is the terror of the French,

The scarecrow that affrights our children so'

Then broke I from the officers that led me,

And with my nails digged stones out of the ground

To hurl at the beholders of my shame.

My grisly countenance made others fly;

None durst come near for fear of sudden death.

In iron walls they deemed me not secure;

So great fear of my name 'mongst them were spread

That they supposed I could rend bars of steel

And spurn in pieces posts of adamant;

Wherefore a guard of chosen shot I had

That walked about me every minute while;

And if I did but stir out of my bed,

[59] Hazlitt (1947), 178

Ready they were to shoot me to the heart.[60]

Hazlitt has chosen to quote Talbot's bombastic self-mythologizing moment, and taken out of context it does appear to corroborate his own brief description of the English hero. At least Hazlitt is willing to find something "remarkable" in a character whom we know contributed heavily to the play's initial success, a character modern critics generally ignore. The rest of Hazlitt's entry on the *Henry VI* plays is, also unusually, dedicated to the titular character – the King. Hazlitt continues with King Henry in the same vein he introduced Talbot, picking pretty speeches to illustrate Shakespeare's poetical gifts, and making value judgements of the characters' character. He is particularly keen to illustrate how Henry VI is a far more sympathetic king than the usurped Richard II, comparing the two at some length.[61] Modern critics are not similarly fascinated.

While Hazlitt was a very strong reader of Shakespeare, the popular practice of the time of picking out "beauties of Shakespeare" undermines his writing on the three plays. Talbot's rousing rendition of himself as the terror of the French, and the first references to him in the mourning court will certainly stick in the minds of theatre-goers, but a careful reading of *1 Henry VI* will render him as a far more complex character.

The reason I have chosen to quote (Hazlitt's quoting of) Talbot's speech in full is that it, when presented as Hazlitt does, out of context, paints a picture of a fairly primitive national hero, and that in spite of reading the full play this is how many readers come to regard him. This is his first instance of self-representation, and we see him as he wishes Salisbury to see him, with this impression likely to stick. Similarly, we are all coloured by our first encounter with the young monarch, who is kept off stage for most of the key scenes of the play, and makes little positive impression once he does appear. He is an indecisive, insecure child, lacking authority or understanding of what goes on around him.

Hazlitt is one of the great Shakespeare critics, but in this case his practice of singling out "beauties" is helpful because of the method's very shortcomings. Talbot, when read separated from the subtler points of *1 Henry VI*, becomes either the inspired national symbol Hazlitt seems to find in him, or the "bully boy" Harold Bloom saw. Both men are reading the same Talbot, but responding rather differently based on their critical ideologies and contemporary values. Nationalism is not considered quite as stirring in modern-day United States as it

[60] Hazlitt (1947), 179
[61] Ibid., 181-186

would have been in England immediately after the Napoleonic wars. Context is everything, and in order to appreciate these plays it is necessary to look, not just at the *lines* which precede a particular quote, but at the *plays* which preceded them. By looking at the two parts of Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* we shall see how, in writing a play putatively about Henry VI, Shakespeare was actually attempting to write about, and make irrevocable, the death of Tamburlaine.

5 The Ghost of Tamburlaine

As we saw earlier, Bloom and Coleridge both quote the play's opening speech to illustrate, respectively, why Shakespeare must, and why he could not possibly, have written *1 Henry VI*. Coupled with the five lines from *2 Tamburlaine* it is easy to see both their points. Coleridge felt these lines sounded nothing like Shakespeare, Bloom that only Shakespeare could make anything this close to Marlowe. On some level, the two critics were in perfect agreement:

BEDFORD

Hung be the heavens with black. Yield day to night.

Comets, importing change of times and states,

Brandish your crystal tresses in the sky

And with them scourge the bad revolting stars

That have consented unto Henry's death –

King Henry the Fifth, too famous to live long.

England ne'er lost a king of so much worth. (I.i.1-7)

Had this been the conclusion to a play about King Henry V these lines would perhaps not be considered as altogether bad. The second line runs on, to a length reminiscent of the mature Shakespeare, yet the "scourge the bad revolting stars" is unnatural, and self-consciously modelled on Tamburlaine's famous epithet (the Scourge of God), while the interjection to clarify (for the slower members of the audience) exactly who is being mourned is frankly embarrassing. The lines in general are not far distant from what Marlowe himself might have written, were it not for the problem that this brief extract by no means constitutes the period of the court's orations for a character the audience will never meet. These lines *open* a play, are we seriously expected to partake of the grief?

Marlowe handles the ending of *2 Tamburlaine* with comparative tact and restraint, offering a mere five lines to mourn the great conqueror immediately after his death:

Meet heaven and earth, and here let all things end!

For earth hath spent the pride of all her fruit,

And heaven consumed his choicest living fire.

Let earth and heaven his timeless death deplore,

For both their worths will equal him no more. (*2 Tamburlaine* V.iii.249-253)[62]

These closing five lines from *2 Tamburlaine* could at first glance have been lifted directly from the opening scene of *1 Henry VI.* Yet there are aspects of Bedford's opening speech and those which immediately follow it which sets the scene apart from anything Marlowe would have written himself. Marlowe is full of dark humour (*Tamburlaine* perhaps less so than *The Jew of Malta*), but one would not expect to see him courting bathos intentionally. Nor would he kill off the only likely protagonist before his play had started.

Stephen Greenblatt, in his Shakespeare-biography *Will in the World*, claims that it took "a startling aesthetic shock to set Shakespeare's career as a writer fully in motion."[63] That shock was Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*. A knowledge of *Tamburlaine* forms part of the necessary background for understanding the otherwise unwieldy opening scene of the first *Henry VI* play.

Shakespeare probably arrived in London around the same time Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* was doing its initial rounds in 1587. It is safe to assume that Shakespeare saw *Tamburlaine* and its sequel at least once (it was frequently revived), and Greenblatt does not hesitate to describe the impact it had on the young actor as "intense, visceral, indeed life-transforming".[64]

Marlowe had been born the same year as Shakespeare, to a similar background, but was already writing successful plays for the stage (and held a university degree). With the information we possess today Greenblatt is tempted to suggest that Marlowe was somehow Shakespeare's "double", but it is unlikely that Shakespeare knew Marlowe's exact age or parentage. What he must have known was that a young man from the country was reinventing English verse before his very eyes (and ears), and this realization is likely to have left its mark.

[62] Marlowe (1998), 136
[63] Greenblatt (2004), 189
[64] Ibid.

Marlowe showed London what was possible within the confines of English blank verse, but he also broke new ground in what was permissible to be showed on stage. We are all familiar wuth the horrible conclusion of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, but the violence is all reported, not witnessed first-hand. While subtlety can be very powerful, the physical discomfort felt when witnessing the blinding of Gloucester of *King Lear* is far greater than seeing Oedipus emerge with bloodied eyes. Marlowe's stage-actions were likely to stick to mind (Bajazeth and Zabina braining themselves in particular), as was the unapologetically successful main character, elevated above regular morality. Its many battles though, occur off stage, occasionally spilling onto it; the *Henry VI* plays would move the sword-fighting into full view of the audience, where it has happily (?) remained.

Greenblatt asserts that part of *Tamburlaine*'s success lay in its breaking of all established Elizabethan ethical norms.[65] It was liberating to see the viciously cruel super-villain/hero remain triumphant at the play's close. Even if *2 Tamburlaine* ends with the eponymous hero's death his triumphs live on through his (surviving) sons. The lines which close the second play are, like Tamburlaine himself, wholly unapologetic, and finishes the story of Tamburlaine abruptly and fitly, with no moralizing epilogue, evidently deemed unnecessary by the dramatist. He is confident his creation speaks for itself, with no need to guide public opinion. When he commenced his project, Marlowe was not so assured of success, and presented his play through a brief prologue, described by his biographer Park Honan as both "a sales pitch and an art manifesto":[66]

From jigging veins of rhyming mother wits

And such conceits as clownage keeps in pay,

We'll lead you to the stately tent of War;

Where you shall hear the Scythian Tamburlaine,

Threatening the world with high astounding terms

And scourging kingdoms with his conquering sword.

View but his picture in this tragic glass,

[65] Greenblatt (2004), 192
[66] Honan (2005), 167

And then applaud his fortunes as you please. (*1 Tamburlaine* Prologue.1-8)

Marlowe is boldly announcing that the play will break with tradition, from "jigging veins of rhyming mother wits"; he will take the audience to the "stately tent of War". Marlowe's play was certainly not the first to depict war, but it was the first to explicitly invite the audience to judge for themselves.

Marlowe is confident in his creation, or is putting on a confident front, inviting the audience to "applaud his fortunes as you please." This will not be a laughing matter, nor will it be one upholding traditional morality. The audience, before the first scene begins, are asked to withhold judgment from a daring new concept until the play has had a chance to run its course.

The irony, of course, is that Tamburlaine's "fortunes" conclude very much on a high. This violent, merciless "scourge of God" shows no signs of slowing his imperious progress as the first play winds down. His fortunes, on the whole, have favoured the brave.

Having been invited to judge him how was an Elizabethan audience to respond? Evidently, with no more outrage than to invite a sequel.

The prologue for *2 Tamburlaine* is far less bellicose than the first, simply acknowledging that

The general welcome Tamburlaine received

When he arrivèd last upon our stage

Hath made out poet pen his second part (*2 Tamburlaine* Prologue.1-3)

The audience are no longer invited to judge Tamburlaine, as their (partially outraged) approbation has already been established. A brief summary of what to expect from the play follows, but "our poet" is evidently confident after the response to his first drama, seeing no further need to warn his audience to withhold judgment. Marlowe's shocking protagonist has been pressed to the collective bosom. When the second play closes with Tamburlaine's death, his son Amyras eulogizes him almost on the audience's behalf, the play ending immediately after its protagonist's death.

Marlowe, by inviting the audience to judge Tamburlaine in the prologue to the first play had achieved a double effect. He involved the spectators directly, made them complicit to

Tamburlaine's ravages and at the same time brought Tamburlaine to the sixteenth century, and made him one of the audience's peers. It is not the Tamburlaine of ancient Asian history who is being eulogized, but the immediate one of the Elizabethan stage. He left a significant shadow, but also a pair of lucrative shoes that wanted filling.

Anti-Tillyardian critics frequently cite how a trilogy was a thing unheard of on the Elizabethan stage as evidence against a pre-existing plan for three plays on the reign of Henry VI. The trilogy was an ancient concept, but not one which had been brought to the Elizabethan stage, where plays in pairs, such as *Tamburlaine* and Shakespeare's later *Henry IV* plays, were current. I would contend that *Tamburlaine* was, presumably without Marlowe's approval or knowledge, actually made into a sort of trilogy.

Tamburlaine had become a symbol, a recognizable giant of the stage. How were Marlowe's fellow playwrights to move on; where could they take the theatre after *Tamburlaine*? Marlowe, as Park Honan points out, was constantly reinventing himself, his creative progress through successive plays reads like "spokes on a wheel"[67] rather than as an obvious linear progression. Whatever the creator of Tamburlaine should decide to do next would receive attention, regardless of what direction he should pick. When he had first burst on to the stage Marlowe had prefaced his controversial play with a prologue, begging the audience to defer their judgment until the play's close. With the War of the Theatres still some years away, if Shakespeare were to write a similar prologue to one of his plays, overtly announcing the time of Tamburlaine to be at an end, it might have been considered in bad taste. *1 Tamburlaine* set out a credo in its prologue: it would be a play seeking to do something new, and this would shock its audience, who must defer judgment for now. Had *1 Henry VI* been a direct sequel to *Tamburlaine* it would probably have set out its stalls through an identical device, but instead Shakespeare creates a drawn out, near-static opening scene which, through its self-conscious artificiality, plays like a prologue, but allows its points to be communicated in a subtler manner. Ironically, it is precisely because of this unique device that subtlety is usually one of the last words which spring to mind when looking over *1 Henry VI*'s opening exchanges.

The very first line establishes what will be a recurrent potential for bathos in the play. As the Arden 3rd editor Edward Burns points out, "the heavens"[68] was a term often used for the permanent canopy which sheltered the central section of outdoor Elizabethan playhouses from

[67] Honan (2005), 178
[68] Burns (2000), 115

the elements. The canopy would be black for tragic plays, creating the opportunity for Bedford to draw immediate attention to the self-dramatizing nature of these opening exchanges. The line, easily overlooked in performance, is a strangely instructive one, almost surreptitiously addressed to the audience, kindly pointing out that "the heavens" have now been clad in black, denoting a tragedy, which in effect turns day (outside and above the theatre) to darkest night. It smacks rather of modern theatrical practice, where performances frequently open with the actors pointing out that cell-phones should now be turned off. Perhaps the audience are being told to settle down: the play has begun, but this would be a highly unusual technique in an Elizabethan play. The main point of information conveyed is that the audience are present at a tragedy; they will soon be made aware that it is a national one.

As we saw earlier the "Histories" category in which the *Henry VI* plays were eventually placed was one that did not prescribe the plays to be either tragedy or comedy, and this initial tragic scenery need not dictate that the rest of the play will follow in the same vein. Bedford, from the opening lines onwards, takes on himself the meta-theatrical role of on-stage director, and will initiate a later scene by pointing out that "The day begins to break, and night is fled" (II.ii.1).

For now, Bedford goes on to summon comets, also pausing to explain what such an omen would typically signify:

Comets, importing change of times and states,

Brandish your crystal tresses in the sky.

No one enjoys being talked down to, but through these instructive double entendres that is what Bedford appears to be doing to the audience, eventually also spelling out that the person being lamented is "King Henry the Fifth". Including some not wholly naturalistic conversational points during the exposition is not an unheard of technique – Shakespeare would also do this at some length towards the end of his career in *The Tempest* – but Bedford is almost performing the role of a modern-day flight attendant, pointing out every conceivable point of interest. Before, of course, the other mourners take up the torch, spelling out the grief of England in greater detail still. Drawing this much attention to the opening theme of loss stresses its centrality to the play we are about to witness. At the same time, by drawing excessive attention to the tragedy of the play's *opening* it leaves the remainder of the play

open to alternative events. “Histories” need not be either tragedies or comedies, and though there is more than a little of the fatality of *Oedipus Rex* in the air, this unsubtle tragedy reads almost as something the play wishes to get out of the way immediately.

The stress on the black “heavens” indicated to an Elizabethan audience that they were witnessing a tragedy, but this is a tragedy which is very quickly accomplished. The great hero is already dead, and by the end of the first scene, England is left with only “some petty towns of no import” in all of France. The tragedy, to all intents and purposes, commences as a fait accompli. As Bloom points out,[69] the tone of Bedford’s and the subsequent orations would fit the funeral of Tamburlaine as well as it does Henry V. More pertinently, this kind of scene would fit *the end* of a play far better than the opening of one. An audience which had seen Henry V triumph on stage for a good three hours would incline more towards lending a sympathetic ear to his interminable funeral orations than one which has just sat down, baying for (French) blood.

By opening his play with a scene in which Henry V is mourned in a way that recalls Tamburlaine effectively equates the two men. The Marlovian hero is dead. The stage is being set for “Shake-scene”.

The opening scene of *1 Henry VI* is the first, but not the only instance where Shakespeare would kill off a predicatably popular character for the good of his play, wiping the slate clean for the character’s successors. To understand his motivation for such a drastic step it may be useful to glance at his more famous dramatic euthanasia.

At the close of *2 Henry IV* the Epilogue promises that the beloved Falstaff shall return when “our humble author will continue the story”(*2 Henry IV* Epilogue.26-27)[70] Famously, Falstaff never physically appears in *Henry V*; instead Shakespeare has him die beautifully off stage. It is a fine Falstaffian irony that this quintessential comic creation of the English renaissance disappears from the stage in a manner befitting Classical tragedy. Nothing in his life becomes him like the leaving it.

The omission of plump Jack from what was to be a relatively serious play, or at least one Falstaff could not be allowed to dominate as he had the *Henry IV* plays, shows both Shakespeare’s exceptional understanding of the workings of his own craft. In *1 Henry VI*

[69] Bloom (1999), 44
[70] Poole (2005)

Henry V certainly has a tangible presence, but he is not allowed on-stage (unless a production was to opt for an open-coffin solution in the first scene). The effect becomes one of the loss of something mythical, someone not merely human, but a sort of symbol. Such a man had just left the stage, in the form of Tamburlaine.

Shakespeare is sending a message to his audience of what is past, getting it out of the way immediately. In putatively mourning Henry V in such Marlovian tones, the established superman of the stage is being forcefully moved on. Now is the time for Shakespeare's man. Although Harold Bloom may have chosen to ignore it, this is where the real "invention of the human" commences.

That is not to say that Marlowe is being condemned to the refuse pile of history in this opening scene, but the play's obvious exponent of a Marlovian hero is. The values Henry V represents survive in the ageing lords of his own generation, notably Salisbury and, in part, Bedford, whose strong links to France set them apart from the emerging court.

Marlowe does not stand directly for either the dying world of larger than life chivalry or the new one of realpolitiks,[71] but incorporates both. Mainly the opening rhetoric is used to draw attention to the values that are leaving the play as we watch it unfold, and setting the stage, literally, for something new.

Whether that is any excuse for such a dreadful first scene is a discussion for another day.

The intentional archaism of the scene is emphasized by its repetitive use of language:

BEDFORD

England ne'er lost a king of so much worth.

GLOUCESTER

England ne'er had a king until his time.

[…]

What should I say? His deeds exceed all speech;

He ne'er lift up his hand but conquered. (I.i7-8, 15-16)

[71] Coined by Ludwig von Rochau, the term refers to political thinking free of ideological motivation, often used pejoratively as Machiavellian, scheming, amoral.

Gloucester's first and last line use the slightly archaic form "ne'er". In both lines (as in Bedford's last line) an article (*a* king) or an unnatural stress (conque*réd*) could have been sacrificed rather than make "never" monosyllabic. "Ne'er" could be argued as necessary for the sake of the iambs, placing the emphasis on "had" and "king" ("lost" and "king"), but there is something inescapably old fashioned about this entire sequence of speeches. "What should I say?" asks Gloucester, and promptly speaks old-fashioned Marlovian bombast. Bedford has already addressed the audience; perhaps Gloucester is doing the same.

We mourn in black, why mourn we not in blood?

Although the opening exchanges smack of Marlowe stylistically, Marlowe does not open any of his plays with as little apparent understanding of dramatic urgency. As a scene-setter for the play to follow it is quite terrible. We gather that the glorious King Henry V has moved on. This is found upsetting by all. Without attempting to grant individual character to any of the mourners (a recurring feature of the entire trilogy – it is often difficult to tell Lancastrians from Yorkists, or any courtier from any other), Shakespeare treats us to some 50 lines of ever more extravagant laments for the deceased King. Momentary respite is provided as Winchester and Gloucester indulge their lambent animosity, but Bedford is quick to drag the dialogue back onto the beaten track, likening Henry's soul to that of Julius Caesar, only "far more glorious". He is then, finally, interrupted by a messenger, who provides an outline on the dire situation in France. Bedford, grandiose as ever, claims to be on the point of retaking France repeatedly throughout the scene, but the overpowering sense of inertia keeps him grounded until all three messengers have come and gone.

It is the third messenger who finally stirs the ceremoniously mourning court from its torpor, and he does so by introducing us to the play's approximation of a hero. For the quite remarkable introduction Talbot receives the report is worth quoting (almost) in full:

3 MESSENGER

My gracious lords – to add to your laments,

Wherewith you now bedew King Henry's hearse,

I must inform you of a dismal fight

Betwixt the stout Lord Talbot and the French

WINCHESTER

What? Wherein Talbot overcame, is't so?

3 MESSENGER

O no: wherein Lord Talbot was o'erthrown.

The circumstances I'll tell you at more large.

The tenth of August last, this dreadful lord

Retiring from the siege of Orleans,

Having full scarce six thousand in his troop,

By three and twenty thousand of the French

Was round incompassed and set upon.

No leisure had he to enrank his men.

He wanted pikes to set before his archers,

Instead whereof sharp stakes plucked out of hedges

They pitched in the ground confusedly,

To keep the horsemen off from breaking in.

More than three hours the fight continued,

Where valiant Talbot, above human thought,

Enacted wonders with his sword and lance.

Hundreds he sent to hell, and none durst stand him.

Here, there and everywhere enraged he slew.

The French exclaimed the devil was in arms,

All the whole army stood agazed on him.

His soldiers, spying his undaunted spirit,

'A Talbot, a Talbot' cried out amain,

And rushed into the bowels of the battle.

Here had the conquest fully been sealed up,

If Sir John Fastolfe had not played the coward.

[…]

A base villain, to win the Dolphin's grace,

Thrust Talbot with a spear into the back –

Whom all France, with their chief assembled strength,

Durst not presume to look once in the face.

BEDFORD

Is Talbot slain? Then I will slay myself,

For living idly here in pomp and ease

Whilst such a worthy leader, wanting aid,

Unto his dastard foemen is betrayed. (I.i.103-144)

Stout, dreadful lord, valiant, enacting wonders above human thought, sending hundreds to hell; the devil in arms, whom all France, with their chief assembled strength dared not face. These are not words to describe the Lord Talbot as he appears to us in this play. They could feasibly describe Tamburlaine, were it not that he rarely commanded such ungrudging respect from anyone not under the imposing influence of his immediate presence. Talbot is engirdled by myth from the very first.

Lord Talbot, Earl of Shrewsbury, may well have been known to members of the audience as one of the great commanders of the Hundred Years War, but he will not have been as instantly recognizable as King Henry V, even before Shakespeare's plays made him familiar to successive generations, so a little foregrounding should not be out of place. Yet the lengthy (in keeping with the overall tenor of this scene) rendition provided by the messenger could be considered sycophantic, were it not for the rest of the court joining so readily in. Bedford is

one of the more self-consciously dramatic characters of the play, with a penchant for laying it on with a trowel, but he has the advantage of making points we are supposed to pick up on loudly and clearly. The loss of both Henry V and Talbot would be too much for old England, and Bedford is first in wishing to join them on the other side. Unlike the other lords in this scene, he has no real interest in either observing or angling for position at the new court. Remarkably, being both the most vociferous and the opening speaker of the play Bedford refuses to mention the new king once, although referring to himself as Regent of France and continuously speaking of "Henry", but always meaning Henry V. He is not a man in touch with the new court.

Talbot, immediately established as international man of mystery, is a legend in his own time, and his weal, rather than the repeatedly reported deterioration of the English holdings in France, is what rouses the court to action. Bedford is a man of his word, and sets about procuring Talbot's release with immediate effect, although the audience will have to wait for this prodigy, this second Tamburlaine, for a few more scenes, as Shakespeare develops the (in this play almost pointless) feud between Gloucester and Winchester and introduces Joan Puzel.

This report on Talbot's incredible military exploits, which is apparently confirmed as plausible by Bedford's exclamation when it finally winds down, is, as the audience will gradually learn, shockingly wide of the mark. Talbot is neither Hercules, nor any other kind of superhero. The single most absurd aspect surrounding his persona in this play is that everyone around him, including the other commanders, his men, and the French, believe in him as if he were a god of war. The Talbot we will encounter is certainly portrayed as a good commander, but he is neither Coriolanus nor Othello, and least of all is he Tamburlaine.

One reason for imagining this opening scene as an extended prologue is that nothing the audience strictly needs to witness occurs. The various long speeches, finally interrupted by the three messengers some three minutes in, constitute one of Shakespeare's least dynamic opening scenes. The minor squabble between Gloucester and Winchester provides a clue to the direction in which the new Henry V-less court is headed. The general state of affairs is described. And then Talbot, and the current malaise of his fortunes, is described. Barring this we learn very little. The mood, the overall atmosphere, is more than anything else what audiences can take away from this seemingly endless opening scene.

That being said, the technique of introducing a main character before having him appear on stage was one Shakespeare would use again and again, and the most worrying later parallel to the messenger's account of Talbot is perhaps the descriptions of Macbeth's exploits in the opening scenes of that play. The major difference between these two episodes is that when Macbeth is described performing heroic feats on the battlefield it is in grisly detail, as a prophetic foreshadowing of his later predilections. Talbot never lives up to either this initial description, or the one he gives of himself in captivity, yet his myth is allowed to live on for the duration of the play, and even after, "in the world", as Nashe confirms.

Some of the blame for the *Henry VI* plays' enduring unpopularity must be laid at the door of this unwieldy opening scene. Most first-time readers of Shakespeare's complete works will take *1 Henry VI* as their logical entry point to the three plays, and these immobile opening exchanges certainly do not bode well for the plays which are to follow them. When picked apart, sentence by sentence or line by line, there are some good turns of phrase, but as a piece of stagecraft it is undeniably poor.

The opening scene is not what the audience will remember when leaving the theatre some three hours later. Rather, they will be left with the patriotic image of the proven witch Joan Puzel receiving her comeuppance, and the ominous signs that the Hundred Years' War is about to be succeeded by the War of the Roses. In the Arkangel Shakespeare's recorded version the eulogizing takes up exactly three minutes,[72] before the first messenger enters. This makes for an admittedly slow start, but not one that would have seen audiences departing the theatre or dozing off, particularly since it is an English king being mourned – leaving might be interpreted as treason! The tortuous opening exchanges can thus be read as a fairly private dramatist's gesture, either a nod to Marlowe (who may well have attended a performance) or a personal statement of intent – by imitating Marlowe, but driving home the point that something of his has died, Shakespeare is showing the audience that it is time to move forward.

The language, being so recognizably overcooked Marlowe, is an initial concern of the play, but the problem is never fully resolved. The imitation, though real enough, is not exactly an expression of homage; it is a sceptical reply. Shakespeare's preoccupation with creating a new language and a new type of hero is never fully realized in the *Henry VI* plays, but the struggle's clearest early embodiment is in the character of Talbot.

[72] Arkangel Shakespeare (2003)

6 Talbot Approaches

After the opening scene the audience is introduced to Joan Puzel and the French host, before being swept back to England to witness the feuding of Gloucester and Winchester. In spite of the capture of Talbot and the lack of supplies the English are managing to cling on. Until the fated advent of Joan Puzel the English appear to have been doing rather alright without supplies, men or Talbot.

We shall focus on Talbot and his meeting with the mad-brained Salisbury, but should pause briefly to note the comedy of the first French scene. The only potential for humour in the tortuous opening scene is in its inherent bathos, but here it emerges clear and bright at the expense of the French, scoffing at Salisbury's lack of money and men as they prepare to raise the siege as a matter-of-course:

REIGNIER

Let's raise the siege: why live we idly here?

Talbot is taken, whom we wont to fear.

Remaineth none but mad-brained Salisbury,

And he may well in fretting spend his gall;

Nor men nor money hath he to make war.

CHARLES

Sound, sound alarum, we will rush on them.

Now for the honour of the forlorn French:

Him I forgive my death that killeth me

When he sees me go back one foot, or fly.

Here alarum. They are beaten back by the English, with great loss.

CHARLES

Who ever saw the like? What men have I?

Dogs, cowards, dastards! I would ne'er have fled,

But that they left me midst my enemies.

REIGNIER

Salisbury is a desperate homicide;

He fighteth as one weary of his life. (I.ii.13-26)

The French, dismissing the English as too mad to be taken seriously, then resolve to abandon Orleans for now, until the Bastard bring Joan Puzel in.[73] While it cannot be fully transmitted via a written text, the two performances I have witnessed of the fight between the Dolphin and the damsel have been disturbingly amusing affairs. The BBC-version has a playful Joan putting real effort into the sparring, making disturbingly sexual noises and casting meaningful glances all the while.[74] The audio-version recorded by Arkangel Shakespeare sounds downright pornographic.[75] Comic immediately after the decidedly sombre opening scene, this scene quickly points out the "Histories" potential for comedy – Shakespeare's greatest comic creation will be born out of them.

On-stage fighting is often problematic, but between a French Dolphin and a fired up Joan Puzel, exchanging sexual innuendo all the while, it is impossible to take the fight seriously. Yet its very sexuality makes this otherwise comical scene ominous. Until the very end of the play, when Somerset's ill-fated wooing of Margaret will contribute to the English catastrophe at home and abroad, sexuality is very clearly separated from everything English. Their women are excluded from this essentially masculine, martial world, with the odd Frenchwoman attempting and failing to disrupt proceedings. Tamburlaine has his Zenocrate, but that is all the feminine influence he, and thus his plays, will allow.

There is a sense of England being doomed from the opening scene onwards, as the heavens are hung with black and Henry V is gone. By the almost supernatural, sexualized introduction of Joan the English fate is sealed a second time.

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[73] In an interesting aside, Alencon mentions that their countryman Froissart (who was a source consulted by the writers of *Edward III*) had described the English as "all Oliver's and Rolands bred". Coupled with repeated references to Orleans, is it implausible to see the fledgling name-pattern of *As You Like It* emerging already?
[74] BBC, Howell (1981)
[75] Arkangel Shakespeare (2003)

Talbot has the weight of expectations already weighing heavily on his shoulders when he first appears on stage. For a commander announced to be in captivity it does not take him too long before he casually strolls out from Orleans to relieve the besiegers. Mad-brained Salisbury is given very little time to establish any separate identity (he speaks a mere 15 lines before he dies) before his protégé upstages him. How can our man possibly live up to his incredible reputation?

Gloucester ended his first speech in the opening scene by asking himself "What should I say?" and answered suitably in keeping with the archaic diction and larger than life eulogizing of the scene. Talbot does not need to pause to ask himself a similar question, in part thanks to Salisbury's way of instructing him to speak:

Talbot, my life, my joy, again returned?

How wert thou handled, being prisoner?

Or by what means got'st thou to be released?

Discourse, I prithee, on this turret's top (I.iv.22-25)

One might imagine Hamlet in his madness discoursing at length upon the various qualities of this turret's top as opposed to another, but for any sane man there is only one mode in which to answer Salisbury's injunction. Standing on a turret's top outside a besieged city and being "pritheed" by a hero of the French wars to discourse on one's lengthy captivity it is doubtful whether even the usually irreverent Faulconbridge of *King John* would have been able to speak in any other mode. There is a time and a place for everything, as the saying goes, and if ever there was a time and a place for bombastic over-the-top heroic self-representation it would be this.

No one in all of *1 Henry VI* is offered a sweeter greeting than Talbot is by Salisbury, yet there may be a hint of the patronizing of one, older and more distinguished campaigner to a younger. The only other Shakespearean character to be described thus is the boy prince Arthur, while being lamented by his mother Constance:

O Lord! my boy, my Arthur, my fair son!
My life, my joy, my food, my all the world! (*King John* III.iv. 103-104)[76]

Salisbury is one of the veterans of the wars, an emblem. That Talbot is addressed in tones the Duchess Constance reserved for her beloved son is undoubtedly a great honour, but it is patronizing in more senses than one. Although only two pertinent questions are actually posed, Salisbury's effusion reads like a bombardment, and Talbot is able to focus only on the final one, before veering somewhat off track:

The Earl of Bedford had a prisoner

Called the brave Lord Ponton de Saintrailles:

For him was I exchanged and ransomed.

But with a baser man of arms by far,

Once, in contempt, they would have bartered me:

Which I, disdaining, scorned and craved death,

Rather than I would be so vile[77] *esteemed.* (I.iv.26-32)

Talbot is at pains to point out how the man he was traded for was both brave and a Lord, though historically he was a mere freelancing captain from Armagnac. For any lesser man "the Talbot" would, and indeed did, scorn to be exchanged. This is of course old-fashioned chivalry, heroically (though idiotically) refusing to be equated with any "baser man of arms", rather craving death. It is a statement designed to appeal to a man of Salisbury's era and temperament, and one imagines it meets with his approval.

Talbot then vents his wrath at the cowardly knight of the Garter who fled when he was captured, and goes a little too far (as he will do again later, in the presence of the young King Henry):

But oh, the treacherous Fastolfe wounds my heart,

Whom with my bare fists I would execute,

[76] Smallwood (2005)
[77] Ard3 has *peeled*, from F's *pil'd*, but as this is never used in a similar sense elsewhere in Shakespeare I have preferred to retain Ard2's *vile*, which has more immediacy, and is akin to the Talbot's martial mind and limited vocabulary. See Burns (2000), 144, 151

If I now had him brought into my power.

SALISBURY

Yet tellest thou not how thou wert entertained. (I.iv.34-37)

There is again a significant comic potential in this exchange, with Salisbury evidently put out. From having Fastolfe's cowardice wound his heart to expressing a desire to murder him with his bare hands there is a world of difference.

Salisbury, hardly taken aback, kindly directs the prodigal son back onto the path of glorious self-representation, on which he had begun, with a simple question.

Yet tellest thou not how thou wert entertained.

TALBOT

With scoffs and scorns and contumelious taunts.[78]

In open market-place produced they me

To be a public spectacle to all.

"Here", said they, "is the terror of the French,

The scarecrow that affrights our children so".

Then broke I free from the officers that led me

And with my nails digged stones out of the ground

To hurl at the beholders of my shame.

My grisly countenance made others fly;

None durst come near for fear of sudden death.

In iron walls they deemed me not secure:

So great fear of my name 'mongst them were spread

[78] Contumelious, or variants thereof, occur only five times in Shakespeare – twice in this play, once in *2H6*, and later in *Timon of Athens* and *Hamlet*.

That they supposed I could rend bars of steel

And spurn in pieces posts of adamant.

Wherefore a guard of chosen shot I had,

That walked about with me every minute while,

And if I did but stir out of my bed

Ready they were to shoot me to the heart.

SALISBURY

I grieve to hear what torments you endured;

But we will be revenged sufficiently. (I.iv.37-57)

Talbot, having gone to some lengths to underlines just how proud, fierce and most of all *feared* he had been in his (brief?) captivity, Salisbury's response must sound like a disappointing malapropos. Aside from his warm, general feelings for Talbot, Salisbury is utterly uninterested in what the other has to say. The two are not equals, in spite of being historically more or less of an age.

Talbot is at particular pains to stress the value of his own *name*, and how his captivity has only served to heighten the terror this holds for the French. In the play's second scene the French bore (dramatically fairly unconvincing) testimony to this. What Talbot is saying, though self-aggrandizing, is largely accurate.

In this play, Talbot is the living symbol of English heroism, Henry V, Salisbury and Bedford of a dying breed. Perhaps this makes it natural that Salisbury prefers not to listen too carefully to what the youngish Talbot has to say for himself, but, if we compare this opening sally to Talbot's non-posturing speeches, it becomes clear that he is attempting to impress the older man.

The final irony is Talbot's association with what is about to cause Salisbury's death, ("And if I did but stir out of my bed | Ready they were to shoot me to the heart.") while he himself will never be threatened with cannon or pistol while on stage.

Salisbury's death is a coup-de-theatre, his death prefigured from the scene's opening, before the gunner's boy has crossed the stage, linstock in hand, like an "ominous owl of death". In a sense Talbot's release dooms Salisbury.

In the brief exchanges allowed them before the fatal shot is fired, Talbot gives off the impression of being a more astute tactician than any of the other present. Salisbury quizzes the assembly on where to launch the next cannonade, and while Gargrave and Glansdale offer contrasting suggestions Talbot assesses the town and finds that it must either be starved or "with light skirmishes enfeebled" (I.iv.68). Throughout this scene Talbot and Salisbury never communicate particularly well, and Talbot's willingness to see something different than what Salisbury bids him see sets him apart from the others. After the heroic description offered in the opening scene, and his subsequent self-representation as a Samson in captivity, this moment is the first time we witness the pragmatic, modern Talbot, the successful military strategist. Talbot is willing to put his own life at risk, but he is also prepared to use less chivalrous tactics, and to think for himself.

When the cannon strikes Salisbury's one line is telling:

"O Lord, have mercy on us, wretched sinners!" (I.iv.69) Here breaks a noble heart. Salisbury, in spite of speaking only a few lines, has been built up by the French in the earlier scene, in a miniature of the way Talbot was reported at the English court prior to his actual appearance. Salisbury's valiant resistance has made the French and thus the audience (and evidently Talbot) respect him, in spite of his short period on stage and relative taciturnity. As he is dying it is therefore difficult to not find Talbot's eulogy grating at best, as he continues in the unnatural mode he used to describe his own captivity, and mixes in unfeeling observations about Salisbury's injuries:

How far'st thou, mirror of martial men?

One of thy eyes and thy cheek's side struck off?

[…]

Yet liv'st thou Salisbury? Though thy speech doth fail,

One eye thou hast to look to heaven for grace.

The sun with one eye vieweth all the world.

[…]

Speak unto Talbot, nay, look up to him.

Salisbury, cheer thy spirit with this comfort;

Thou shalt not die while –

He beckons with his hand and smiles on me

As who should say, 'When I am dead and gone,

Remember to avenge me on the French.'

Plantagenet, I will; and like thee, Nero,

Play on the lute, beholding the towns burn:

Wretched shall France be only in my name. (I.iv.72-96)

As a lament for a dying man, this is in decidedly poor taste. Talbot will treat Bedford similarly, but there is reason to believe he possesses more inherent respect for Salisbury, who, among his many achievements are the claim that "Henry the Fifth he first trained to the wars". And Talbot does respect Salisbury. He simply has no idea how to address him. Less than 80 lines have passed since Talbot walked triumphantly out onto the turret with the jubilant, almost motherly Salisbury. Suddenly Talbot is supposed to speak appropriately upon the death of one of the great commanders of Henry V's generation, and he comes up painfully short. Pointing out his missing eye, and then attempting to comfort him with a simile on how he still has as many eyes as the sun is unlikely to assuage the dying man's pain. The line "Speak unto Talbot, nay, look up to him" probably reads crueller than it is intended – Talbot is now commanding the speeches, and refers to himself in the third person. Salisbury feels compelled to break Talbot's frantic flow with a gesture, and although Talbot goes rather to town in his interpretation, it is likely that the dying older generation will take comfort only in the promise of an eye for an eye, as it were. Talbot swears revenge, in a theme we shall return to in the Countess of Auvergne-scene.

It is left to Joan Puzel to be the prophetess of this play, but Talbot's closing promise: "Wretched shall France be only in my name." is partly true. His name already carries

tremendous power, and we shall witness how this name alone will win battles for the English troops.

The refusal to move the scene forward is also reminiscent of the play's opening exchanges, and once again it takes a messenger to interrupt the overzealous speechmaker. Finally quite on board with the dying man's last wish, Talbot refuses to leave well enough alone, and courts bathos (in keeping with the comic trend from the opening scene), even after being made aware of the impending battle:

Hear, hear, how dying Salisbury doth groan:

It irks his heart he cannot be revenged.

Frenchmen, I'll be a Salisbury to you.

Puzel or pussel, Dolphin or dogfish,

Your hearts I'll stamp out with my horse's heels

And make a quagmire of your mingled brains. (I.iv.103-108)

Even in the recently much-maligned NFL, this would be unacceptable pre-game chat. Talbot, having just sworn that France shall be wretched in his name only, now subsumes into himself the dead Salisbury, and attempts to speak accordingly. The scene is characterised by Talbot speaking some of his worst, most over the top lines of the entire play. In his desire to please Salisbury it seems he is attempting to speak in a certain mode not wholly natural to him. Bedford, with his repeated speechmaking and posturing is frequently over-the-top, often silly, but with him it seems a calculated effect. For Talbot, in this scene in particular, the terrible speeches appear to be a consequence of his attempt to speak the way Salisbury, the man of Henry V's world, would have spoken had he been in a similar position. He truly is attempting to be a Salisbury, not just to the French, but to himself, and the result is not appealing.

There is a sense of a modern hero trapped in an archaic pattern of speech with which he can never feel quite comfortable. When we compare Talbot's speeches in this, his first and thus rather pace-setting scene, with his conversations with Burgundy and the Countess of Auvergne, a different man is revealed. Had Talbot been able to speak good Tamburlaine, which is what this reads like a misguided attempt at, the transition could be easily explained away by different compositors attempting different effects, emulating different playwrights,

but Bedford, Gloucester and Exeter actually speak passable Marlowe. Talbot, when he attempts a similar register, falls embarrassingly flat, and is perhaps more reminiscent of the poorer passages of Kyd's *Spanish Play*.

Talbot's world is about to undergo a second shock, as he, utterly unprepared is put face to face with Joan Puzel for the first time.

Joan Puzel hits Talbot's world like the cannonball hit Salisbury. His honour, till now a thing untarnished, is suddenly up for questioning. Spurred on by revenge, on a battlefield where Salisbury had recently shown his mettle, Talbot and the English are beaten back by a Frenchwoman. For the first time, but far from the last, Talbot reverts to his shield of accusing Joan of being in league with the devil and thus some kind of witch. It is interesting to note that all the fighting in *Tamburlaine* took place off-stage, while here we are presented with an on-stage fight between a man and a woman (technically for the second time in this play, but the first one (between the Dolphin and Puzel) can be interpreted variously). One need not resort to cage-braining to shock an audience, but all the on-stage fighting in the *Henry VI* plays is bound to have made it popular with the pre-Hollywood equivalent of action-film enthusiasts.

Talbot's duel with Joan can emasculate him or confirm her demonic powers, depending on the production. The only stable point is that Talbot has fought on-stage, after his various descriptions as a Herculean warrior, akin to Samson in captivity, and he has come up short against a young girl. The historical Talbot may have been aging at this point, but the only indications Talbot is supposed to be an old man in this play appear during his final stand. Until his dying moments Talbot's age, unlike for instance that of Bedford, is never remarked upon.[79] Were he meant to be an octogenarian it is probable Joan would have availed herself of this fact in their many insult-exchanges.

[79] He is described as having a war-wearied limbs by Lucy in IV.iii.71, but after supposedly taking 50 towns for England this is no definite indication of old age. He is obviously not a young man, but there is nothing to suggest he has become enfeebled by age until his very final scene.

7 The First Talbot Sequence

The Talbot-section of *1 Henry VI* is essentially split into two sequences. The first sequence follows Talbot's relationship with Salisbury, from their meeting on the turret's top until Salisbury's body is placed squarely in the middle of Orleans. The Countess of Auvergne scene which immediately follows the Salisbury-sequence also features Talbot, and may be said to close a portion of the play, but its tenor is of such a different nature to the other scenes in this sequence that it is tempting to regard it as entirely separate. It is the first of two long "island"-scenes in this play, and conforms neither to the overall pattern nor to the theme of what preceded it, but offers a valuable fresh perspective both on the events of the play and its military protagonist.

Within the first sequence, the scene where Bedford and Burgundy are introduced forms both a fresh start and a continuation of the on-going concern with Salisbury, as new characters are brought on stage to achieve the same goal that the old ones attempted, and glide more or less into the same patterns.

A French Sergeant and a Sentinel exchange a few quick words, establishing the French side and the English side of the stage.[80] Some uncertainty surrounds the comical aspect of the introduction of the three English generals here. The *First Folio*'s scene directions allows for Talbot, Bedford and Burgundy to enter alone, carrying the scaling ladders themselves. This would of course be unrealistic, but in keeping with the spirit of Holinshed's presentation of the episode, in which the Englishmen, with a negligible army, expelled the French from the town (of Le Mans, not Orleans as here)[81] by merely crying "saint George! Talbot!"[82]

Holinshed goes on to elaborate the significance of Talbot's name:

Lord Talbot, being both of noble birth, and of haultie courage, after his comming into France, obteined so manie glorious victories of his enimies, that his onelie name was & yet is dreadfull to the French nation; and much renowmed [sic] amongst all other people.

[80] See Nuttall's treatment of "Primitive" stage spacing: Nuttall (2007) 25-26, 45
[81] Burns (2000), 169
[82] Holinshed (1965), 97. The episode used for this scene is not actually connected to Orleans, as it is here.

This earle was the man that at that time, by whose wit, strength, and policie, the English name was much fearefull and terrible to the French nation; which of himself might both appoint, command, and doo all things in manner at his pleasure; in whose power (as it appeared after his death) a great part of the conquest consisted: for, suerlie, he was a man both painefull, diligent, and readie to withstand all dangerous chances that were at hand, prompt in counsel, and of courage inuincible; so that in no one man, men put more trust; nor any singular person wan the harts so much of all men.[83]

According to Holinshed then, due to his successes in France Talbot's very name was (and remained) fearful to the French. Through him, the name of the English itself was terrible to their enemy. Most beloved, most trusted and most feared, of exemplary courage and ready to withstand all dangers, Talbot was a single man in whom "a great part of the conquest consisted". A perfect candidate then, for an English, more politically correct, Tamburlaine. With Henry V very much buried, and Salisbury deceased, Talbot would be the immediate candidate to take up sovereignty on the battlefield. Instead, Bedford unhistorically arrives.

Talbot walks on stage speaking deferentially to both Bedford and Burgundy, outlining the latter's significance to the audience, while high-handedly plotting a stratagem to avenge the perceived French deceitfulness in attempting to raise the siege by actually returning fire. Bedford continues in the vein he opened the play, and takes up Talbot's hint that the French are only successful through unnatural sorcery. Burgundy's introductory sentiment regards, ironically one suspects, traitors and the company they keep, before he proceeds to inquire hungrily about Joan Puzel. As we saw in Talbot's previous scene before the gates of a Oreans, he is the one who gets to the point, and offers the concrete, sensible martial advice. Bedford, newly arrived from England, follows Talbot's commands in this scene, and the action meets with success.

The plan itself seems a rather risky venture, effectively employing the three supreme commanders of the English contingent as crack troops, which, while clearly heroic, hardly constitutes sustainable policy for modern warfare. Arguably, Talbot is already exhibiting a slight death wish after the death of Salisbury.

The obvious parallel to this scene in Shakespeare's plays is Coriolanus' (or Martius, as he is then known) single-handed storming of the walls of Corioles.

[83] Holinshed (1965), 98

While both Livy and Plutarch state that Coriolanus had a small band of men along to assist him, Shakespeare chose to present him alone.[84] This has obvious theatrical value, as it singles him out, makes the exploit an iconic moment of military bravery, whereas in the Roman histories it counts as just one of his many triumphs. In Shakespeare the solitary figure appears on the walls of Corioles, inspiring his shamefaced men to rush to his aid, whereas his cursing had previously alienated them. The town is taken, and Coriolanus emerges, determined to rush off to Cominius' aid, in despite of his wounds. Shakespeare paints a picture of a man who stands very much alone, but also one who, on the battlefield at least, can afford to do so, through his superhuman strength and determination.

Greenblatt pointed out that the world of *Henry VI* is populated by myriad would-be-Tamburlaines, while "Marlowe's play concentrated all of the world's driving ambition in a single charismatic superhero".[85] Coriolanus' tragedy is that he does not, like Tamburlaine had, hold the hearts and minds of the people, believing himself above them in birth and valour. Talbot, while instigating this heroic action, is not undertaking it single-handedly, and throughout the play there is a focus on how Talbot as a symbol is universally beloved. His name is a mantra, Coriolanus' becomes a curse. With the French soon to emerge confusedly in their shirts and jump the wall, the capture of Orleans has more of a comic character than Coriolanus' iconic act of bravery, and is somehow less serious than the battle where Coriolanus earns his name.

Naturalistic is they very last word to describe Talbot's dealings with those around him up to this point in the play. It is a relief to us then, that just before he goes over the top he has one of his rare moments to himself, and speaks a less awkward verse than he habitually does when addressing Salisbury or Bedford. Simply, in a style more likely to have agreed with Hemingway than his usual bombast:

And here will Talbot mount, or make his grave.

Now, Salisbury, for thee and for the right

Of English Henry, shall this night appear

How much in duty I am bound to you both. (II.i.34-37)

[84] Livy (2006), 111, Plutarch (2010) volume III,. 95
[85] Greenblatt (2004), 197

This is noble, simple, and personal. It is not for St. George or England, but for his current king, whom he has yet to meet, and for his recently deceased role model, that Talbot is risking his life. There are no end-rhymes, and the iambs emphasize the words *Salis*bury, *Eng*lish *Hen*ry and *du*ty. Far from the blustering "bully boy" Harold Bloom so briskly dismissed, we have, for once, a self-effacing Talbot, simply loyal to his king, speaking uncomplicated, naturalistic blank verse before a significant event. Coriolanus ran around the battlefield cursing his own men, Talbot, prior to putting his life on the line, is at his least self-conscious, and most likeable. He may be more entertaining and personable in subsequent exchanges, but this shows a brief glimpse of a noble man simply willing and able to do what needs to be done.

The English, following Holinshed, take up the cry of "Saint George, a Talbot!", leaving his name ringing in the ears of the spectators as the confusion of the French is comically revealed on stage, where they also invoke his name, as either "a fiend of hell" or one favoured by "the heavens".

Talbot's name carries power. It has been invoked repeatedly during this scene, first by Bedford "Ascend, brave Talbot", then by Talbot himself, before the French discuss his prowess, the Bastard of Orleans also mentioning him by name. Every major French character discusses Talbot before the play is at an end. Throughout the scene he will be the rallying call of the English; a single soldier drives the French before him by merely invoking Talbot's name:

*Alarum. Enter [an English] Soldier, crying, '*a Talbot, a Talbot'*; they fly, leaving their clothes behind.*

SOLDIER

I'll be so bold to take what they have left.

The cry of 'Talbot' serves me for a sword –

For I have loaden me with many spoils,

Using no other weapon but his name. (II.i.78-81)

As we shall soon see, Talbot's physical presence is not intimidating in itself, it is his name, his reputation, which sends the French scrambling. His presence in a battle is important, and

he clearly inspires his men to bravery by setting a personal example (as was narrated in the opening scene), but it is the idea of Talbot, rather than his physical reality, which carries all before it. By contrast Tamburlaine, when we first encounter him at the very outset of his martial career, carries the exact opposite effect. He is scoffed at as a worthless shepherd, but wins improbable victory after victory, the most significant by rhetoric and appearance alone. "Simply to look at Tamburlaine is to see the embodiment of Herculean power, to look on Talbot, by contrast, is to be disappointed."[86] Greenblatt bases his statement on the Countess' response to Talbot's physique – he is no superman, but she is the only one who finds him a "weak and writhled shrimp" (II.iii.22).

One begins to suspect that Talbot's reputation now serves *him* for a sword too.

For the fame which appears to rest on the opinions of many fosters a certain unshakeable belief in a man's worth which is then easily maintained and strengthened in minds already thus disposed and prepared.[87]

This "truth", lifted from Baldesar Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier*, rings true for Talbot. It helps to explain why this martial hero is repeatedly put out by Joan Puzel, whose irreverent approach to war provides something new, which does not fit into the established norms of chivalry which Talbot understands. Her gleeful sexualized violence is baffling, and she has no respect for reputation, knowing that she offers something entirely new. This alone does not make her superhuman, but it evidently makes her strong enough to stand up to Talbot, who in a single battle is supposed to have sent hundreds to hell (I.i.123). When his reputation is ignored, most of Talbot's power evaporates.

The Countess of Auvergne's descriptions of Talbot, which has led directors to cast a short actor in his part ("shrimp") should not necessarily be taken at face value either, *The Book of the Courtier* again providing a good definition of reputation and how it may affect expectations:

It has several times been my experience (and, I believe, that of others) to have decided, in the light of what was said by those able to judge, that something was of outstanding quality before I saw it; but then, when I have come to see it I have been greatly disappointed, and it has fallen a long way short of what I expected.

[86] Greenblatt (2004), 197
[87] Castiglione (2003), 141-142

This has been the result of relying too much on hearsay and having formed such an exaggerated notion in my mind of what to expect that when I have had to compare what I anticipated with the real thing, for all its possible excellence and grandeur, the latter has seemed of little or no account.[88]

The Book of the Courtier was first translated into English as early as 1561, by one Thomas Hoby, and Shakespeare has been shown to use it for some of his later plays. It would have been equally available at this early stage of his career, and its explication of how an exalted reputation can work both for and against a person is a valuable key to understanding Talbot's aberrant fluctuations from omnipotent god of war to weak writhled shrimp and back again.

In spite of leaning heavily on his reputation, Talbot is in effect invincible for most of the play. Joan can match him in hand to hand combat, but she cannot defeat him as she did the Dolphin. He may offer up a prayer before climbing the wall of Orleans, as well as repeatedly swearing (and forcing others to swear with him) to take towns/revenge or to die trying, but Talbot cannot be killed as long as he has a united English military at his back.

1 Henry VI is a play steeped in pageantry, ritual and repetition. One of the most striking symmetries is the two burial scenes. After the English victory Salisbury's body is carried on stage to a dead march[89], Bedford opens the processional mourning; the eulogies go on for a good long whie, before a messenger enters to disrupt the obsequies. Bedford's brief speech even refers back to his (and the play's) opening line:

The day begins to break, and night is fled,

Whose pitchy mantle overveiled the earth. (II.ii.1-2)

The French have fled, and so has night, but this battle was not an Agincourt or a Bosworth Field, there has been no decisive victory, and no threat has been quelled. The English have at last taken control of Orleans, but that is all. From Bedford's lines there is the suggestion that some great evil has been dispelled, and that day and light can only now return to the earth. For Bedford this is somehow true.

[88] Castiglione (2003), 142

[89] The *First Folio* places the dead march at 2.1, when Talbot, Bedford and Burgundy are preparing their surprise attack of Orleans. John H. Long in his *Shakespeare's Use of Music* suggests that the dead march is actually the typically slower paced French march, used as a subterfuge, but his argument is ultimately as strained as it is suddenly dropped. Even if a dead march should be sounded during 2.1 it would be unnatural to omit it from a state funeral such as Salisbury's. See Long (1971), 21-22.

From the play's opening scene Bedford reveals a penchant for absurd theatricals. After mourning Henry V (whose star he claimed surpassed Caesar's), Bedford, in turn, warned one messenger to speak softly lest Henry's corpse burst through his coffin in anger, was deeply offended at Gloucester doubting his forwardness when Bedford had just, in his mind, mustered an army "Wherewith already France is overrun" and then threated to slay himself when inferring Talbot's demise (I.i.62-64, 100-103, 141). That Bedford, as Regent, has come to France, ransomed Talbot, and then successfully captured a city side by side with that imp of fame has really demonstrated his mettle (or forwardness if he prefers). Bedford's rather hyperbolical lines then, are actually an appropriate representation of what this (quite unhistorica) victory means to Bedford, and spoken as they are at another funeral procession must put us in mind of the play's opening line, spoken by the same man under similar circumstances:

Hung be the heavens with black. Yield day to night.

The play, having begun as a tragedy, with "the heavens" illustrating England's sorrow for all to see, has now, through this taking of Orleans, met with some sort of happy ending. Night has yielded to day. Bedford has done what he set out to do, and may now die reasonably content.

The night, and the battle, is past, and a change has occurred in Bedford. Having led the obsequies at court for his elder brother the King, he here defers to Talbot. Ever one for pomp and ceremony, Bedford ensures he gets to speak the opening lines about the battle newly ended, but leaves the honouring of Salisbury to the man who served with him. As the only character present at both ceremonies, Bedford here takes a step back, his mini-tragedy seemingly resolved, and leaves the position of chief mourner to Talbot. One immediately wishes he had not.

The burial of Salisbury prompts the third of Talbot's long speeches.[90] Salisbury, through no fault of his own, brings out the worst in Talbot.

Bring forth the body of old Salisbury,

And here advance it in the market-place,

The middle centre of this cursed town.

[90] The previous two being his initial introduction and the "lament" for the dying Salisbury.

Now have I paid my vow unto his soul.

For every drop of blood was drawn from him

There hath at least five Frenchmen died tonight.

And that hereafter ages may behold

What ruin happened in revenge of him,

Within their chiefest temple I'll erect

A tomb wherein his corpse shall be interred,

Upon the which, that everyone may read,

Shall be engraved the sack of Orleans,

The treacherous manner of his mournful death,

And what a terror he had been to France. (II.ii.4-17)

Talbot, in poor form, focuses on "old Salisbury", as he will soon insist on Bedford's "crippling old age". Although ostensibly honouring these peers of Henry V he is constantly distancing himself from them by remarking on their age, whereas the historical Talbot was more or less of an age with both Bedford and Salisbury.

Whenever he addresses or refers to Salisbury Talbot becomes obsessed with blood and an eye for an eye, Old Testament justice. Every drop of blood has apparently led to the death of five Frenchmen, although the battle we just witnessed hardly appeared steeped in blood. Why should the newly quelled populace be introduced to Salisbury's corpse in the "middle centre", their marketplace, until the tomb, within "their chiefest temple", is ready? The "middle centre of this cursed town" recalls Talbot's reply to Salisbury's prompting "Yet tellest thou not how thou wert entertained":

In open market-place produced they me

To be a public spectacle to all.

The two men's first conversation again makes this scene feel as though something has come full circle. Why Talbot should wish Salisbury to suffer the fate the French forced on him is beyond the forces of ordinary logic.

Shakespeare has chosen to attach an unhistorical degree of symmetry to the city of Orleans. Talbot appeared outside its walls in his introductory scene, by implication having been released from there. Historically, Salisbury was buried in England, and the English failed to recapture Orleans. The details used for Talbot's successful stratagem are lifted from the earlier siege of Le Mans, elaborated by Hall.[91] Talbot's grand gesture of burying Salisbury inside Orleans' walls, during the siege of which he was killed, may make poetic sense; the underlying historical fact that the English never recaptured the city opens the play for more bathos. The tomb for his corpse, and its engraving of the sacking of Orleans, for everyone to read, is piling it on a little thick for something which quite simply never happened.[92]

Talbot, ever prepared to change the tenor of his longer speeches at the drop of a dime, closes this one with the sudden question:

But, lords, in all our bloody massacre,

I muse we met not with the Dolphin's grace,

His new-come champion Joan of Aire,

Nor any of his false confederates. (II.ii.18-21)

This is no way to end a eulogy, bur thanks to Talbot's inappropriate, if business-like, interruption, the entrance of the messenger some lines later does not jar quite as badly as the first messenger of the opening scene did. The tone is already less elevated, the shift actually began with Bedford's opening lines, heralding the morning.

The messenger enters, not exactly bearing urgent news, but full of flattery which is readily accepted. Talbot, tellingly, answers the heap of proffered compliments by referring to himself not simply in the third person, but as an actual concept rather than a man, replying to the messenger's

[91] Burns (2000), 169
[92] Shakespeare makes the English retake Orleans (unhistorically), but lifts elements from the later siege of Le Mans, where according to Holinshed, there were hardly any casualties.

Which of this princely train

Call ye the warlike Talbot, for his acts

So much applauded through the realm of France?

With

Here is the Talbot. Who would speak with him? (II.ii.34-37)

This is grandiloquence on a large scale, and certainly only fitting (if at all) for royalty. When dealing with Salisbury Talbot has been at pains to prove himself, to talk himself up, but after this recapture of Orleans he has arrived at a more secure identity, in a way very similar to how Coriolanus was a shoe-in for public office after the taking of Corioles.[93] Talbot has created his own myth, and buried Salisbury, and suddenly the play changes, from a procession of alarums and muffled drums, to include a surprisingly "modern" scene as Talbot goes off to "encounter with" the Countess of Auvergne.

Talbot, very much one of the lads now that his "glory fills the world with loud report", invites Bedford and Burgundy along to meet the Countess, but Bedford declines, for the sake of good manners and decency. Talbot has given no indication of any unmannered behaviour so far (bombast and cursing the enemy obviously excepted), and may be inviting the other two leaders as a matter of simple courtesy.

Bedford, as his various funeral speeches have denoted, is concerned with the proper ceremonies, and would believe it to be wrong to accompany Talbot to meet the Countess. Burgundy is a shifty Frenchman, but is not given the opportunity to respond to Talbot's semi-lewd invitation. Talbot, as soon as Salisbury's obsequies were dispatched with, inquired after "Joan of Aire", he is then suddenly invited to "encounter with" a Countess. It is as if once the promised revenge of Salisbury was duly accomplished, Talbot's mind became available for softer purposes than wars and violence.

[93] Bedford is referring to the victory over the French, who are fleeing, but the battle, unusually for the *Henry VI* plays, has not been fought onstage, and every indication is that it has been at worst a light skirmish.

8 The Countess of Auvergne

Critics have long recognized the juxtaposition of the Countess of Auvergne scene with the subsequent Rose Garden one,[94] and the two scenes are typically the best known and most admired scenes of *1 Henry VI*.

The Countess of Auvergne scene provides a comic break from the chaotic warring and plotting of the rest of the play, and is in certain respects reminiscent of the Countess of Salisbury scene of *Edward III* (a scene Shakespeare is suspected to have written). Both scenes are steeped in sexual puns, with the two sexes battling one another for supremacy and the initiative shifting back and forth. The scenes, equally unhistorical, have a few key differences. One shows a "lascivious King" (*Edward III* iii.175)[95] in unlawful lust, and shows him thus at the play's outset, before he has had a chance to establish himself as a good man in any other sense. He is still King Edward III, and the playwrights promptly sweep him off to the wars as soon as he has realized the error of his ways, where he is famously successful. One may also speculate whether Edward's lusting for the beautiful countess was set up as a conscious device to restore unquestionable heterosexuality after Marlowe's depiction of his father's bi-curious predilections in *Edward II*.[96]

Regardless of the motivation behind the Countess of Salisbury scene in *Edward III*, the Countess of Auvergne scene does not paint Talbot in any very untoward light, but does render him more tangibly modern than many of his preceding appearances, leading some scholars to speak of several different Talbots.

This idea of separating the Talbot of the Countess of Auvergne scene from the "others", first put forward by Sigurd Burckhardt, was set out to accommodate his assertion that Talbot, having railed on the French for being cowardly traitors in previous scenes, here becomes a plotter himself. Talbot, writes Burckhardt, "is the more successful plotter because he does not naively and vainly assert himself as a "first person," a substantial being in and of himself. He

[94] Riddell (1977)
[95] Wells (2005), 268
[96] There are also the obvious parallels with the biblical King David and Batsheba. The story of David's lust for Uriah's wife may not rank amongst his proudest moments, but any comparison to the great King David must be at least partially positive.

is not what he is."[97] Burckhardt claims for Talbot knowledge of "the secret of self-effacement". Talbot may know several secrets, but self-effacement rarely appears to be one of them. He is well aware of his dependence on troops, he is not Hercules, but self-effacement is hardly the reason "the Talbot" finds himself in the Countess' castle, he goes there feeling that his fame has justified her curiosity, but wary precisely in the knowledge of what his reputation means to the French.

Burckhardt continues "We must be clear that this is the Talbot of the episode, not that of the rest of the play." James A. Riddell felt compelled to answer Burckhardt's claims in an essay in the Shakespeare Quarterly, where he finds the claims that there are several Talbots unnecessary. Instead he posits "two related virtues of the hero shown in this scene which are wholly consistent with the character of Talbot in the rest of the play. They are humility and disdain of vindictiveness."[98]

Riddell goes on to examine some characteristics of magnanimity. While Riddell's arguments are generally well made, it is a brave man who brings the phrase "wholly consistent with the character of Talbot in the rest of the play" to the table without offering an extensive analysis of Talbot's various modes of speech. I am arguing that Talbot, while he takes on many roles over the course of the play, remains essentially true to himself, but to claim him particularly endowed with humility or free of vindictiveness is oversimplification, especially as immediate examples to the contrary are to be found in the preceding scene.

Humble men do not, as a rule, respond to requests regarding their whereabouts in the third person, nor do they preface themselves with the definite article. Further, the ostensible purpose of the (also invented) previous scene was to gain revenge for Salisbury's death:

For every drop of blood was drawn from him

There hath at least five Frenchmen died tonight.

And that hereafter ages may behold,

What ruin happened in revenge of him

Within their chiefest temple I'll erect

[97] Burckhardt (1967), 15
[98] Riddell (1977)

A tomb wherein his corpse shall be interred,

Upon the which, that everyone may read,

Shall be engraved the sack of Orleans (II.ii.8-15)

Particularly when we consider that these lines, and the events surrounding them, are either invented or cut and pasted from a myriad places and characters in the sources, insisting on Talbot's "disdain of vindictiveness" becomes untenable. Talbot, although a symbol, reveals himself in the Countess of Auvergne scene as a mere man, and as such, is by nature vindictive.

Riddell defines the idea of "magnanimous man", citing how the Greeks actually lauded trickery above violence, while the Romans reversed this position.[99] Without really resolving Talbot's own plotting, we are informed that two "closely related aspects of magnanimity are the hero's generosity of spirit and his indifference to petty insult and to revenge", so that Talbot could be angry with the French at Rouen, but is here prepared to overlook the Countess' petty machinations. Again, Talbot's famed humility is cited, exemplified by his shadow/substance-speech to the Countess.

I am but shadow of myself:

You are deceived, my substance is not here;

For what you see is but the smallest part

And least proportion of humanity.

I tell you, madam, were the whole frame here,

It is of such a spacious and lofty pitch

Your roof were not sufficient to contain't. (II.iii.49-55)

As we considered earlier, context is important, and Talbot's supposed humility in offering the description of himself as a mere "shadow" if denied the aid of his soldiers actually picks up on, and plays with, the Countess' earlier assertion that

Long time thy shadow hath been thrall to me;

[99] Riddell (1977)

For in my gallery thy picture hangs.

But now the substance shall endure the like (II.iii.35-37)

Talbot laughs, claiming he is amused by the Countess' "fondness" in believing she has captured aught but his shadow. The shadow/substance analogy is then developed further, but as a game in which Talbot shows his superiority to the Countess in every conceivable way, turning her own words and attempted sorcery against her, outplotting her in his planning for all eventualities, and hardly showing himself as the "straightforward, humble soldier" of Riddell's reading.

Riddell quotes Hurault:

There is not a thing more beseeming a noble minded man, than to be of great courage and loftie in adversitie, the which would ill-beseeme him in prosperitie. And as Plutarch saith, like as they that walke with a statelie gate, are accounted vain-glorious, and yet notwhitstanding, that maner of marching is allowed and commended in them that goe to battell: even so he that advanceth his mind in adversitie, is deemed to be of excellent and unvanquishable courage, as having a brave port and stout countenance to encounter adversitie, which in prosperitie would ill beseeme him.[100]

To suggest that Talbot demonstrates humility in triumph is to miss the detail that Talbot, when he relates the events of his captivity upon being introduced to us, is a free man, relating his own haughtiness in adversity. In attempting to unify Talbot Riddell makes too many allowances for him, ignoring strong evidence to the contrary. What he fails to register is the context of the different manifestations of Talbot's persona. Talbot acts like a boisterous buffoon in front of Salisbury, trying too hard for acceptance, but shows himself an intelligent, modern commander whenever consulted on, or left in charge of, military strategy.

In front of the Countess of Auvergne Talbot is essentially wooing, although the insults levelled at his person appear to (quite naturally) rile him. Yet he is not "martial Talbot" in this scene, it is a comic interlude, and Talbot plays it as such. There is no one present he needs impress or live up to, all he needs to do is topple a scheming Frenchwoman. He does so with aplomb.

[100] Riddell (1977), 288-289

The “heavens”, as Bedford informed us in the previous scene, are no longer hung with black, and the “Histories” continue their existence as a bewildering genre. Having just demonstrated that a history-play may feature unhistoric conquest scenes alongside unhistoric comic scenes, we are about to witness an unhistoric causality scene, as Shakespeare invents the start of the Wars of the Roses in the Temple Garden.

The Countess of Auvergne scene provides the key to our appreciation of Talbot as a more modern man than his peers, and it makes a reader sympathize with him all the more when this fairly good natured exchange is immediately contrasted with the Temple Garden scene. Talbot, in foiling the Countess and making much of his own relative weakness is humanized after his earlier grandiloquent raving. The idea of Talbot cannot be equated with the man, but the man knows very well how to take advantage of the concept. Above all, Talbot emphasizes his own adaptability, without ever being in danger of becoming identified by Joan’s (rather anti-French) taunt: “Done like a Frenchman: turn and turn again!” Talbot is whom he needs to be, when he needs to be.

9 The Second Talbot Sequence

When we next meet Talbot the first seeds for the Wars of the Roses have been planted, and England's fortunes are on the wane. The first Talbot sequence showed Talbot with a united nation behind him, recapturing Orleans to avenge Salisbury's death, with no signs of imminent deterioration in the English fortunes. While we have been away from Talbot the world of the play has moved in a sinister direction. The Temple Garden scene has given the audience a visual clue to the imminent outbreak of the civil war, Richard has been confirmed in his ambition by the dying Mortimer and the young king has shown his face and demonstrated his inability to govern.

After the long Orleans-sequence had concluded we were treated to the interesting Countess of Auvergne-scene, where our man showed some decidedly modern traits. It is frustrating then to find him immediately back in the wars, this time fighting over Rouen, and again being outfoxed by Joan Puzel, mouthing his old curses. Puzel at least pays Talbot the tribute of referring to the English as "the Talbonites" (III.ii.27).

When Talbot appears on stage he reverts immediately to his default accusations of the French and Puzel of dabbling in treachery and sorcery (before vowing revenge). This is a disappointing regress for our man, who spits his overly familiar lines before darting off stage. After the closure provided by carrying out his promise to Salisbury, and the excellent Countess of Auvergne scene, it is disappointing to see Talbot revert back to his primitive war-persona. Presumably someone needed to represent the English surprise at the French subterfuge, and vow the prescribed revenge, and it would be unseemly for Bedford to do so, carried in as he is soon afterwards in his chair. Talbot, made to deliver this unimaginative drivel, even makes sure he repeats every single accusation twice: treason and treachery, witch and sorceress, damned and hellish.

The French appear on the walls of Rouen to taunt their recently bested foes. Bedford, predictably theatrical, is carried on stage in a chair, and repeats his fruitless calls to urgency of the opening scene: "O let no words, but deeds, avenge this treason." When Joan taunts his old age and crippled state Talbot replies in kind, showing her that anyone she can taunt, he can taunt better:

Becomes it thee to taunt his valiant age

And twit with cowardice a man half dead?

This is not a speech expressly designed to make Bedford feel younger, though "valiant age" is at least respectful, "A man half dead" somewhat less so. Being as ever unable to engage in entirely successful oratory, Talbot appears at least as unable to speak well with Joan present as he was while Salisbury's long shadow dominated his consciousness. There is some sexual innuendo in his exchanges with Joan in this scene, but unlike his dealings with the Countess of Auvergne Talbot is inelegant and clumsy in his dialogue, attempting alliteration through "Foul fiend of France", accusing Joan of being surrounded by paramours before calling her "Damsel" as he demands a "bout" with her himself. Unsurprisingly, the newly victorious Joan is very little put out by his puny railing, perched safely on the town walls. Talbot is then gifted the potentially single funniest line in the entire play:

[The English whisper together in counsel.]

JOAN

God speed the parliament: who shall be the speaker?

TALBOT

Dare ye come forth and meet us in the field? (III.ii.59-60)

The French, having just won Rouen back through a clever subterfuge, are cordially invited by the English to surrender their advantage, and issue forth to fight in the open. If this were a spontaneous demand by the theatrically inclined traditionalist Bedford it might sound less absurd, but this is the best idea the collected English, after drawing apart for an impromptu council, are able to come up with. There is more than a whiff of Monty Python's *Quest for the Holy Grail* in this exchange, as the dying breed attempt in vain to make the new world conform to their dying ideals. This scene alone is reason enough to track down the 1981 BBC-version of the play, with Trevor Peacock playing a markedly diminutive Talbot (in keeping with the Countess of Auvergne's disappointment, the actor is a good head shorter than most of his colleagues). As the English assembly splits up to have Talbot offer their challenge the gathered faces are straighter than ever, strained in mock solemnity.[101] Modern

[101] BBC, Howell (1981)

men, even professional actors, find the absurdity of this request amusing. The Bedford of Shakespeare's play presumably does not.

Bedford, in being carried around in his chair as he is dying is reliving a favourite Arthurian motif, lifted from Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain*. In canto VIII.23 King Uther Pendragon (Arthur's father) has fallen so ill that he must be transported to the battlefield in a litter. His Saxon enemies scoff and scorn, and in their arrogance leave the besieged town's gates open, whereupon the Britons simply rush in and cause havoc. The enemy sally forth to face them in the open field at daybreak, and the Britons, under the auspicious gaze of their great king, win a decisive victory. Eventually Uther is killed through treachery, but so great is the reverence in which he is held, or so daft are his followers, that some hundred men follow him to their death, persisting in drinking from the same poisoned spring which had killed him instantly.[102]

I would suggest that Talbot, after his sensible advice just prior to Salisbury's death, his subsequent clever surprise attack to recapture Orleans and finally his savoir-faire in foiling the Countess of Auvergne's plot is too sensible to come up with such an old-fashioned chivalric suggestion by himself, and delivers it more out of respect than in expectation. Bedford, as Regent of France is emulating the mythical King Uther, seated in his Chair of War, and imagines the French might, perhaps tempted by his dilapidated state, be tempted to face the English in the field, as Uther's enemies reportedly were. In the modern world of *realpolitiks* which is increasingly imposing itself on the universe of *1 Henry VI* the suggestion comes off as simply absurd.

Talbot continues the scene in the spirit of Monty Python, acting surprised that these "base muleteers of France" refuse to "take up arms like gentlemen." He then, after swearing with Burgundy to retake the town or die, takes the time to considerately inform Bedford of his impending death:

But ere we go regard this dying prince,

The valiant Duke of Bedford. Come, my lord,

We will bestow you in some better place,

Fitter for sickness and for crazy age.

[102] Monmouth (2010), 128-130

[…]

Undaunted spirit in a dying breast! (III.ii.84-87, 97)

Doctors and nurses are expected to maintain a certain "bedside manner", Talbot is very much a man of war, and perhaps a man of war a little tired of Bedford's posturing and outdated ideas.

Talbot orders Burgundy to come with him and "set upon our boasting enemy", which they execute with habitual success. Before Talbot returns to the stage we witness both the flight of Fastolfe and the intentionally mythical on-stage death of Bedford, echoing at once the Bible and Geoffrey of Monmouth.[103] Fastolfe's flight, interjected at this precise point rather undercuts the self-conscious pathos of Bedford's final moments, in a bathetic manner by now quite familiar to the play.

The death of Bedford signals the end of the funeral sequence which opened the play and continued with Salisbury. These three men (Henry V, Salisbury and Bedford), for different reasons, have been absent and untouched by the modern court and its intrigues, and with the death of Bedford Talbot is left alone as the only uncorrupted presence in the play. Bedford's self-mythologizing death, although undercut by the cowardly (second) flight of Fastolfe, reveals a transition to the audience, the death of an ideal.

When Talbot returns a mythical, old fashioned section of the play's world has been finally closed, and he speaks his lines more simply than hitherto, exchanging some observations with Burgundy. Talbot has been struggling to speak in the manner appropriate to the situation throughout the play, and the passing of Bedford has liberated him rather than affected him adversely. For one fleeting moment he is his own man and, while wondering aloud (ironically) about the sudden French absences his speech suddenly carries overtones of Hamlet contemplating Yorick's skull:

Thanks, gentle Duke. But where is Puzel now?

I think her old familiar is asleep.

Now where's the Bastard's braves and Charles his gleeks?

What, all amort? Rouen hangs her head for grief

[103] Burns (2000), 212-213

That such a valiant company are fled.

Now will we take some order in the town,

Placing therein some expert officers,

And then depart to Paris to the King,

For there young Henry with his nobles lie. (III.ii.119-127)

Talbot does take some time to taunt the French defeat, but there is nothing bawdy of particularly vaunting over his lines here, he even (ironically) lends them his favourite adjective for the dying Bedford, valiant.

The speech is refreshingly unadorned, and although the suggestion of death ("What, all amort?) may be hyperbole the verbal parallels to *Hamlet*'s Graveyard-scene lends the exchange an unaccustomed calm. Talbot is talking quietly, being practical, and is indisputably in charge of the situation.

But yet before we go let's not forget

The noble Duke of Bedford, late deceased,

But see his exequies fulfilled in Rouen.

A braver soldier never couched lance,

A gentler heart did never sway in court.

But kings and mightiest potentates must die,

For that's the end of human misery. (III.ii.129-135)

Talbot has not undergone a transformation on par with Hamlet's "sea change", but there is a maturity to his statements which carry the suggestion that something either within him or in the world of the play has changed.

The French are not privy to Talbot's new-found solemnity, and describe him as a peacock, whose feathers need plucking.

10 Sons and Fathers

1 Henry VI begins with the ceremonial burial of its eponymous king's father. Immediately before Talbot is first introduced on stage the Master Gunner of Orleans and his son share a moment, which proves fateful to Talbot's own father-figure Salisbury. Talbot will eventually expire while his "old arms are young John Talbot's grave."

Talbot is the tetralogy's great exemplar of chivalric masculinity based on devotion to the father. A fiercely valiant warrior fiercely loyal to his sovereign, he rests his identity on his reputation for courage, but it is not his personally so much as it is a family possession and national asset; Shakespeare stresses, especially in the scene with the Countess of Auvergne (2.3), that Talbot's "substance" is England. When Talbot lays his numerous honors at the king's feet (in 3.4), what might have seemed heroic self-assertion becomes submission to the father. He and his fellow warriors fight to keep France because their "great progenitors" conquered it before them. Talbot's final battle and death (4.5, 6, 7) constitute the climax of the play, a last look at the nobly flawed ideal of chivalric masculinity based on identification with the father, an ideal no longer viable in this twilight of feudalism.[104]

Coppélia Kahn, in her book *Man's Estate*, identifies Talbot with the father-son relationship both because of his unquestioning loyalty to his king (regardless of young Henry's age or overall fitness to rule), and because of his adherence to ideals represented solely by the dying parent-generation in this "twilight of feudalism". Talbot is not personally ambitious, only on behalf of the fatherland, and it is the tangible corruption of this ideal which will resolve him to accept death for himself and his immediate heir.

As one of the very few, if not the only, character in the play unquestioningly loyal to the current incumbent of the English throne, Talbot is part son, part faithful dog, to young Henry, whom Talbot refers to repeatedly as "English" rather than focusing on his age, as others do.

The talbot was a white hunting dog which is now extinct, and is considered an ancestor of the modern bloodhound. The Talbot family used the talbot dog as their emblem, and the image

[104] Kahn (1981), 52

was so closely tied to the family that the OED has Henry VI calling "Talbott oure good dogge"[105].

The first scene where Talbot and the young king finally meet is short and relatively sweet. In contrast to the mirror scene where Henry restores Richard Plantagenet to the dukedom of York (III.i.150-180**)**, Talbot has no hidden agenda, and is graciously awarded the Earldom of Shrewsbury. While his status as faithful subject is unquestionable, Talbot does make a particular point of how he has not been summoned, but is present of his own volition and initiative, and he persists in an unseemly repeated focus on ownership, which makes the entirely regular "My gracious Prince" appear almost as if Talbot believes himself in charge of the young king:

My gracious Prince and honourable peers,

Hearing of your arrival in this realm

I have awhile given truce unto my wars

To do my duty to my sovereign. (III.iv.1-4)

Having taken a break from *his* war to see *his* sovereign, Talbot has even brought *his* soldiers along with him, perhaps to carry on the image from the Countess of Auvergne scene of his "substance". He then anatomises his own body, letting "this arm" lay down "his sword" before the king's feet,

And with submissive loyalty of heart

Ascribes the glory of this conquest got

First to my God, and next unto your grace. (III.iv.10-12)

Although it is still *my* God, at least Talbot is willing to forgo the ownership of his king. It is a strange speech, one calculated to impress, and yet again Talbot demonstrates his awkwardness when speechmaking. The king, in a manner reminiscent of Salisbury in Talbot's introductory scene, reveals a degree of discomfort, as he must first turn to Gloucester and have confirmation of precisely who this personage is:

Is this the Lord Talbot, uncle Gloucester,

[105] Get the OED

That hath so long been resident in France? (III.iv.13-14)

The king's question reveals how different he finds Talbot's manner of addressing him from what he is used to at court. Talbot is respectful, but also anxious to have his brave deeds recognized by his Prince, in a manner which would have made Castiglione proud:

For it is certainly right to exploit the things one does well. And I believe that just as it is wrong to seek false glory or what is not deserved, so also it is wrong to cheat oneself of due honour and not to seek that praise which is the only true reward of prowess. And I recall in the past having known men who, though very able, were extremely stupid in this regard and would as soon risk their lives to capture a flock of sheep as in being the first to scale the walls of a besieged town; but this is not how our courtier will behave if he bears in mind the motive that leads him to war, which ought to be honour pure and simple.[106]

Talbot has, quite literally, been the first to scale the walls of a besieged town, but has done so without any Prince nearby to observe his bravery. While his reputation may precede him, Talbot is at pains in his brief speech to his sovereign to ensure that he is appreciated for his martial prowess, in utter contrast to the softer stance he adopted for the Countess of Auvergne:

Then again, to continue speaking of arms, our courtier will pay attention to the occupation of those with whom he is speaking and will behave accordingly; and he will speak one way with men and another way with women.[107]

Rather than there being two or more Talbots, he reveals himself as a character acutely aware of whom he is addressing, and of the setting in which he is doing so. Without strictly speaking being a courtier, Talbot has more of the qualities outlined by Castiglione than any other character in the play, and though his speech in this scene is unusual, it does not break with decorum, but sets out his stalls as a man of war, meekly (by his standards) submitting to his lawful sovereign.

This scene is one of the very few ceremonies in the play that actually comes off without any interruptions or asides. Henry is puzzled by Talbot, but that is all. The playwright could easily have combined the two scenes between Talbot and the king, but has chosen to place this ceremony (which historically took place when Talbot came back to England seeking

[106] Castiglione (2003), 116
[107] Ibid.

reinforcements) before the coronation, which will be interrupted by Talbot's righteous wrath, the report of Burgundy's defection, and Vernon and Basset's dispute. Creating this one, relatively simple moment between the king and his most faithful servant ensures the play a single ceremony free of maimed rites.

The coronation in Paris is the second great state occasion of *1 Henry VI* and, just like the first, it is repeatedly interrupted. The chastisement of Fastolfe does not tie in with King Henry VI's coronation in Shakespeare's sources, nor is it Talbot who strips the unfortunate knight of his garter, but Bedford. One suspects tough, that it is not simply because Bedford has already been killed off that Talbot is the one given the task of reading a sermon on the evils of cowardice and the noble past age of chivalry:

When first this order was ordained, my lords,

Knights of the Garter were of noble birth,

Valiant and virtuous, full of haughty courage,

Such as were grown to credit of the wars;

Not fearing death nor shrinking for distress

But always resolute in most extremes.

He then that is not furnished in this sort

Doth but usurp the sacred name of knight,

Profaning this most honourable order,

And should (if I were worthy to be judge)

Be quite degraded, like a hedge-born swain

That doth presume to boast of noble blood. (IV.i.33-44)

Talbot, now the last martial man of any tradition, is left upholding the good name of English chivalry, and his speech on how the knights of the Garter used to stand for something effectively seals his doom. Talbot is in reality simply describing himself, or at least the idea of Talbot, and by stressing the Knights of the Garter's not fearing death nor shrinking from

distress he stakes out his own course for the final confrontations, in a battle he cannot possibly win.

Talbot has repeatedly invoked his young king by name throughout the play, and identifies himself by his unswerving devotion. To this idea of devotion, the idea of the king, is tied the rapidly waning idea of a chivalric code. Talbot may have shown himself both willing and able to adapt that code somewhat to suit the occasion, but in the formal setting of coming face to face with his sovereign and the betrayer of chivalry Talbot is put in an impossible position and reacts impulsively. Suddenly finding himself face to face with the loathed Fastolfe, who has betrayed Talbot twice (and tainted Bedford's heroic death), must cause a reaction. Unfortunately, Talbot's reaction underlines the inefficacy of his young king, who spends the remainder of the scene attempting to order his subjects around, and finally becomes fatally assertive later in the scene.

Talbot is one of the very few nobles King Henry successfully commands, and one of the last he should be sending away from his immediate presence. Having dismissed this truly loyal subject, the young king then ironically dooms him moments later by picking up the fatal red rose.

11 The King's Speech

The king's misguided attempt at oratory is one of the most significant moments in *1 Henry VI*, as it, coupled with the rose picking scene, is shown to directly facilitate the Wars of the Roses.

The scene in the Temple Garden had shown the (unspecified) burgeoning conflict between York and Somerset, but the throne was not party to the dispute; these quarrelling nobles were no more immediately threatening to King Henry than Gloucester and Winchester were in the first act.

The young king, in his first appearance in the play, ordered the reconciliation of Gloucester and Winchester, which was an empty one at best. This time he attempts the same style of shotgun reconciliation of York and Somerset, and the consequences shall be even more fatal than on his last attempt.

[Takes the red rose from Basset]

I see no reason, if I wear this rose,

That anyone should therefore be suspicious

I more incline to Somerset than York:

Both are my kinsmen and I love them both. (IV.i.152-154)

By picking up the red rose Henry is not only failing to resolve the conflict, he is exacerbating it, and giving York an excuse to feel the king has taken sides against him. Henry then, for some reason, draws attention to how his crown is also a mere symbol, which is and has been worn by many, before vainly preaching "peace and love".

When the king and his followers leave the stage York restrains himself, sensing that Warwick is not quite prepared to discuss the possibility of open rebellion, but their comments on the king's speech are more ominous than they at first sight appears:

WARWICK

My Lord of York, I promise you the King

Prettily, methought, did play the orator.

YORK

And so he did, but yet I like it not,

In that he wears the badge of Somerset. (IV.i.174-177)

Warwick's two lines read, when roughly translated into prose, as "My Lord of York, wouldn't you agree that the king made a pretty little speech?", but the enjambment also hints at Warwick's soon-to-be-assumed soubriquet of "Kingmaker". "My Lord of York, I promise you the King" is an interesting statement to make in all innocence.

The second, condescending line "Prettily, methought, did play the orator." reveals part of *1 Henry VI*'s ongoing agon with *Tamburlaine*.

Shakespeare uses the word "orator" (and its derivative oratory) primarily in his early history plays – the word occurs twelve times in the first tetralogy, but not once in the second. The two narrative poems also use "orator" and "oratory" freely, but after these early works we find it on only three occasions – once each in *Julius Caesar*, *As You Like It* and *All's Well that Ends Well*. In each of these cases the word is associated with someone putting on a self-conscious show, and achieving a desired, by implication cynical, result.

When Marc Antony declares that he is "no orator, as Brutus is" this reads like an entirely natural statement within the confines of Roman society (Cicero himself had appeared on stage in *Juius Caesar* I.iii), but here as elsewhere in Shakespeare "orator" is subtly pejorative. Why should Shakespeare use the word orator more frequently towards the beginning of his career, and why is it negatively charged?

We can trace the concept, and in particular that of "playing the orator", back to a decisive moment early in *1 Tamburlaine*. Zenocrate and her train have just been captured, and Tamburlaine has engaged in his own particular brand of wooing his fair captive. Techelles, in an aside, attempts to put Tamburlaine out by asking him "What now? In love?" whereupon Tamburlaine answers aloud "Techelles, women must be flatterèd. But this is she with whom I am in love." Tamburlaine makes it clear from the very beginning that, although he will gladly

flatter Zenocrate – abiding by what he feels is the proper forms of wooing – he will not hide or dissimulate this fact.

After this brief exchange the scene is (in a mode only too familiar to readers of *1 Henry VI*) interrupted by a messenger, who relates the approach of a thousand elite horsemen. Tamburlaine's five hundred foot are facing impossible odds, and the fledgling Scourge of God's first impulse is to ascertain whether the horsemen look affluent.

TAMBURLAINE

Then shall we fight courageously with them.

Or look you I should play the orator?

TECHELLES

No. Cowards and faint-hearted runaways

Look for orations when the foe is near.

Our swords shall play the orators for us. (*1 Tamburlaine* I.ii.128-132)

The question ostensibly regards whether the men require a motivational lecture prior to the battle, but in Tamburlaine's mind the horsemen's wealth has triggered the idea that oratory could be put to use, for once, before brawn. Techelles voices the military man's innate distrust of oratory, and answers Tamburlaine the only way he can be answered. In both Techelles' and Tamburlaine's use of the word orator the notion is inextricably linked to assuming a role for a limited time. Cicero (or Tully as he was more commonly known to the Elizabethans) was both an orator and a military leader, but for Tamburlaine and his men an orator is a mantle one assumes, not part of one's permanent personal armory in the way that, say, being a great warrior is.

Techelles, a simpler man than his commander, is speaking in the natural tenor of his personality, and from experience of the world these men inhabit, which is a noticeably different one from the one Shakespeare would invent for *Henry V*, where the art of military oratory reaches its summit. Yet Tamburlaine is in this scene more susceptible to the self-conscious concept which oratory represents, having already intentionally engaged in wooing, and recalls his lieutenant, ordering a parley with the horsemen. After seeing the noble

appearance of Theridamas Tamburlaine then launches into a long piece of excellent oratory, which effectively lays the foundation for his conquest of Asia. The episode reveals an unusual side of Tamburlaine, one he will not reveal to a similar extent again, perhaps because he never needs to – once Theridamas' thousand horse have joined, Tamburlaine's army goes from strength to strength.

There is something effeminate and dissimulating about oratory. Tamburlaine attempts to ward off these associations when he explains to Techelles how he is wooing Zenocrate as a mere necessity. "This is she with whom I am in love", and since women must be flattered, he is merely abiding by the necessary rules of the game.

"Playing the orator" is a role which Tamburaline gets away with by showing himself strong enough to rise above its implications – facing them head on as he does in this scene. When the child-king Henry VI attempts oratory it is commented scornfully upon, as he is known to be weak. Unlike Tamburlaine Henry does not have the choice between oratory and strength – pretty speechmaking is his only option, and he is mocked because of it.

In spite of his supposed Herculean qualities, whenever Talbot indulges in rhetoric it falls embarrassingly flat. He attempts, repeatedly, to modulate his speeches to suitably impress his audience, but perhaps the very tension between his physical reality and his reputation makes his oratory something strained, knowing that if his reputation, his name, were to collapse there would be very little left of him.

Of the three self-conscious orators of this play, only Bedford is relatively successful, and that is because he gives himself wholly up to his own speechmaking. All three men are self-conscious in the moment of speaking – Talbot is most often attempting to play Tamburlaine, the king is trying to play an older king, while Bedford is simply attempting to play. His speeches are full of bathos and bombast, but this is accepted, joined in or simply ignored by those who share his stage. He never appears to fully understand the world around him, and takes his theatrical leave of it at the right moment, though his final scene is predictably undercut by Fastolfe's flight.

King Henry and Talbot are left to struggle on without Bedford, and it is telling that when we see Talbot present himself, very ceremoniously, in front of Bordeaux, he once again reverts to his old speechmaking, attempting the outdated mode of Tamburlaine, but failing to hit the correct register. Warwick and York have drawn attention to the treacherousness of oratory

only a few lines earlier, and Exeter closed the scene prophesising doom. When Talbot now, in his third and final siege, reverts to his old bombastic pattern and not quite getting his threats right – famine has never been known to lay air-braving towers low in a moment – we sense that his end is fast approaching.

After Talbot has made a suggestion to the town fairly similar in tenor to the one he had to make on behalf of the English assembly at the siege of Rouen, he is actually put down by the French captain[108], whose composed speech confirms Talbot's impending death. During this speech Talbot does have the dubious honour of being spontaneously lent Tamburlaine's soubriquet by his enemy ("Our nation's terror and their bloody *scourge*" (IV.ii.16)), but this must be scant consolation as he realizes that the French captain is correct, and that he is about to die.

While the deer-punning may be somewhat silly under the circumstances, Talbot, confronted with death, abandons Tamburlaine's rhetoric, reverting to his simpler, more naturalistic style which one wishes he would have had recourse to more often. The sentences are shorter, the metaphors more muted, and the only references to himself are there to inspire his men to sell their lives as dearly as him:

He fables not. I hear the enemy.

Out, some light horsemen, and peruse their wings.

O negligent and heedless discipline –

How are we parked and bounded in a pail –

A small herd of England's timorous deer

Mazed with a yelping kennel of French curs. (IV.ii.42-47)

"A small herd of England's timorous deer | Mazed with a yelping kennel of French curs" is elegiac and elegant. The imagery of English deer conjures up a very tangible picture of an idyllic England, of the hunt and the countryside, which, in spite of the immanent danger and the images of bloody dogs, gives the scene a sense of calm.

Sell every man his life as dear as mine

[108] Or General, see Burns (2000), 232-233

And they shall find dear deer of us, my friends.

God and Saint George, Talbot and England's right,

Prosper our colours in this dangerous fight. (IV.ii.53-56)

Nowhere else does Talbot speak the word "friend", though he pays his soldiers the compliment of being his "substance" in the Countess of Auvergne scene. In order to free up actors for the next scene Talbot is likely to be more or less alone on stage as he speaks these final words, emphasizing his isolation, but also bringing him closer to the audience before his last scenes. Talbot's friends is the audience. Addressing them as such is a common device in epilogues ("Give me your hands if we be friends | And Robin shall restore amends" *Midsummer Night's Dream* 427-428), and in scenes calling for witnesses (see Gloucester at III.i.138-141). That Talbot chooses this moment to take the audience into his "inner circle" is an indication that the game is up, and he invites the audience to help prop him up in his final moments. This reminds us of Nashe's *Piers Penniless*, where the audience are described as becoming enrolled in Talbot's militia. The approaching last stand is being stressed through Talbot's increasing isolation.

12 The Man and the Myth

After Talbot addresses the audience, helping them realize that the end really is approaching, the remainder of the fourth act becomes strangely ceremonial and artificial. Interjected between Talbot's announcement of his impending last stand, and the actual commencement of it with his son by his side, there are 99 lines written for the express purpose of eulogizing the great man. Ostensibly Sir William Lucy is riding to York and Somerset in turn to request they send their troops, assembled for this purpose, to Talbot's aid. This scene reveals first-hand how the fractions at court seal Talbot's doom, but this information could have been handled more economically by their simple absence from Talbot's last stand.

Instead Lucy rides from one self-serving duke to another, eulogizing Talbot at length. As we saw in the opening scene, *1 Henry VI* has an odd relationship to obituaries. Henry V, without ever appearing on stage, was mourned for a solid three minutes, before the business of the play proper was allowed to intrude. Now, Talbot is, as soon as his fate is sealed, remembered fondly.

Lucy rides up to York first, who pays Talbot a fitting compliment in echoing one of his favourite devices in labelling his opponent a traitor.

YORK

Renowned Talbot doth expect my aid,

And I am louted with a traitor villain,

And cannot help the noble chevalier.

LUCY

Spur to the rescue of the noble Talbot.

[…]

Else farewell Talbot, France and England's honour.

YORK

O God, that Somerset, who in proud heart

Doth stop my cornets, were in Talbot's place;

So should we save a valiant gentleman

By forfeiting a traitor and a coward.

LUCY

O send some succour to the distressed lord. (IV.iii.12-30)

This exchange is as formulaic as Talbot's own verbal sparring with his son will be in the next scene. Talbot is equated with England's honour, repeatedly referred to as noble, while Somerset is twice labelled a traitor.

LUCY

Then God take mercy on brave Talbot's soul,

And on his son, young John, who two hours since

I met in travail towards his warlike father.

This seven years did not Talbot see his son,

And now they meet where both their lives are done.

YORK

Alas, what joy shall noble Talbot have,

To bid his young son welcome to his grave. (IV.iii.34-40)

York follows the pattern of the scene in using every adjective twice, calling Talbot noble, his son young. The unexpected introduction of Talbot's son catches the audience by surprise, and is particularly shocking given that it has been made perfectly clear that all that remains for Talbot is to make a last stand. For his son, of whom the play has made no mention or indicated the existence of, to be suddenly introduced at this late stage reads like a consciously formulaic conclusion to the father son theme which has run through the play, from the

opening death of the Father (of both the nation and the current king) to Talbot's relationship to Salisbury, and to his fatherland.

Talbot's repeated insistence on the French being traitors whenever fortune favoured them lends poignancy to Lucy's claims that:

LUCY

Sleeping neglection doth betray to loss

The conquest of our scarce-cold conqueror,

That ever-living man of memory,

Henry the Fifth. (IV.iii.49-52)

[…]

The fraud of England, not the force of France,

Hath now entrapped the noble-minded Talbot.

Never to England shall he bear his life,

But dies betrayed to fortune by your strife. (IV.iii.89-92)

Just as Coriolanus could only be killed off the battlefield, so it appears that Talbot can only die if betrayed by the fatherland. The French, though eternally treacherous and in league with the devil, could never overcome him on their own.

SOMERSET

This expedition was by York and Talbot

Too rashly plotted.

[…]

… the over-daring Talbot

Hath sullied all his gloss of former honour

By this unheedful, desperate, wild adventure.

York set him on to fight and die in shame,

That, Talbot dead, great York might bear the name. (IV.iii.55-62)

Another odd reversal is Somerset's suggestion that York has set Talbot on against all odds, so that "Talbot dead, great York might bear the name." There has been a persistent focus on the power of Talbot's name throughout this play, but in *1 Henry VI* he is neither Regent, Protector nor any other "name" separable from him by death.[109] When Ben Jonson, some hundred and fifty years after the events of this play, went on his famous walk to Scotland, he was welcomed at Rufford Abbey, the home of one Lady Jane Talbot, who still maintained both the family name of Talbot, and the Shrewsbury title.[110] Which of Talbot's names is York supposedly emulous of?

In the scene preceding this, when Talbot learns his doom from the French Captain, he is begrudgingly honoured by the description "Our nation's terror and their bloody scourge" (IV.ii.16). This is only the second time in the play Talbot is described as such, the previous being by the Countess of Auvergne. However, when Lucy learns of Talbot's death, his immediate response is telling:

Is Talbot slain, the Frenchmen's only scourge,

Your kingdom's terror and black Nemesis? (IV.iv.189-190)

Talbot's status as the play's "scourge" character, a title inherited from Tamburlaine, becomes finally incontestable, and it appears this is the name York is hoping to inherit. He is, as the final act shows, granted the privilege of ending the days of the first person to proclaim herself a scourge, but his subsequent actions will make him more likely to be remembered as the "Scourge of the English" than the "Scourge of the French".

LUCY

Too late comes rescue: he is ta'en or slain,

For fly he could not, if he would have fled;

And fly would Talbot never, though he might.

[109] The historical Talbot was actually Constable of France and Lord High Steward of Ireland until his death in 1453, but neither of these offices are ever mentioned or hinted at in the play, nor did York succeeded him in either.
[110] Donaldson (2011), 36

SOMERSET

If he be dead – brave Talbot, then, adieu.

LUCY

His fame lives in the world, his shame in you. (IV.iii.95-99)

As Nashe demonstrated, Lucy's statement proved accurate. Both this scene and the previous one[111] ends with an appeal on Talbot's behalf for audience empathy – his fame shall live on if they will have it so.

Excluding stage directions, Talbot is named more than ninety times in this play. That is more than Hamlet is in his play, despite it being more than one thousand lines longer, and the prince forming the undisputed centre of the plot. Talbot's "fame" has lived in the world throughout our play, and in these final scenes, with the aid of Sir William Lucy and young John, the Talbot name will be constantly bandied back and forth. Unusually for a "hero" Talbot meets his end with a full act still to go, comprising some 550 lines in which he is only mentioned once, by Burgundy making merry with the prospect of his ghost appearing. In despite of this lengthy absence, by repeatedly invoking his name towards the end of the fourth act Shakespeare ensures that brave Talbot will be the character the audience remembers when they leave the theatre. The opening scene's protracted mourning for Henry V is long forgotten, while the subliminal repetition of his name indoctrinates Talbot into our subconscious.

Another device Shakespeare uses to ensure Talbot stays with his audience until the end is the final major "island" of this play. There are many battle scenes in the *Henry VI* trilogy, probably a few too many, but this one stands out in a similar way to Henry VI's "musings on a molehill" in *3 Henry VI*.

The two scenes between Talbot and his son are counternaturalistic in that the two men first exchange rhyming couplets, before Talbot delivers a 30 lines long rhymed sermon, which his son responds to in kind. The play's final father son sequence is then ended with a masculine pieta-image, as Talbot clasps his dead child in his arms, and then expires.

[111] In Burns (2000) the Somerset and York-scenes are collated into one.

It is a kind of poetic dancenumber between father and son, and one which will be remembered by audiences. The conscious artificiality of the scene is its point, it offers a break from the procession of skirmishes that Talbot has been present in, and, although no one speaks like the two Talbots do to one another, their exchange somehow feels *right*, it is a fitting, idealized and thus worthy conclusion for "the Talbot".

E. Pearlman is another critic who believes there is no such thing as a single Talbot Sr. His essay "Shakespeare at Work: "The two Talbots"", describes how Talbot is much older in the first scene with his son than he appears in the next; Pearlman believing act four scene five to be a later interpolation:

but in the interpolated act 4, scene 5 he is much altered; there, weary age, beset by "malignant stars," embraces his "dear boy" while falling backward onto a "drooping chair." The scourge and terror of the French has become weak, affectionate, even stoical--and yet these same traits, acquired in the one scene--the revision--mysteriously evaporate in the next--the draft. Unless, of course, act 4, scene 6 was intended for the wastebasket and only accidentally preserved.[112]

Pearlman's theory is that this scene, with its call and response sonnet-like quality, was a later addition to the play, and that scene IV.vi[113] (IV.iv.56) was the first draft of the same scene, meant for the chop, but accidentally preserved by the compositors of the *First Folio*. To support this theory he lists supposed proof for why the Talbot of this scene is more in keeping with the one who suddenly appears in the SD "*Enter old* TALBOT *led*" asking "Where is my other life? My own is gone." in scene IV.vii (IV.iv.113). That Talbot suddenly enters as "old" just before he, like Lear, will expire clutching his dead child is correct, but Pearlman's interpretation of Talbot's greeting to his son requires considerable goodwill.

O young John Talbot, I did send for thee

To tutor thee in stratagems of war,

That Talbot's name might be in thee revived

When sapless age and weak unable limbs

[112] Pearlman (1996)
[113] The Arden 3rd edition which I follow prefers to read the entire Talbot and Son sequence as one long scene. The scene Pearlman refers to as act 4, scene 6 commences with Talbot shouting "Saint George and victory!"

Should bring thy father to his drooping chair.

But – O malignant and ill-boding stars –

Now thou art come unto a feast of death,

A terrible and unavoided danger.

Therefore, dear boy, mount on my swiftest horse,

And I'll direct thee how thou shalt escape

By sudden flight. Come – dally not, be gone. (IV.iv.1-11)

Talbot is presented, at the outset of this long final scene,[114] imploring his son to flee. There is immediate focus on the son's youth, as there was when Lucy reported his arrival in the previous scene. He curses the stars, that is true, and does call his son "dear boy" in an effort to make him obey and save himself. But to somehow get from this that Talbot "embraces his "dear boy" while falling backward onto a "drooping chair" is absurd. There is no embrace. There is no falling backward. There is no drooping chair.

Talbot is telling his son he has been sent for so that he might be taught the ways of war by his father, so that he can carry on the Talbot's name once the older Talbot has been rendered weak and useless by sapless age. "*When* sapless age and weak unable limbs | *Should* bring thy father to his drooping chair." The scourge of the French is no more "weak, affectionate, even stoical" in this scene than in the next, nor does he signal that his age has yet become a problem, only a realization that it soon will. Again the idea that the text of *1 Henry VI* is unstable leads scholars into inventing multiple Talbots.

In actual fact Shakespeare here breaks with his main source for Talbot's death, Hall, and chooses to depict Talbot Sr. as a still vigorous man; the pointed mention of a "drooping chair", which is referred to as a *future* potentiality, is suggested by Hall's description of his final moments:

"they lyghted al on fote, the erle of Shrewsbury only except, who because of his age, rode on a litle hakeney"[115]

[114] Again, in following Burns (2000).
[115] Burns (2000), 242

Although Hall and Holinshed fail to report the story, one of the French sources on which they based his account of the end of the Hundred Years' War, Enguerrand de Monstrelet, describes how Talbot, as a condition of his release from Falaise, had sworn never to "wear armour" against the French again. This promise he evidently kept, and duly returned to France unarmoured, in order to campaign on without breaking his word. In spite of this rather "modern" take on maintaining one's honour the French commanders are said to have erected a chapel, the Notre-Dame de Talbot, on his final battlefield.[116]

Riding on his somewhat unheroic "litle hakeney", Talbot is shot through the thigh with a handgun and slain while he lies helpless on the ground by a group of Frenchmen after he has hurried a little too eagerly to encounter them. Shakespeare, far from willing this pathetic ending for his modern hero polishes the circumstances surrounding Talbot's final moments, also carefully ignoring the presence of his bastard son, Henry Talbot, who is omitted from this play. The stage is kept intentionally "pure". In the scenes leading up to the advent of his son Talbot's loneliness on stage was emphasized, his "substance", the army, conspicuous by its absence. Introducing two sons of different mothers at this point would serve little dramatic purpose. It would also be problematic for Talbot to chide the Bastard of Orleans with his Contminated, base | And misbegotten blood" (IV.iv.76-77) were his own bastard present. Pearlman posits the theory that Talbot's death constitutes "Shakespeare's first great theatrical success", citing Nashe's rave review as evidence.[117] It appears the dramatist knew what he was doing (though it is not always clear that Pearlman does).

Part of Pearlman's motivation for claiming that one scene was written as a replacement for another is that Talbot, in his final long speech of the play, repeats much of what he has already urged his son to do in their previous exchange. The disputed repetitions are mainly a lack of original input in the conversations between father and son, as Talbot repeatedly calls on his son to fly, using more or less the same arguments throughout, and on occasion coming close to repeating himself verbatim. As we have seen throughout the play Talbot's diction alters according to his audience, and this scene, if we afford the character any psychology at all, must of necessity be the most stressful Talbot has to endure. If he should fall back on repetitively urging flight it would be hard to fault him.

[116] Thompson (1966), 339-340
[117] Pearlman (1996)

The reasons given in the previous exchange for why it is sensible for the young man to flee and the old to die are already legion and sound, so it would be difficult for Talbot to come up with many better. All he can do is repeat his urgings for emphasis, while rephrasing some of it. Not for the first time, Talbot's speeches fail to obtain their desired result. His ability to speak, his words, have never achieved anything, and although there is some classical pathos in the pieta-image Shakespeare creates of the dead man and his child, these failed speeches constitute Talbot's greatest failure. His name, as we saw from Ben Jonson's chance visit, does not die out with his son (who had children of his own by this time), but as a father this is both the proudest and the most tragic imaginable end.

13 Conclusion: Is my name Talbot?

Young John asks the most pertinent question possible to refute his father's first attempt to make him save himself from certain and pointless death. Over the course of *1 Henry VI* Talbot has shown a propensity for adaptability. He was first represented as an unrealistic superman easily on a level with Tamburlaine. When he presented himself to the audience and to Salisbury Talbot emphasized his adherence to the rules of chivalry, refusing the sensible choice of being exchanged for "a baser man of arms", and went on to describe himself in captivity as indomitably fierce.

Over the course of the play we have witnessed him making allowances for the new world as the ideal world of chivalry has gradually passed out of existence. He was willing to use subterfuge to cleverly (albeit bravely) launch a surprise commando attack on Orleans when the French were least expecting it. He then railed on the French "traitors" for employing similar tactics.

He revealed, to the Countess of Auvergne, how he understood his physical limitations, and that the unquestioning devotion of the English soldiers alone rendered him superhuman.

He finally came face to face with his king, saw his weakness, preached the dying virtues of the Knights of the Garter, and was sent to fight his wars, without direct command of the necessary soldiers.

The new world has finally proven the undoing of this adaptable man of the old. After holding a name, which almost on its own was conquering France, Talbot has lost the united support of his nation. He has been left exposed, without hope of assistance, because the weak king is unable to command the powerful new courtiers, who no longer adhere to the old chivalric codes of Henry V, Salisbury and Bedford.

Is my name Talbot? What power does the name hold now his substance has been denied him? For the first time in the play Talbot is made to stand virtually on his own, with another of his name by his side, who looks at his father and sees the legend. If his name is Talbot then flight is impossible, undesirable. And besides, his father is known to singlehandedly have laid a hundred Frenchmen low in a day, perhaps all is not lost?

Talbot, in his final stand, is left almost a victim to his own legend. His son shows him, through his stubborn and blind belief, that there is only one path left for the Talbots to take, and that is to join the departing old guard. In truly embracing these roles the two men join forces in speaking the most stylized, unnatural language of the entire play, but it carries with it a sort of self-conscious grandeur. The Talbots have no further parts to play in the new dawn of realpolitiks and civil dissensions. All they can do is to perish nurturing the name.

Throughout this play Shakespeare has experimented with a new type of "weak" hero, one who speaks and fails to shine, one who changes his tone depending on whom he is addressing, and what effect, what self projection he hopes to convey. With the coming world of Machiavels and intrigues this character, as a heroic protagonist, has become untenable. Talbot is killed off before the play ends because he has no further place in this new, scheming world.

In the subsequent plays in the trilogy Shakespeare will develop the weak king character further, culminating in his one great moment at Towton, but he abandons the "realistic" heroic warrior experiment.

The idea of a "weak" main character, who is not constant, but attempts different speech registers according to whom he addresses, who is not an island but interacts with the world around him was an attempt at something entirely new. His contemporary audience, perhaps blind to some of his subtleties, appears to have been taken with him. Perhaps they appreciated what set him apart from most of his peers, and made him more of an ideal courtier than any member of Henry's court:

Do you not agree that that friend of ours, of whom I spoke to you the other day, had completely forgotten whom he was talking to and why, when, to entertain a lady whom he had never seen before, he began their conversation by announcing that he had slaughtered so many men, how fierce he was, and that he knew how to wield a sword with both hands? And before he left her he was wanting to teach her how certain blows of the battle-axe should be parried, both when one was armed and when one was unarmed, and the various ways of brandishing a sword, until the poor girl was suffering agonies and every moment seemed like an eternity till she could make her escape before being cut down like the others.

These are the kind of mistakes made by those who have no regard for those "circumstances" you say the friars told you about.[118]

[118] Castiglione (2003), 116-117

Even though Talbot embodies this experiment with different register, and finds speaking difficult throughout the play, it appears from the character's documented initial popularity, as well as from his modern-day critical malaise, to be a struggle which goes largely unnoticed in audiences and readers alike.

Shakespeare would spend his entire career experimenting, but as many an experimental poet consigned to oblivion would be able to inform us (could anyone remember them), taking risks before establishing a solid reputation can land one out of a career before it has even taken off. Biographers tend to disagree on many of the finer points of Shakespeare's life, but are united in their admiration of the poet's savvy, his economic good sense, and his extraordinarily constant popularity.

When we first meet Talbot he attempts to speak like the Marlovian dinosaurs of the opening scene, emulating first Salisbury and then Bedford, but never entirely successfully. When alone, or alone with the more modern French characters, he speaks a more immediate language, less highly wrought. When he has accepted that he neither fits into, nor is long for this world he embraces his most artificial speech, ably aided by his son, and expires speaking the most highly wrought language of the play.

Talbot, ironically, was doomed from the play's opening device where it tried to mourn Tamburlaine and Henry V at once. Over the course of the play is has become apparent that the only world in which Talbot could excel was the old one in which he never quite fit. In the emerging new one where Joan Puzel and the English courtiers are breaking all the rules of chivalry and honour there is no place for the adaptable but old-fashioned Talbot.

A character that started out as the play's leading experiment has been left behind before the play is at an end. Some of his qualities will live on in his king, but the Talbot character has been discovered to serve no function in the limited Machiavellian drama Shakespeare is now crafting. Aspects of Talbot will reappear, in Shakespeare's Roman heroes and in Hamlet, but for now his time upon the stage is spent.

Once his fame lived in the world. Perhaps it could again.

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