

## The King Is Dead

*Mourning the Nation in the Three Parts of Shakespeare's Henry VI*

THE NATION is IN c R i s i s. Jack Cade and his peasant followers have killed all the lawyers and are advancing through the city while the King, debating the merits of appeasement, is exhorted by his Court to flee London for Warwickshire. Separated from this scene of state deliberation by a few feet of stage space, but nevertheless central for the way it compels our gaze, is a severed head, cradled like a baby in the arms of a Queen distraught with grief. The scene attacks our modern sensibilities with its inappropriateness, with a grotesque incongruity that disturbingly, nervously, verges on the comic. It takes an agonizing twenty-five lines of dialogue for the King to acknowledge this monstrous embrace between his Queen and the remnant of her lover, and even then, his statements oddly reflect none of our horror at this intrusion of the dead into the presence chamber; or at least, his words reflect a horror of quite a different kind:

KING. How now, madam?

Still lamenting and mourning for Suffolk's death?

I fear me, love, if that I had been dead, Thou

wouldest not have mourned so much for me. (2

Henry VI 44.21-24)<sup>1</sup>

The Queen's strangely equivocal response, "No, my love, I should not mourn, but die for thee" (4.4.25), is followed by the entrance of a Messenger who informs King Henry that the rebel Jack Cade has declared for the throne, "And calls your grace usurper openly / And vows to crown himself in Westminster" (4.4.30-31). This scene, coming in the middle of Shakespeare's first English tetralogy, emblemizes the highly complex work of mourning in these plays,

for the Queen's grief is more than personal, and the death that is mourned is not of an individual, but of an ideal.

Moving rapidly from Margaret's lament to challenges to Henry VI's sovereignty, this scene is a picture in little of the extended lamentation that structures Shakespeare's first historical tetralogy. Among the most violent of Shakespeare's plays (*Titus Andronicus*, of course, taking the uncontested lead), the early histories dealing with the reign of Henry VI and the intestine Wars of the Roses have their fair share of strong characters driven by ambition and battle lines drawn between parties—the Lancasters and the Yorks—contending for absolute power. However, unlike the violent tragedies, these plays are characterized by *the* absence of an ego, a Macbeth or Richard Gloucester, whose megalomaniacal desire drives the plays from death to death in a logical progression toward a definable goal. The Henry VI plays do not offer the consoling presence of an evil genius whose violence we can condemn with moral confidence and whose extirpation we can applaud as the triumph of good over evil in a bloody, but ultimately fair fight.<sup>2</sup> However, like Thomas Dekker's *The Wonderful Yeaere*, which is offered as a chronicle and lament for Plague-ridden London in 1603, Shakespeare's first tetralogy attempts to "boldly rip up and Anatomize the vlcerous body of the *Anthropophagized* plague" (Dekker 26), revealing a unifying structure of mourning which codifies apparently meaningless violence and offers a sustained examination of a crisis within the very metaphors of social embodiment from which social identity derives.

In its ideal ceremonial form, the scene of mourning mobilizes these metaphors of social embodiment, seeking to situate the tincture of temporal decay in a discourse transcendence. This transcendence is achieved through an appeal to the *uniuersitas*, that politic body that defines both the mourners and the dead as individual aspects of a functional, unified national self. In the three parts of *Henry VI* and *Richard III*, however, the ceremonies of state are invariably fractured and disrupted by mangled bodies, interrupted eulogies, news of lost territories, rebellions and dire prophesies of lost national identity. At every turn, the appeals made to England as a unified and transcendent entity are undermined by division, limitation and mortality. In these plays, the customary progression from "The king is dead" to "Long live the King" is disrupted by Henry VI's inability to bear—or to bring to bear in his all too limited mortal form—the vast, unifying power of the

politic body. It is the impossibility of a mortal embodiment of sovereignty that defines the particular nature of the plays' despair. In an often repeated pattern, the confrontation between the living and the dead staged in these plays is coextensive with the fragmentation of the state, dramatized in a sustained litany of self-loss and bodily mutilation. Beginning with the first scene of *i Henry VI*, funeral and mourning go in lock step with a crisis of national identity. The tetralogy's overarching structure of mourning, therefore, is not necessarily to be found in the invariably ironic funerary rituals; the tetralogy itself forms an extended lamentation for a lost ideal of sovereignty that once, through the metaphor of social embodiment, made meaningful the individual's relationship to the transcendent life of the national self.

IN ORDER TO UNDERSTAND fully the riveting tableau of Henry VI's quizzical condemnation of Queen Margaret's grief, and the scene's relationship to sovereignty and national identity, it is necessary to return to the first scene of the preceding play, *1 Henry VI*, and the funeral of Henry V. As the first of a series of mangled rituals, the 177 lines of this scene occupy the uncomfortably extended pause between the customary declaration, "The king is dead!" and the response, "Long live the King!" Ideally, this juxtaposition of the announcement of death and the declaration of allegiance is designed to permit no interregnum, no gap in the continuity of royal claims to territory and power (Kantorowicz 411-12).<sup>3</sup> Linking in this way funeral to coronation, the ceremony permits the new king seamlessly to take up the space vacated by the old, asserting the unbroken presence of a power that is at once immanent in the individual and an expression of "the eternal continuity and immortality of the great collective called the human race" (Kantorowicz 277), in this case, the English race. The royal funeral then, with its procession of peers and its effigy of the monarch lying in state, enacts the complex conceptual work of mourning that turns the confrontation with mortality into a celebration of *uniuersitas*, the union of the people and the territory of the nation with tradition and posterity. In this sense, the king was by no means a mere figurehead of state apparatus, but was both the ruling head of a body of which the people, past, present and future, comprised the "limbs" and "members" and the nation as a whole personified.<sup>4</sup>

The noble funeral enacted a subtle shift of emphasis from the loss of the individual to his or her participation in a living social body, a body that celebrates in the scene of mourning its unbroken progression through time.<sup>5</sup>

The eulogy for Henry V that opens the tetralogy purports to enact just this turn from the limitations of the corporeal to the ideal embodiment of the nation, but the significant absence of a successor produces, not unity, but fatal fragmentation. Henry V conceptually outlives his own death as well as the play that bears his name to hover like a spectre over the reign of his son in the three parts of *Henry VI*. Part One begins with the funeral procession of peers pacing behind the king's hearse in a dead march. "Hung be the heavens with black, yield day to night!" (i.i.i) Bedford intones, perhaps referring to the funereal cloths draping the stage, a conventional decoration for tragedies,<sup>6</sup> but expressing as well the nature of the world that takes form as the procession of mourners fills the stage. As the funeral speeches progress, Henry V materializes in the language of the peers as the ideal embodiment of power: "England ne'er had a king until his time," Gloucester eulogizes, continuing, "What should I say? His deeds exceed all speech. / He ne'er lift up his hand but conquerèd" (1.1.8,15-16). Positioned as the model of kingship, with his "sparkling eyes" that drive back his enemies like "midday sun fierce bent against their faces" (1.1.12, 14), Henry V is described in terms of a well-known vocabulary of spectacular power. The eulogy for Henry seeks to fulfil the promise of one of Elizabeth I's mottos as it appears on the most famous of her many portraits, the so-called Rainbow Portrait: "*non sine sole iris*: No rainbow without the sun." Here, the Latin, *iris*, refers simultaneously to the rainbow of peace and to the all-seeing eye of the sovereign, while the sun is, of course, the monarch herself, the condition of peace. Appropriating the Elizabethan image of the sun, Henry's spectacular presence, "replete with wrathful fire" (1.1.12), is a violent, penetrating light that conquers where it shines; as the sun, it is aloft, seeing to all horizons, transforming where it touches. Henry is not so much a living being as he is a condition of life, not a creature illuminated by Gloucester's praise, but a source of all illumination.<sup>7</sup> Foregrounding Henry's supernatural presence, envisioning him, with his "arms spread wider than a dragon's wings" (1.1.11), as a colossus, naming him "a king blessed of the King of Kings" (1.1.28), his eulogy begins the process of idealization, enacting the turn from the mortality of the body hidden in the coffin to the unassailable,

because invisible, transcendence of his memory. Dead, idealized, incorporeal, Henry is the uncontested icon of sovereign mastery.<sup>8</sup>

This transformative process of mourning does not come to fruition, however, for the declaration that the king is dead does not progress to the salutary invocation of the *universitas* in the second part of the ritual utterance, "Long live the King." Bedford's prophesy, "A far more glorious star thy soul will make / Than Julius Caesar or bright—" (1.1.55-6), is cut off by the rapid entrance of Messengers with the news "Of loss, of slaughter, and discomfiture. / Guyenne, Champagne, Rheims, Orleans, / Paris, Guysors, Poitiers, are all quite lost" (1.1.59-61). Exacerbating the fomenting rivalries amongst the peers, the news also goads them to renewed military action to protect England's dwindling foreign empire. For Bedford's transcending gesture is substituted another, more dire and painfully ironic, prophesy: No rainbow without the sun. Overcome with the sense of England's loss, Bedford declares, "Instead of gold we'll offer up our arms, / Since arms avail not, now that Henry's dead" (1.1.46-7). These arms he proposes to lay upon the altar are both the arms of war and the coats of arms representing the peers' hereditary right and place in the hierarchy of the nation. The image neatly invokes in one gesture of impotence the history of the nation, the martial glory that subtends it and the limbs of the social body which are now paralysed and ineffectual without the royal head. Not soon to be cured, this malaise, Bedford prophesies, will visit future generations' "wretched years" until "Our isle be made a nourish of salt tears, / And none but women left to wail the dead" (1.1.48-51). It seems that once the paragon of kings is dead the nation can cohere for no more than 50 lines before exploding under pressures from within and without.

The special dangers of the eulogizing impulse are made manifest here, for no one left in the world of the living can hope to fulfil the promise of this all-powerful, idealized kingship. While the visible trappings of the royal funeral establish the background for the customary celebration of the continuity of the state, the action of the scene belies this expectation. Between the lamentations over the hearse of the dead monarch and Gloucester's declared intention to "proclaim young Henry king" (1.1.169) there intervene 169 lines concerned with praise for the king that was, news of foreign massacre, and the outbreak of civil broils. Occupying over 25 percent of a scene which covers as much ground as this one—from establishing the

animosity between the Bishop and the Protector, to the loss of seven French cities and the chief English hero, to preparations for war and for a coronation—the eulogy for the old king leaves precious little space for praise of the new. Henry V's body, memory, fame and loss dominate the conceptual space of the scene, a careful disproportion of stage time that emphasizes the impossible standards set for the young king whose physical absence is indicative of a political vacuum that enables factionism to flourish where monologic power should reign.<sup>9</sup> The absence of Henry V, signalled by his body inhearsed on stage, represents the physical, political and conceptual absence of his son, who makes no appearance until Act three, who, with only 157 lines out of a possible 2676, speaks a mere 6 percent of the play that bears his name, and whose speech, when we finally hear it, is invariably characterized by wheedling, deference, and disastrous misunderstanding. When he is mentioned at all in this scene, young Henry is an "effeminate prince" (1.1.35) offered up as an object of the peers' ambitious jarring.

This absence and its consequences are rehearsed several times in 2 and 3 *Henry VI*. In one of his first scenes as an adult king (2 *Henry VI*, 2.3), in fact, Henry speaks but nine lines of a possible 218: three of them are questions, in one he pleads for peace, and the remaining ones express only his lack of interest in state affairs. His first act of government takes the form of an abstention over the choice of regent of France: "For my part, noble lords, I care not which: / Or Somerset or York, all's one to me" (1.3.99-100). In the opening scene of 3 *Henry VI*, York sits in the throne while Henry stands to disinherit his son in favour of the house of York, a decision that, as Margaret observes, can only lead to his death: "To entail [York] and his heirs unto the crown, / What is it but to make thy sepulchre / And creep into it far before thy time?" (1.1.235-37). Fulfilling a pattern of displacement and effacement, this act of disinheritance makes Henry a ghost, a king in name only who "shalt reign but by their [the Yorkists'] sufferance" (1.1.234). Having thus divorced the Crown from its power (dramatically signalled by the divorce of the powerful Margaret from the bed of the politically impotent king), Henry is left to steal disguised into his own kingdom from exile in Scotland, "To greet mine own land with my wishful sight" (3 *Henry VI* 3.1.14), only to utter a eulogy to his absence: "No, Harry, Harry, 'tis no land of thine; / Thy place is filled, thy sceptre wrung from thee, / Thy balm washed off wherewith thou was anointed" (3.1.15-17). His disguise signals metonymi-

cally his role as a Player-King, a proxy for his own throne. When the disguise is removed, he is revealed to be neither the holy palmer he aspires to be, nor a king, but, literally, a has-been. Calling himself "Harry," the king marks his demotion from Dignity to mere, unanointed, man. That the king is dead is loudly proclaimed. That a new king has taken his place is barely whispered. The consequences of this disruption of the work of mourning are manifest, for the death of the monarch entails a radical challenge to the identity of the peers who follow his bier. Breaking into Gloucester's accolades at Henry V's funeral, Exeter's contribution to the eulogy pulls the transcendent images of glorious sovereignty back to temporal loss and an undeniable sense of abandonment:

Henry is dead and never shall revive.  
 Upon a wooden coffin we attend,  
 And death's dishonorable victory  
 We with our stately presence glorify,  
 Like captives bound to a triumphant car. (1.1.18-22)

Exeter begins with a reassertion of absence and loss and then immediately links the ritual of mourning to that of the triumph, where the vanquished are paraded before the victors as objects of spectacle humiliation. The speech is heavy with contemporary horror of death's levelling decimation of individuality, what Sir Thomas Brown called "the disgrace and ignominy of our natures, that in a moment can so disfigure us that our nearest friends, wife, and children stand afraid and start at us" (qtd. in Neill 9). Writing in the first half of the 1590s, Shakespeare would have experienced as a London dweller the seemingly inescapable, indiscriminate ravages of the Plague, as *Death's Triumph*, a popular artistic subject, rolled inexorably through the streets, touching rich and poor alike, negating in its final reduction of individuals to base matter, all pretensions to status. Michael Neill describes the typical representation of *Death's Triumph* this way: "...mounted in splendour, like the monarch of some Renaissance royal entry, King Death rides through the world on a magnificent parade chariot, hauled by a team of jet-black oxen over the heaps of his victims, grinding their corpses into the final anonymity of earth" (89). The juxtaposition of Exeter's image of *Death's Triumph* with Gloucester's encomium is exemplary of the perversity of the

Triumph itself: "This absurdity," Neill continues, "is most apparent in the mordant contradiction between the ceremonial formality of triumphal pageantry and the grotesque disorder represented by the indiscriminate piles of carrion beneath Death's wheels" (91). As its dramatic *raison d'être* is to exhibit within the framework of formal mourning the collapse of order attendant upon the death of Henry V, the funeral scene itself mimics the representational economy of the Triumph of Death. Immediately following Exeter's references to the peers' humiliation by Death, a dispute breaks out between Winchester and Gloucester over who can praise the dead king with most integrity. As if on cue, the Messengers enter with news of the threats to English interests in France. One gets the sense from the impropriety of this sequence of events that Death's stately pageant has passed over the stage and left behind it what Dekker calls in *The Wonderful Yeaere* the Plague's "main army," a "mingle-mangle" (31).<sup>10</sup>

In the same pamphlet, Dekker refers to the kingdom of Death as the "wild Irish country of worms" (39), associating the suddenness of plague death with what to the contemporary imagination was anarchy beyond the English colonial pale, the untamed, unintelligible, perpetually resistant Celtic Outside. The comparison neatly designates England as a nation of life and order and Ireland as its constitutive Other. Death, like anarchy and rebellion, is nationalized, and those who die become Life's expatriates or exiles, or, in the case of Exeter's contribution to the eulogy, captives in a humiliating triumph. Rather than celebrating the continuity of the state, the funeral in its ironic turn from idealizing eulogy to Death's Triumph drags the living into the "wild Irish" space of war, dismemberment and anarchy, challenging in this way the very foundation of Englishness. The notion of the "wild Irish," for all its importance as a specific colonial Other with specific ideological challenges to the English nation as an incipient imperial power, participates analogically in a more general conceptual structure that encompasses all national Others whose presence defines, even as it threatens, the borders of the English self. Thus, in this sense, the shift in Exeter's speech from admission of humiliation in Death's Triumph to a condemnation of the "subtile-witted French" who, he insists, "By magic verses have contrived [Henry's] end" (1.1.25, <sup>27</sup>)> marks an attempt to expel Death beyond the borders, to consolidate his forthright Englishness through

opposition to a sly and subversive French Other. Henry's death, in other words, is figured as an invasion from without, a perversion even of nature itself by the unnatural practices of witchcraft, and the humiliating fall beneath Death's wheels is a sign of English difference and uniqueness as the privileged domain of life expressed even in the moment of its dissolution.

But Exeter's attempt at consolidation through the designation of a constitutive Other is ineffectual, for the Other he seeks to extirpate has been shown to exist as virulently within the pale, in the form of jarring peers, as it does without. Beginning with the solemn, hierarchically ordered procession of peers onto the stage, the scene exhibits a visual disintegration as the peers exit individually, to prepare for war, or the coronation, or, in the case of Winchester, a self-styled "Jack out of office" (1.1.175), to pursue treason. He tells us of his intention to "steal" the king from his seat in Eltham "And sit at chiefest stern of public weal" (1.1.176-77). The last line of the scene, then, signals the turn from celebration of *universitas* to individual, atomizing ambition, this gesture of individuality partaking of the language of disorder and disintegration associated with the grinning King on his pageant chariot. Ending with this intimation of usurpation which will be the theme of the following three plays, the scene points to a prior usurpation by King Death, whose levelling presence undermines the transcendent gestures of funeral which enable the salutary appeal to the *universitas*, as Randall Martin astutely observes: "While like any Elizabethan funeral the implied purpose of this moment is to affirm lineal and political succession as part of an eternal natural order, its symbolic shading and dislocated ritual exposes [sic] such a connection as purely contingent" (259). "The great continuity of the social body threatens to reveal itself as the great undiffer-entiated mass of physical decrepitude, a disintegration of the systems of status and fealty, where, as at the end of a chess game, wrote George Strode in 1632, "the men are tumbled together and put into the bag" (qtd. in Neill 14).

So powerful is this horror of dissolution that it seeps beyond the funeral context to stain the language of the plays that follow, where the social body continues to struggle to cohere in the face of the erosion of England's territory and the crippling absence of a king capable of embodying the abstract power of the *universitas*. In the opening scene of the *2 Henry VI*, where Henry VI meets his new French bride, Margaret of Anjou, the subject is marriage,

but the pattern established in the funeral scene is repeated. The scene begins with ceremonial processions, and quickly devolves into the fragmentation and "mingle-mangle" of lost identity. As in the funeral scene, the formal gestures toward the life of the nation implicit in a political union with foreign nobility are undermined by our knowledge that this union is a sham. Suffolk has already declared his intention to marry Margaret to Henry in order to facilitate his sexual and political ambitions: "Margaret shall now be queen, and rule the king; / But I will rule both her, the king, and realm" (*1 Henry VI* 5.5.106-7). The consequences of Suffolk's and Margaret's adulterous relationship and its grisly outcome will be discussed at length below. At this point it suffices to observe that the marriage, which should be a celebration of continuity and renewal, is coded by our foreknowledge of duplicity and faithlessness as yet another exploitation of Henry's displacement from the centre of power.

Again, this vacuum produces directly a crisis of identity. Reading the terms of an injurious nuptial agreement that divests England of great swaths of French holdings, Gloucester is struck with a "sudden qualm...at the heart" (1.1.53), registering the loss of territory contained in the articles as a bodily infirmity that has, he says, "dimmed mine eyes that I can read no further" (1.1.54). Protector of the realm and the peer most associated with the nation as *universitas*, Gloucester's identification with the land makes it impossible for him to read or speak the terms of its loss. Gloucester's next speech invokes the dead Henry V in a familiar litany: "What? Did my brother Henry spend his youth, / His valor, coin, and people in the wars?/.../ And shall these labors and these honors die?" (*2 Henry VI* 1.1.76-77, 93), he asks. He then moves to a nomination of the peers in language that turns their martial presence, and their connection to the nation as landed, hereditary lords, into *memento mori*. He asks: "Have you yourselves, Somerset, Buckingham, / Brave York, Salisbury, and victorious Warwick, / Received deep scars in France and Normandy" only to see "Your deeds of war, and all our counsel die?" (1.1.83-85,95). Positing a social body defined as martial and sacrificial, Gloucester's roll-call appeals to an image of a state written in scars upon the bodies of peers who are united in a common martial and political effort to keep the French in thrall. York's assertion that "France should have torn and rent my very heart / Before I would have yielded to this league" (1.1.123-24) identifies the mutilated body of the noble soldier as the external sign of the

*universitas* as it is expressed in a discourse of nationalism, for the heart of the martial hero is the measure of the nation itself. Posed against this model of state embodiment, in much the same way as Henry V's eulogy is balanced by Death's Triumph in the earlier scene, is Warwick's anguished sense that his scars are made meaningless without the territory they represent: "And are the cities that I got with wounds / Delivered up again with peaceful words? / Mort Dieu!" (1.1.119-21). Divested by "peaceful words" of the conquered land that makes their sacrifices meaningful, the peers' bodily signs become unintelligible cyphers. As Martha Hester Fleischer observes, in the iconography of the English history play the onstage representation of the wound (signalled by the scar, the bandage or the crutch) is the physical manifestation of valour "in virtually any context" (19). Here, the perversion of these signs is part of a larger pattern of distorted and desecrated iconography that signals the decay of systems of meaning in the tetralogy.

I HAVE ANALYZED these two scenes of state, one funeral and one wedding, in order to establish a framework for our return to the scene of macabre mourning that began this discussion. Gesturing toward the established rituals of mourning, the funeral scene dramatizes the idealizing work of mourning as the commemoration of the dead becomes part of a language of continuity, defining the English nation through the idealized vision of a sovereign whose "brandished sword did blind men with his beams" and who "ne'er lift up his hand but conquerèd" (*1 Henry VI* 1.1.10, 16). Pitted against this invocation of *universitas* is the horror of the corporeal, the indiscriminate ravages of King Death that threaten to exile, not only the dead, but the unlucky survivors to the "wild Irish" country beyond the pale of English order. In the absence of a new king to ensure the continuity of the social body, there is no defence against the triumphal humiliations of Death, and the state immediately begins to crumble. It is against this background that the shocking incongruity of the Queen's onstage mourning over her lover's severed head begins to take shape as part of a nuanced and economical visual language.

Queen Margaret's lament to the severed head of her lover, Suffolk, is easily one of the most puzzling moments of the tetralogy, incongruous to

the point of comedy, yet somehow retaining something of both the macabre and the pathetic. The rather startling stage direction, "*Enter the King with a supplication, and the Queen with Suffolk's head*" that opens 4.4 of *2 Henry VI*, can be made meaningful in the context of these contesting discourses of idealization and corporeal disintegration. Margaret is onstage with the head for twenty-five lines of dialogue in which her lamentations for her lover interrupt the king's consultation with his council. In the time that it takes for Henry to acknowledge her presence, the severed head can only become a compelling object of fascination, asserting itself against the background of state deliberations. In its ideal manifestation, the appearance of the severed head invokes the displaying of the head, in a Perseus with the Gorgon fashion, to the assembled audience of the execution, announcing the containment of transgression by sovereign power. However, in this scene, where Margaret's asides interrupt Henry's woefully ineffectual attempts to curb the power of the Cade rebellion, this discourse of containment inadequately explains the power of this visual symbol. This is especially so since the scene ends with the Court fleeing to Kenilworth. Implicated in a complex web of allusion to the demise of the *universitas*, the severed head and the mourning Queen become images, not of closure, but of rupture.

Holding her lover's head to her "throbbing breast," the queen wonders: "But where's the body that I should embrace?" (4.4.5-6). The image of the head without a body indicates in a visual chiasmus the play's central concern with the consequences of a social body without a head. Henry, who will soon continue his pattern of absence and flee from London, offers to parley with Cade and the rebels, "Rather than bloody war shall cut them short" (4.4.12). But the heads saved in Henry's gesture of mercy are tallied up elsewhere. Henry informs the aged Lord Say that "Jack Cade hath sworn to have thy head," to which Say responds, "Ay, but I hope your highness shall have his" (4.4.19-20). It is this reference that calls to Henry's attention the lamenting Margaret who literally "has" Suffolk's head in a grotesque realization of the language of the debate. The overall effect is an image of circulating heads, charges and counter-charges, that add up, finally, to impotence.<sup>12</sup> As Margaret Owens observes, this impotence and the proliferation of severed heads is symptomatic of "the failure of the king to establish with any conviction his authority as the legitimate head of state" (371). For Owens, this pile-up of mutilated bodies, and especially of severed heads, marks the breakdown of

established hierarchy and the creation of the "many-headed monster" of rebellion (370) whose advent produces in the play "a picture of disembodied heads jostling for power" (371). In his adaptation of the tetralogy for the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1988, Adrian Noble literalized this vision of mob violence and collapsing sovereign power when a mad, shaggy-haired Oliver Cotton as Jack Cade sat in mock triumph while the rebels danced around him with the severed heads of slain nobles on literal ten-foot poles (*Rise of Edward IV*). The exuberance of the dance of death around the mock-king epitomizes not only the world-turned-upside-down nature of rebellion, but the shocking realization that there is no proper king to right this carni-valesque exultation of corporeal decrepitude. Jack Cade in his macabre "court," in Noble's vision, is not merely a parody of legitimate authority, or a negative image of legitimacy, but, rather, a horrifyingly realized image of the naked violence that lies just beneath the surface of the unrealizable ideal of monarchy.<sup>13</sup> Ideally part of a "visual rhetoric" (Owens 367) of power and stability, the severed head in these plays is wrenched out of its ideal context in scaffold spectacle; as Owens asserts, beheading in *2 Henry VI* becomes "a sign not of the orderly extirpation of civil dissension but of its uncontrollable proliferation" (370).

In analogous scenes in the following play, Warwick and the sons of York discover the body of Clifford, whose death in the battle has robbed them of their revenge. Warwick orders the eldest son, Edward, to cut off Clifford's head "And rear it in the place your father's stands. / And now to London with triumphant march, / There to be crownèd England's royal king" (*3 Henry VI* 2.6.85-88). Yoking through juxtaposition the severed head to the head of state, the replacement of York's head by Clifford's parallels in Warwick's speech the replacement of one king with another. Triumphant coronation is in this way contaminated with the trace of ignominious defeat. Linking coronation to abdication in this way, the scene echoes Henry's decision to entail the crown, for as a Player-King, Henry's very occupation of the throne is a sign of his defeat. Warwick's own change of heart and subsequent decision to back the Lancastrian cause likewise exhibits this doubleness. Plucking the crown, now, from Edward's head, Warwick declares that Henry "now shall wear the English crown / And be true king indeed, thou but the shadow" (*3 Henry VI* 4.3.49-50). But Henry, as the plays relentlessly demonstrate, is himself a shadow, making Edward but the shadow of

a shadow. Figuring metonymically the decapitation of the body of state, the circulation of heads, both severed and crowned, articulates through a compelling visual symbol the spectre of sovereign absence defined here as a disturbing loss of individuation: king replaces king in a meaningless round.

Visually signalling the distortion of the unified social body, the grotesque "embrace" between the queen and her "lover" is part of a pattern that includes Jack Cade's obscene order to his followers to make the heads of Lord Say and his son-in-law, Sir James Cromer, "kiss" at every street corner as they progress through the city (2 Henry VI 4.7.120-26). This perversion of the gestures of affection and proper bodily conduct graphically symbolizes the general perversion of proper bodily signs throughout the tetralogy. The gestures of familial love become impotent gestures of revenge, for example, in Richard's desire to cut off his own hand in order to drown the dead Clifford "whose unstanched thirst / York and young Rutland could not satisfy" (3 Henry VI 2.6.80-84). Hugh Richmond asserts that, in the discourse of revenge, the play articulates a certain metaphysical order: "Virtue may be destroyed often in the world of *Henry VI*, but Nemesis always overtakes the guilty" (46). I would argue, however, in the light of the resonating images of perverse affection in the play, that revenge is symptomatic rather than curative of the disorder of the state. The scenes of revenge in these plays represent a pathological forfeiture of the *universitas* in favour of personal ambition and vendetta, figured in the image of desecrated corpses. Fleischer contends that, to the contemporary playgoer trained on the iconography of state and stage violence, such desecration "is a piece of superstitious savagery which the spectator cannot regard without rage or revulsion" (195). Embedded in the symbolism of the Passion, Fleischer asserts, the bloody abuse of the corpse activates a well-known and "timeless or eternal pattern of insult" (195). Neglecting or actively denying the rituals proper to mourning, these postmortem punishments of the flesh invariably foreground the bloodiness and ghastly horror of the dead in order to body forth, as it were, the painful absence of the larger unifying power of the social body. The evil do get their just deserts in the end, but the moral centre that might *define evil* is evacuated in the play, signalling an ultimate breakdown of the modes of knowing the social body and articulating "order."

This evacuation and concomitant breakdown is apparent in the "son that hath killed his father/father that hath killed his son" episode (3 Henry VI

2.5). Civil war has severed the bonds of family and caused men unknowingly to kill their own family members. This scene demonstrates the mangle-mangle of social relations, for sons and fathers, arbitrarily renamed enemies by the nation's political schism, no longer recognize one another. The son, realizing that he has become a patricide, indicts the nation itself:

From London by the king was I pressed forth;  
My father, being the Earl of Warwick's man,  
Came on the part of York, pressed by his master;  
And I, who at his hands received my life,  
Have by my hands of life bereaved him.  
Pardon me, God, I knew not what I did.  
And pardon me, father, for I knew not thee. (2.5.64-70)

Pressed into service on the part of regional lords, the two men represent the territory of the nation turning on itself in blind massacre. Indicted in this speech are the traditional oaths of fealty to one's liege lord that subtend hierarchical structures, for the values of service and loyalty that organize social identity produce in this conflict rather a loss of identity and the dissolution of the ground of knowledge: "I knew not thee" and "I knew not what I did." The familial embrace is refigured in this scene, as in Richard's desire to sever his hand to drown Clifford in blood, as self-mutilation, for father and son unknowingly shed their own familial blood and lament their blindness over the slain bodies on the stage. The aptly-named intestine wars are formulated here as a kind of national suicide. As mourners, then, these men become both individuals expressing private grief and members of the social body grieving the nation.

With its gestures toward the horrors of a state feeding upon itself, the scene echoes on the level of the commoners the crisis of national identity established in the very first scene of the tetralogy at the funeral of Henry V, anticipating Dekker's own vision of the loss of identity attendant upon the death of Elizabeth: "Oh look what an Earth-quake is the alteration of a State! Looke from the Chamber of Presence, to the Farmers cottage, and you shall find nothing but distraction: the whole kingdom seemes a wilderness, and the people in it are transformed to wild men" (13). Revealing the perversion of the bodily sign, this massacre of the family also demonstrates the precar-

iousness of the differences that justify dispute, for the terms "wild Irish" or "subtile-witted French," even "Yorkist" or "Lancastrian," can no longer safely delineate the boundaries of living, ordered Englishness. Their identities literally obscured by the blood that formerly bound them symbolically to the social body, the peasants, and by association their lords, have become "wild men" and all the nation is now a "wilderness"; the Other—the enemy—is revealed to have been the self—the family—all along.

Clutched to Margaret's breast, Suffolk's head similarly marks the return of the Other within the boundaries of the self, for his banishment and execution cannot eradicate his ability to displace the king with his erotic presence. A proxy to a death's head, Henry is upstaged once again by Suffolk's amorously coded body. That this body still holds power is apparent, for example, in the way that Margaret's elegy for her lost lover is intertwined with the deliberations of the king's council. Although she delivers these lines "apart" from the council debate, her lament is a competing focus of attention that causes a kind of hiatus in the scene, a suspension of state concerns. At the same time, this competing narrative is continuous with the news of Cade's progression to the heart of London. As in the funeral scene, the scene of state is disrupted by the entrance of Messengers with news of loss, slaughter and discomfiture. Messengers report that "The rebels are in Southwark" (4.4.27), and, a mere 22 lines later, that "Jack Cade hath gotten London Bridge" (4.4.49). Just as Suffolk's presence displaces the king from the marital bed, the penetration of the rebels into the centre of Henry's domain displaces the king to its outskirts, to Kenilworth castle in Warwickshire. This confusion of centre and margin is reiterated at the beginning of 3 Henry VI where York's troops hold Henry's traditional seat of power, London, while Henry negotiates to entail his crown and rule "but by their sufferance." Henry is marginalized even at the centre of power, returning to the presence chamber only to find his own absence. A strange conflation of the motherly and the erotic, the image of the queen cradling Suffolk's head emblemizes the perversion of the body's sign that is symptomatic of this collapsing boundary between self and Other, inside and outside, friend and enemy. Suffolk, who has been described as a "kennel, puddle, sink! whose filth and dirt / Troubles the silver spring where England drinks" (2 Henry VI 4.1.72-73), who has brought Margaret to England and turned Henry into a proxy in his own bed, is one of the major sites at which this infiltration and

contamination are revealed. As the Lieutenant concludes in his assessment of Suffolk's role in this contamination, "reproach and beggary / Is crept into the palace of our king, / And all by thee" (4.1.102-4). Embedded in this network of images of perverse relationships, Margaret's mourning parodies the funeral's emphasis on social ties, status and position that define the *universitas*.

RETURNING TO COURT after his banishment, Suffolk's severed head marks the dangerous eruption of the Other whose abjection is supposed to solidify the identity of the state. Dead and in pieces, the Duke's presence is an invasion of the living English pale by the anarchy of corporeal decay. This gentle mourning of the symbol of anarchy and fragmentation is likely the source of the scene's almost comic grotesqueness, for the laugh, like the shudder of horror, is an acknowledgement that the established systems of signification, the languages of justice, power and bodily decorum, fall short. Instead of producing a narrative that, like the scars on the martial body, binds that body to the *universitas*, the queen's mourning points persistently to the collapse of continuity, dwelling obsessively not on the ideal but on the putrescence and fragmentation of both the individual and the social body.

As an individual, Margaret mourns her private loss, but as part of a narrative of social disintegration, the scene as a whole mourns the lost ideal of English life and order. The discomfort experienced by modern audiences in witnessing this scene is to some degree a product of this double focus, which to our eyes, less familiar with the complex relationship between individual bodies and the body of the state, appears as a startling, macabre impropriety. In production this impropriety can be either highlighted or dampened by the staging of the scene as either a highly public or intimately private encounter between the living and the dead. In Pam Brighton's 1980 adaptation of the three plays for the Stratford, Ontario Third Space, for instance, Margaret was discovered in a tight spotlight on the bare runway stage. She knelt before the swaddled head to utter her lamentation in choked tones while the sound of singing monks filled the dark space around her. Emphasizing the queen's isolation, the surrounding darkness disconnected

her from the social context which burst in on her at the conclusion of her speech as the lights came up and the King entered with his council. While gesturing to the state of crisis that occupies the King's attention, this staging avoids the uncomfortable double focus of Shakespeare's original, since Margaret's lament for her lover does not compete with or comment on the King's ineffectuality relative to the potent, sexually coded and compelling image of the lover's severed head. Framed by darkness and the religious tones of the monks' chant, Margaret's mourning becomes a personal encounter with loss, a private moment of grief which we inappropriately overhear. Anticipating the audience's tendency to react with confusion to the interpenetration of the mourning scene and the state scene, Brighton has opted for a more modern, psychological reading, one more easily accessible to an audience reared up on the Stanislavkyian realism of the modern theatre.

The scene aptly demonstrates the queen's ultimate separation from her husband, as does the English Shakespeare Company's treatment of the confrontation. In this adaptation by Michael Bogdanov and Michael Pennington, Henry, seated on his throne, conspicuously alone in the presence chamber, bemoans his inadequacy: "Was ever King that joyed an earthly throne / And could command no more content than I?" (*2 Henry VI* 4.9.1-2). The following scene is an invented one, combining speeches from across the play. Margaret enters as his speech progresses and passes over the stage, trapped in her own grief: "Oft Have I heard that grief softens the mind" she says, " And makes it fearful and degenerate. / Think therefore on revenge and cease to weep. / But who can cease to weep, and look on this?" (4.4.1-4). This contrapuntal rhythm of lament continues, ending finally with Henry's "Come, wife, let's in, and learn to govern better; / For yet may England curse my wretched reign" (4.9.48-49). Neatly and eerily affective in its representation of the characters' inability to communicate with one another because of their solipsistic isolation, the scene, like Brighton's, emphasizes the interior over the exterior ramifications of mourning, the psychological over the social context. While Henry's final lines allude to the beleaguered state, that political upheaval is invisible, and what is left is the image of two individuals mourning in poignant isolation.

One last example will round out this brief survey. Of the three, Jane Howell's 1982 BBC production adheres most closely to the original text,

placing Margaret's lament firmly in the context of the council meeting. In fact, the queen and her macabre "babe" are not isolated at the margins of the stage, but rather physically intervene in the state deliberations even as her language does so. Held in a medium close-up, the queen passes between Henry and his advisors as she delivers her speeches directly to the camera. The trick is effective, for it both shows Margaret as an individual and places her simultaneously at the heart of the social upheaval of the Cade rebellion. Thus, Howell is able to exploit the efficacies of film in order to capture the double focus that would have been possible on the broad stage of the Globe, where the queen could easily occupy the stage with the king's council and simultaneously be "apart" from them in a private space of lament. The direct address to the camera draws us into the intense psychological pain of the grieving woman, while the shifting focus of the camera to the faces of the counsellors provides a wider perspective and sense of political urgency heightened by the frantic preparations for departure to Warwickshire that take place in the background. Unlike the ESC or Stratford, Ontario productions, which, in placing the queen on a stage conspicuously bare, seek to reduce the discomfort and incongruity of her grieving, this production emphasizes it, makes it unavoidable. The effect is somewhat diluted by the tendency to see the subject in close-up as conceptually isolated, but the overall feeling produced is one of outrage: it is outrageous that Margaret should bring a severed head to the presence chamber, just as it is outrageous that she should be unfaithful to the king, and it is outrageous that he should talk appeasement while preparing to abandon the state to a gang of ruffians, whether they be Cade's or the Yorkist faction for which Cade is but a proxy.

Outrage, unseemliness, discontinuity, the plays assert again and again, are precisely the point, for, as *Death's Triumph* passes over the stage, we are left to contend with the "mingle-mangle" of a dissolving national identity. John Hirsch, writing his director's notes for his production of *Henry VI* in 1966 during the controversial Vietnam War, saw this despair at the heart of the play cycle as intensely topical. Encapsulating his approach to the adaptation of the cycle, his comments on the play are framed as questions about the hope for humanity's "progress" to greater "morality, peace, and order": "Can man ever subjugate his personal greed for status and power to the interest of the community? Will man ever be able to stifle the cruel

blood-lust which is his primitive way of grabbing more life and pleasure, and a compensation for his rage against mortality?" ("Notes About the Play," n.p.). Using Yeats's "The Second Coming" to anchor his interpretation of Shakespeare's vision of civil war, Hirsch offered the play as his own brand of mourning: "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; / Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world."<sup>14</sup> Repeatedly, anarchy is the consequence when the idealizing gestures of Henry V's eulogy that opens the tetralogy are shown to be as ineffectual against the usurping power of Death and corporeal decrepitude as Henry VI proves to be against the challengers to his sovereignty. On their deepest level, the plays raise the possibility that the sovereign ideal is not merely lost, but ever was, and forever will be, unattainable for the limited, mortal humanity that must nevertheless struggle to attain its unifying power. This is why Henry V is dead at the beginning of the play, since, as an incorporeal presence, he is safely protected from the inevitable disappointments of the temporal world. This is why, too, that in rewriting the flow of history, Shakespeare's dramatic narrative of the English nation ends in the second tetralogy with Henry V's triumphant kingship, progressing from the meanness and meaninglessness of intestine wars toward a nostalgic culmination of nationalism in the providential defeat of the French at Agincourt. There, where the English suffer minimal losses to the French thousands, England is once again defined as the land of life and order against the French "royal fellowship of death" (*Henry V* 4.8.96), King Death's court, beyond the pale.

#### NOTES

1. All references to the plays are to the Pelican edition—William Shakespeare, *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, ed. Alfred Harbage (New York: Penguin, 1969).
2. For this reason these early histories have faced criticism for their episodic nature, for the sensationalism and seeming meaninglessness, or at best, meanness of the violence, and for the capaciousness of their focus which criticizes everyone with a moral relativity that disappoints the literary imagination looking to Shakespeare for the catharsis of poetic justice. In making his case for his adaptation of the tetralogy for the Royal Shakespeare Company in the late 1960s, for instance, Peter Hall insists that "the plays do network in unadapted form" as they are in effect "a mess of angry and undifferentiated barons, thrashing about in a mass of diffuse narra-

five" ("Introduction" vii). Equally strong, however, has been the desire, on the part of such critics as Hugh Richmond, David Riggs, and Edward Berry, for example, to rescue the tetralogy from such attacks, on the grounds of the close thematic relationship between plays and such sustained rhetorical and dramatic motifs as heroism and "patterns of decay." See H.M. Richmond, *Shakespeare's Political Plays* (New York: Random House, 1967) 21; David Riggs, *Shakespeare's Heroical Histories: "Henry VI" and Its Literary Tradition* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1971); Edward Berry, *Patterns of Decay: Shakespeare's Early Histories* (Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 1975). These readings need not be interpreted necessarily as opposing ones, however. John Barton, Hall's partner in adaptation, admits that Shakespearean black sheep (*Titus Andronicus*, *Timon of Athens*, *Pericles*) have often been dismissed as inferior "only to be proved viable in the theatre after all" ("Adaptation" xv). Stephen Greenblatt echoes Barton's (grudging) acknowledgement of the tetralogy's of dramatic power, insisting that the second part of *Henry VI*, at least, "is more than the sum of its memorable parts.... Unflinching in its depiction of emotional and physical violence, the play examines the forms of monstrous individualism that emerge when the social identities provided by networks of kinship and feudal loyalty no longer exert their hold" (293). I tend in my own readings of the tetralogy to lean toward the latter, recuperative, critical position, not to suggest that the plays are not sensationalistic and episodic, but with an eye to reading the "mess" and "mass of diffuse narrative" as productive aspects of the plays' underlying, if elusive, cohesiveness.

3. Ernst H. Kantorowicz, in *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1957), locates the first significant use of the formula, "Le Roi est mort. Vive le Roi," to the accession of Henry VI, as the English struggled to maintain their hold on France, won at Agincourt by the hero-king, Henry V (411-12).
4. We can see this metaphor of the politic body at work, for example, in Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*, where the First Citizen anatomizes the state, describing, "The kingly crowned head, the vigilant eye, / The counsellor heart, the arm our soldier, / Our steed the leg, the tongue our trumpeter" (1.1.110-12). Menenius, seeking to quell an uprising of hungry peasants, appeals to an image of self-mutilation, defining "The senators of Rome" as "this good belly," and the rebelling Citizens as "the mutinous members" (1.1.143-44). At its heart, the metaphor is conservative, envisioning a body that exists according to a meticulously defined functional order.
5. The *universitas* is concretized in and articulated through the sovereign's two bodies: the Body Natural that lives and dies, and the Body Politic, comprising the Office of monarchy, the populace and the land they inhabit, which through continual renewal and a sense of shared history, lives perpetually. It is this perpetuity that is declared, as Clare Gittings observes, in the noble funerals over which the heralds presided. The highly symbolic and carefully deployed escutcheons, family emblems and coats of arms in heraldic funerals were integral to "a display of power, intended to reinforce the social hierarchy. In a sense they were performed almost to deny that

- a death had occurred at all; the whole emphasis was on continuity and on the undiminished strength of the aristocracy, despite the demise of one of its members" (22). In the case of the demise of a king, the hierarchy of which he is the head remains symbolically intact, the continuity of the Body Politic being represented by the King in effigy until the coronation of the new corporeal counterpart, the Body Natural of the succeeding king.
6. If in production, these funereal cloths are constantly in view, the mourning for the individual will be seen to extend beyond this isolated event, pervading the generations of war and political unrest that follow.
  7. I discuss the implications for *1 Henry VI* of this spectacular aspect of Henry's sovereignty at length in my article, "No Rainbow Without the Sun: Visibility and Embodiment in Shakespeare's *1 Henry VI*," *Modern Language Studies* 30.1 (2002): 137-56.
  8. But the social process of mourning was not unproblematic. The late medieval practice of including effigies on funeral monuments provides an interesting example of this conceptual yoking together of, or more precisely, this conceptual turn from the temporal to the eternal. In his exhaustive study of the development of concepts of European monarchy, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1957), Kantorowicz includes several photographs of such monuments in which the effigy of the lord lies atop the monument reclining as in life dressed in his raiment of office, and below on a second level, in his mortal decrepitude, a decaying corpse naked before God (in Kantorowicz, Figs. 28-31). The images represent respectively the perpetuity of office or family dynasty, and the mortality of the now deceased incumbent. The actual mortal body is, of course, interred out of sight beneath the monument. In this way, the monument's representation of the conjunction of the two bodies of public figures is characterized by a lacuna: mortality itself is figured in stone, designed to endure, unchanging, for eternity. In the process of representing the relationship between the intangible and the eternal on the one hand and the corruption of the corporeal on the other, these monuments both acknowledge and elide the true decrepitude and transience of the human form, attesting to and evading an anxiety about the particular limitations of corporeality that resides deep within the metaphor of social embodiment.
  9. John Hirsch's 1966 production at Stratford, Ontario emphasized the vacuum left by the death of Henry V through the interpolation of a Prologue in the form of Henry V's last will and testament. The will ends with Henry's injunction to the Peers: "What I have gotten, I charge you to keep it; I command you to defend it; and I desire you to nourish it" (Prologue, Promptbook n.p.). The irony of this statement is manifest, and this ironic falling off from the ideal of "one league and one unfeigned amity" (Prologue, Promptbook, n.page.) is the touchstone of the Hirsch's adaptation of the trilogy.
  10. Indeed, Dekker's enumeration of "Burning Feauers, Boyles, Blains, and Carbuncles, the Leaders, Lieutenants, Serieant, and Corporalls" (31) in *Death's* army is a gruesome parody of the orderly hierarchy ratified in the noble funeral parade, and the disintegration of the Court during this scene represents the transformation of order to chaos. I am indebted to Michael Neill for directing me to this passage in Dekker's text. Neill conducts a fascinating exploration of Elizabethan responses to death in his *Issues of Death: Mortality and Identity in English Renaissance Tragedy* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1997).
  11. Martin traces a pattern of disfigured civic ceremonies in his article, "Elizabethan Civic Pageantry in *Henry IV*," arguing insightfully that such fractured rituals represent junctures where Shakespeare opposes the monologic nature of civic rites "officially designed to impose a single authoritative meaning on a political or social subject" (245) with "destabilizing particularity" (251). Martin also identifies the Triumph of Death as the controlling metaphor of the scene and the first part of *Henry VI*, but does not discuss the significance of the levelling aspect of the Triumph in terms of the play's extended dilation on the relationship between individual and national identities.
  12. Margaret Owens discusses the relation of the severed head to castration ("The Many-Headed Monster" 371). See also Nina Athanassoglou-Kallmyer, "Gericault's Severed Heads and Limbs: The Politics and Aesthetics of the Scaffold." While this article focusses on a later period, Athanassoglou-Kallmyer provides a pertinent discussion of the shift in popular attitudes regarding decapitation as a form of judicial punishment from the seventeenth to the eighteenth centuries, and especially through the Terror. The article also provides a pictorial history that graphically illustrates these shifts. For a good survey of philosophical developments from the Classical to the modern periods, see Gertrude Ezorsky, ed., *Philosophical Perspectives on Punishment* (Albany: State U of New York P, 1972).
  13. The practice of doubling in this production further emphasizes the ascendancy of corporeal decay and violence in the tetralogy, for, in addition to Cade, Oliver Cotton also appears as the seductive cuckold-maker Suffolk and, in the final of the three instalments of *The Plantagenets*, as Richard of Gloucester's venal and Machiavellian henchman, the Duke of Buckingham. Pam Brighton's Stratford, Ontario production (1980) capitalized on a similar thread of association, casting Nicholas Pennell as both Suffolk and Richard, Duke of Gloucester, both of whom are strongly associated with sensuality, decay, and a personal ambition at odds with the commonweal.
  14. Hirsch's production emphasized the pervasive nature of this anarchic impulse toward national disintegration by altering Shakespeare's play to have Suffolk lynched by a mob following the murder of Humphrey of Gloucester. Moving Margaret's mourning from the Cade rebellion, and connecting it visually to the deathbed scene of Gloucester's murderer, Beaufort, Hirsch shows the vigilantism of the mob to be a direct consequence of the collapse of courtly order.