

Chapter 10

Performing Commemoration in Wartime: Shakespeare Galas in London, 1916-19

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London Celebrations for Shakespeare's Tercentenary in 1916 were barely to resemble those discussed before the outbreak of war. Proposals for commemorating Shakespeare would be completely reassessed in a wartime context; the new plans should be frugal and patriotic, selective and pertinent, "a very simple observance of the Tercentenary in a manner consonant with the mood of the nation under present conditions"¹. As a result, the gala revue format, selecting as it could the smallest of textual fragments or the stylised 'Shakespeares' expressed in sketches, extracts, songs and pageants, was bound to flourish. On May 2nd 1916, a flamboyant, yet tactfully inexpensive, Shakespeare Tercentenary commemorative gala, 'A Tribute to the Genius of Shakespeare', took place at Drury Lane. In August 1916, the commemorative Shakespeare Hut, a YMCA respite Hut for Anzac troops on leave was erected. In its purpose-built performance space, this Hut held modest gala commemorations, for audiences of servicemen, annually from 1917 to 1919.² The fragmented Shakespeare at the Hut and, by contrast, the elaborate spectacle presented at Drury Lane offer two very different versions of Shakespearean commemoration in wartime. Yet a recursive pattern of commemoration

¹ Israel Gollancz, *The Times*, 'The Shakespeare Tercentenary', 23rd November 1915, 9.

² See Ailsa Grant Ferguson "'When Wasteful War Shall Statues Overturn": Forgetting the Shakespeare Hut', in *Shakespeare*, 10 (3), (2014), 276-292 and 'Lady Forbes-Robertson's war work: Gertrude Elliott and the Shakespeare Hut performances, 1916-1919', in Gordon McMullan, Lena Cowen Orlin & Virginia Mason Vaughan (ed.s) *Women Making Shakespeare*, (London: Bloomsbury, the Arden Shakespeare, 2013), 233-242.

emerges in both, in which commemoration reflects commemoration and public memory of Shakespeare interacts with both public and private memories of war and its losses. In these productions, too, can be found varying attitudes to cultural value and the treatment of Shakespeare on stage in wartime. Legitimate and popular modes are transgressed. Gender roles are challenged. The two cases present a contrast between the disappearing spectacle of late-Victorian Shakespeare at Drury Lane and the new, minimalist style represented, through both necessity and design, at the Hut.

The Shakespeare being ‘remembered’ in London in 1916 is a deconstructed one, often fragmented to fit wartime agendas and sensibilities. Recruitment posters featured Shakespearean quotations, morale boosting postcards boasted Shakespearean phrases, plays were performed to bolster injured soldiers. In this context, the fragmented revue format of the Shakespeare Hut performances would not have seemed out of place; the pageant of Drury Lane, too, would have fitted both within this context and a longer tradition of Shakespearean pageantry and tableaux, especially of the late Victorian and Edwardian period.³ Yet, critically, the fragmentation of Shakespeare tends to be viewed as forming a definitive aspect of modernist treatments of his texts post First World War. As Julia Briggs articulates,

The modernist project of demythologising Shakespeare has continued to the present day with occasional pauses or backlashes, moments when a more dignified or a more patriotic version was called for. Oppressed by ancestral voices (among which Shakespeare’s was the most pervasive), modernism had to

³ Michael Dobson, ‘The Pageant of History: Nostalgia, the Tudors, and the Community Play’, in *SEDERI*, 20 (2010): 5-25, p20.

confront the too-familiar words it had inherited.⁴

Critical views of Shakespeare's relationship to the Modernist project post Great War centre around a notion of deconstruction, on the act of fragmenting Shakespeare representing either a conversation or a struggle (Bloom's "anxiety of influence"⁵) with that ancestral Shakespearean voice. Yet the deconstruction and fragmentation of Shakespeare's texts was the pervasive treatment of Shakespeare during both the War and the preliminary Tercentenary commemoration debates, especially after the turn of the century. The Shakespeare inherited by modernists – woven, for example, into Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* or Elliott's *The Wasteland* – was already widely fragmented. The version of Shakespeare experienced by wartime audiences, especially those in military service, was more often than not fragmented and reconstructed into a suitable 'whole' for wartime consumption. While Briggs characterises those post-modernist lapses of the more interrogative "demythologising" of Shakespeare as "moments when a more dignified or a more patriotic version was called for", one of these moments came *before* the emergence of some of the most definitive modernist appropriations of Shakespeare.

In these unique circumstances, how best to mark the Tercentenary in wartime conditions was debated and agreed by a new Tercentenary Committee, whose leading light, Sir George Alexander (acting star and, later in 1916, member of the Shakespeare Hut Committee), was to organise the main theatrical event: a lavish gala performance at

⁴ Julia Briggs, *Reading Virginia Woolf*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 11-12.

⁵ Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (second edition), (Oxford University Press, 1997) 13-16.

Drury Lane on 2nd May 1916.⁶ Meanwhile, Sir Israel Gollancz,⁷ Honorary Secretary of the Shakespeare Memorial National Theatre (SMNT) Committee and a Shakespearean academic, mooted a plan to use land in Bloomsbury bought for the erection of a new National Theatre to construct, instead, a temporary memorial to Shakespeare in the form of a mock-Tudor style YMCA hut for active soldiers on leave from the front (Figure 10.1).⁸ The Shakespeare Hut would provide, above all the usual conveniences of the YMCA huts elsewhere in the capital, a dedicated performance space and a programme of education to include Shakespeare's works.

[Insert Figure 10.1 here]

Figure 10.1. The Shakespeare Hut.

To commemorate the commemoration, as it were, a lavish Souvenir Programme for the Drury Lane gala, in the form of a large hardback book, was produced, featuring sixty diverse illustrations.⁹ Sir George Alexander's¹⁰ annotated copy of this volume¹¹ provides an insight into this performance both as a moment in theatre history and for its

⁶ The Tercentenary would have fallen on 23rd of April but was, in 1916, measured by exact reference to the Old Style date of his death (thus conveniently avoiding the Easter weekend).

⁷ Gollancz's involvement in the Tercentenary is explored by Gordon McMullan in Chapter 9.

⁸ Ailsa Grant Ferguson (2014).

⁹ *A Tribute to the genius of William Shakespeare* (London: Macmillan 1916).

¹⁰ Annotations are assumed to be written by Sir George Alexander based on the following evidence: a. inscription is initialed "G.A."; b. the formal hand used in the annotations correlates with the informal hand in a letter from Sir George Alexander to Sir Israel Gollancz, dated 18th November 1916 (National Theatre Archive SMNT/2/1/12); c. depth of organisational knowledge displayed in lists of volunteers and players, consistent with Sir George Alexander's Tercentenary Committee leadership.

¹¹ At the time of writing, this copy of 'A Tribute to the Genius of Shakespeare' has been newly acquired and is not yet entered into the catalogue but is being held at the National Theatre Archive, London.

own commemorative purposes. In the pages of his copy, Alexander undertook the completion of all the missing lists of performers and volunteers involved in this huge production, an omission for which the printed copy carries an earnest apology. The book also contains handwritten Shakespearean quotes and an inscription expressing Alexander's thoughts on war losses and Shakespeare in wartime (which appeared in print in a less expensive incarnation of the programme). By contrast to the Drury Lane tome, programmes for the Hut galas were ephemeral. Nevertheless, a few rare copies do still survive and, through these simple one-sheet programmes, we can learn much about the Shakespeare Hut performances.¹² The Hut's modest annual Shakespeare galas configured Shakespearean fragments into a production which would ostensibly build morale, showcase the war work of theatrical superstars (Ellen Terry, Martin Harvey, Johnston Forbes Robertson, his wife, Gertrude Elliott, Mary Anderson and more) and revive, each year, the Tercentenary 'spirit' that the Hut was built to represent. It would also become a stage on which modes and expectations of Shakespearean transmission were quietly transgressed.

The Drury Lane gala comprised a full performance of *Julius Caesar*, followed by a Shakespeare-themed musical programme, itself no small affair, performed by the London Symphony Orchestra. Finally, an ambitious pageant of "all the characters"¹³ from *Much Ado About Nothing* (directed by Sir George Alexander), *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *As You Like It*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Winter's Tale*, *Coriolanus*, *Macbeth*

¹² E.G., programme for entertainments at the Shakespeare Hut, Ellen Terry & Edith Craig Archive, National Trust, held at British Library: BL/125/25/2/Ellen Terry Archive/ET/D439.

¹³ 'The Shakespeare Celebration', *The Observer*, 16th Apr 1916, p13.

(planned but not performed),¹⁴ *Twelfth Night* and *The Merchant of Venice*. Despite wartime austerity, the Drury Lane gala was genuinely spectacular. With a cast of hundreds, scenery and costumes were borrowed from the tsar of spectacularism, Sir Herbert Tree;¹⁵ the Drury Lane gala was the acting profession's extravaganza of bardolatry. Alexander's annotations reveal that, in addition to the several hundred listed players in the printed programme, nearly 150 more were onstage in *Julius Caesar* as "Senators, Patricians, Citizens, Guards, Attendants"⁴. In contrast to the spectacular sets and costumes – and the grand venue – of the Drury Lane gala, the Shakespeare Hut stage had no sets and was comparatively tiny; its very existence was based on impermanence, transience and liminality. In this YMCA image (Figure 2), the Hut's little stage can be seen, with its black and white timber and plaster background. The black and white stripes function paradoxically, in a way: they simultaneously draw attention to both the pseudo-historical, mock-Tudor – commemorative – design of the Hut's exterior and, contradictorily, to the temporary, transient substance of the Hut's wooden and plaster structure. As Figure 2 illustrates, at any moment this purpose-built performance space would need to be transformed into a functional dormitory. The impact of this transience on the relationship between commemoration, memory and performance evades definition. The prospect of the Hut's always imminent destruction was, tragically, shared by its audience. The performers' space is separated from the audience not only by that layer of imagination required of the spectator but by the relative safety and normality of their lives, a luxury not shared by the men who looked on. The tragic was thus ever-present in the Hut's entertainments.

¹⁴ Alexander has crossed through the listing for *Macbeth* with the annotation "(not performed)".

¹⁵ 'Dramatis Personae' in *The Observer*, 9th April 1916, p7.

[Insert Figure 10.2 here]

Figure 10.2: Concert Hall, The Shakespeare Hut.

The delineation of this whole building as a manifest commemoration of Shakespeare had a range of impacts on its performance function. On the most literal level, a Shakespearean bias is abundantly clear in the Hut's general weekly programme of entertainments and concept of "recreative education"¹⁶. Ill-suited as was its tiny stage to the demands of full-length Shakespearean drama, the Hut's performance hall was still utilised as the Shakespearean focus for this place delineated for commemoration. Never attempting 'complete' Shakespearean plays, the Hut presented gala or revue-style entertainments, often consisting of a series of Shakespearean scenes interspersed with music, readings, talks and speeches. The Hut's fragmentary and diverse productions made playful use of Shakespeare's perceived 'value'. A surviving programme for one of the Hut's annual Shakespeare galas documents the format of this annual event. Co-directed by Gertrude Elliott and Edith Craig, it included Johnston Forbes-Robertson performing a soliloquy from *Hamlet* and Jacques' 'Seven Ages' speech, 'Shakespeare Songs' (Lady Maud Warrender), an address by Gollancz, Ellen Terry as Portia (the same role reprised in the Drury Lane gala's pageant),¹⁷ scenes from *Henry V* (performed by the all-female, teenage troupe, the Junior Players) and a range of other songs and extracts, including scenes from *King John*.¹⁸ The choice of extracts serves as a representative 'revue' of those individual plays that were particularly often used in wartime to bolster morale in the form of postcards and broadsheets, commemorate those

¹⁶ 'New Shakespeare Movement: A Notable Alliance in London and Stratford' in *The Observer* 27th Apr 1919 p3. Assumed author, Gollancz ("the great Shakespeare hut, which it was my privilege to found" p3).

¹⁷ 'The Shakespeare Celebration', p 13.

¹⁸ Programme for entertainments at the Shakespeare Hut, BL/125/25/2/Ellen Terry Archive/ET/D439.

lost,¹⁹ and even recruit troops²⁰. Posters featuring Shakespearean quotes such as “Stand not upon the order of your going, / But go at once” (Macbeth III.4)²¹ were widely displayed to encourage volunteer recruits, even after conscription began in 1916.

However, to find only naked patriotism or imperialism in the Shakespeare Hut performances would be highly reductive. Other themes emerge from the fragmented version of Shakespeare its stage presented. By piecing together parts of Shakespeare, the Hut performances did not necessarily create synecdochic representations of the plays from which the extracts were drawn, nor simply present a patriotic message. Instead, fragments pieced together to make a whole performance that suited the new cultural and entertainment space offered by the Hut. These fragmentary presentations of Shakespeare toy with the role of memory in how the audience experiences these most famous texts. Marvin Carlson’s notion of ‘ghosting’ is helpful in theorizing the process of recognition that may have affected Shakespearean transmission and reception at the Hut and, to a certain extent, in the pageant and songs of Drury Lane. Carlson writes:

Theatre...is the repository of cultural memory, but, like the memory of each individual, it is also subject to continual adjustment and modification as the memory is recalled in a new circumstances and contexts. The present experience is always ghosted by previous experiences and associations while these ghosts are simultaneously shifted and modified by the processes of recycling and

¹⁹ E.G., the *Welwyn and Woolmer Green Book of Remembrance*, Old Woolmer, UK quotes “There’s rosemary, that’s for remembrance” (*Hamlet* IV.5). Imperial War Museums (IWM) War Memorials Database, 20015.

²⁰ Poster (1915) Parliamentary Recruiting Committee, IWM PST 5154.

recollection.²²

Where Shakespearean fragments are performed, the re-iteration of a ‘familiar’ text is subverted from its usual course into one where the memory of the audience might reconstruct the ‘whole’ text around each synecdochic fragment, or associate each fragment with an external context (such as a recruitment poster or morale-boosting postcard) and/or receive the entire production as a new text, a sum of its parts. In the case, for example, of *King John* at the Hut, this text may have been unknown to many young soldiers. Russell Thorndike, as King John, and several other members of this cast had performed in the Old Vic production of the same year (1917). The Hut’s Anzac audience would not have known of this overlap. However, Faulconbridge’s patriotic, if historically inaccurate, lines ‘England never did nor never shall / Lie at the proud foot of a conqueror’ and ‘Nought shall make us rue, / If England to itself to rest but true’ (V.7) were both used prolifically in morale-boosting and patriotic materials such as postcards and memorial plaques²³. Such quotations being the only links to the play familiar to many in the Hut’s audience, assumptions of the play’s ‘message’ on war and patriotism are likely to be not remembered but rather constructed around the smallest of fragments. In the Old Vic production, audiences were apt to find wartime allusions in the text and performance. They would have “thought the line about ‘Austria’s head’ to be a topical interpolation... Falconbridge’s final speech...’brought the house down’, and the lines were inscribed over the proscenium arch for the remainder of the war”.²⁴

²² Marvin Carlson (2001) *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2.

²³ Such as the inscription on a memorial bench in Warwickshire: “The men whose names are inscribed on the neighbouring monument gave their lives for that England ‘which never did, and never shall lie at the proud foot of a conqueror’” IWM War Memorials Database 38528.

²⁴ Gordon Williams, *British Theatre in the Great War*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2003), 248-9.

However, at the Hut, the ‘ghost’ of *King John* that shadows the Hut’s fragments must also have been affected by the Hut’s particularly limited demographic of young soldiers, again showing the recursive mode of commemoration in these memorial performances.²⁵

Julius Caesar was chosen for Drury Lane’s main feature, to display the talents of its star, Frank Benson (knighted by the king after his performance), and to provide a multitude of male roles, rather than to reflect the wartime environment. Big names were engaged, such as Oscar Asche, H.B. Irving and Arthur Burchier. However, the play may have held some resonances intended to strike a chord during wartime. Francis Colmer’s audacious exercise in Shakespearean fragmentation and exploitation, *Shakespeare in Time of War*, compiles an extensive collection of extracts, taken entirely out of context and reordered thematically to form wartime messages, resonances and commentary. He names the Kaiser “Imperious Caesar” and pieces together some strange ‘poems’ from a number of plays, including *Julius Caesar*, to create a picture of a megalomaniac Kaiser.²⁶ Possibly, such pejorative cultural references resonated with the audience. Nevertheless, the obvious choice would have been *Henry V* and its total absence from the production as a whole is striking, as it ‘was just the play to draw all the soldiers in London’²⁷. On 22nd April 1916, *The Times* carried a long editorial, in which the writer waxes lyrical on the immediate relevance of the play to the times in

²⁵ Surviving poster images show that only Allied servicemen were admitted to Shakespeare Hut performances. For example, see poster for *Macbeth* (Hoover Institution Political Posters Database Ref 3943).

²⁶ Francis Colmer (1916) *Shakespeare in Time of War: Excerpts from the Plays Arranged with Topical Allusions*, New York: E.P. Dutton & Company, 47-57.

²⁷ Sybil and Russell Thorndike (1938) *Lilian Baylis*, Chapman & Hale, p125.

which Shakespeare is to be commemorated:

It is with thoughts of Henry the Fifth rather than any other Shakespearean hero that the nation at large will prefer now to commemorate Shakespeare... If the time is not propitious to such a celebration of Shakespeare's death as we could wish, if the toasts and the fanfaronade have to be curtailed, Shakespeare at least left behind him an eloquence which burns all the brighter for the smoke and dust of battle.²⁸

The planned gala at Drury Lane had also been announced in the national papers during April, yet it is conspicuous in its absence from this editorial on the upcoming Tercentenary, despite being patronized by the King himself. Nevertheless, the gala received much positive press after the event, not least due to its having raised funds for the Red Cross and to the curiosity of Benson's public knighting at the end of the play.

However, while *Henry V* was absent from the stage at Drury Lane that day, King Henry, or at least Prince Hal, does feature briefly in the Souvenir Programme. An illustration by Byam Shaw shows Prince Hal in full heraldic armour gazing, somewhat quizzically, at Edward, Prince of Wales, who is standing to attention in modern military uniform. The modern Prince is tipping Hal a salute and casually holding a smoking cigarette, implying a more 'modern' and fashionable future for monarchy (lent tremendous irony with hindsight, given Edward VIII's abdication in 1936). The illustration is inscribed "It is the Prince of Wales' *I Henry IV*, Act V, scene iv" and, above the two figures, the feather insignia of the Prince of Wales appears with his motto, "Ich Dien", German for "I serve".²⁹ Its use here is perhaps surprising, drawing as it does so much attention to

²⁸ 'Once More Unto the Breach', *The Times*, 22nd April 1916, p5.

²⁹ See Figure 10, 'It is the Prince of Wales', by Byam Shaw, in R. Foulkes, *Performing Shakespeare in the Age of Empire* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 201. The image is taken from the *A Tribute to...*

that German monarchic link that, a year later, the Royal family did their best to obliterate, changing the dynasty's name permanently from the very German Saxe-Coburg-Gotha to the very English, Windsor. The image lightheartedly posits the Drury Lane gala event, the Souvenir programme and Shakespeare's most popular King in a wartime moment and appears incongruous with the romanticized illustrations and personal portraits filling the rest of the volume. The two Princes of Wales coming face to face in war attire and the nonchalance of the smoking Prince Edward present a humorous image of modern England meeting Shakespeare's portrayal of an adventurous medieval past. The illustration emphasizes glory and confidence in war, rather than Shakespeare or war commemoration.

Drury Lane's male-dominated *Julius Caesar*, Benson's knighting, the patriotic foreword to the Souvenir, its spectacular pageantry and the notable absence of *Henry V* all reveal commemoration with a patriotic agenda while yet attempting to escape from the war outside. The Shakespeare Hut's immersion in the war and its status as a physical memorial to Shakespeare allowed its performances to blur the boundaries between Shakespearean commemoration and the wartime environment, with a uniquely recursive effect. While the Drury Lane gala performance may have avoided being overtaken by wartime themes by omitting *Henry V*, Alexander redressed the balance in his annotations. Among his Souvenir Programme marginalia is a fascinating inscription that serves to conflate the Shakespearean commemorative purpose of the book - and the gala itself - with commemoration of war dead and support for the fighting soldier-actors:

(no page numbers).

The number of actors and actresses assembled within these historic walls, in order to do honour to the memory of their immortal brother-player, approaches four hundred. Even that number would have been exceeded but for the war, which has denuded our ranks very greatly, particularly in regard to our younger men. It has been computed that some two thousand members of the theatrical calling had voluntarily - long before compulsory service was mooted - joined His Majesty's Forces. Many are now in the trenches, while some - over forty for certain, perhaps more for identification is impossible, several actors having enlisted under their real names - have died for King and Country. To those who are still serving, it is intended to send a copy of the programme as a souvenir of this memorable occasion. For we are all -

‘We few, we happy few, we band of brothers’

- United in love and gratitude for the man who, above all others, has enriched the stage and ennobled our calling.³⁰

Henry V is deployed as if a mouthpiece for Shakespeare's own patriotism, a cliché of the Great War years. Alexander flits from solidarity within the acting profession, to grief at the loss of so many actors, affording honour to their deaths, to bardolatry within the shortest of passages. He takes up the anaphoric fragment, ‘We few, we happy few, we band of brothers’ (*Henry V* IV.3), Henry's perfect rhetoric of persuasion and call to arms, to describe instead fraternity within the acting profession in wartime. He conflates male wartime solidarity with male professional solidarity; he makes those stage words to acting soldiers into a message for – or in support of – actors-turned-soldiers.

Alexander's inscription in the Souvenir Programme transforms it into a very different artifact of commemoration to its unannotated equivalents and provides a different view

³⁰ *A Tribute to...*, annotation (see notes 6 and 7), No page numbers.

of the dual commemorative function of both book and performance. However, Alexander's inscription made it into print on the less opulent standard programmes for the event. The two programmes, if viewed unannotated, represent different approaches to commemorating Shakespeare in wartime. Furthermore, the plan to send copies of the large, delicate and opulent souvenir version to serving soldiers "in the trenches" suggests a highly romanticized notion of active service in the trenches and of commemoration.

While the Drury Lane production was primarily for a (predominantly local) civilian audience, the Hut performances were, almost exclusively, for (predominantly Australian and New Zealander) servicemen. Unsurprisingly, then, at the Shakespeare Hut, too, lines between commemorating Shakespeare and commemorating war dead would become blurred. The Hut's main lounge was known as the Leslie Tweedie Memorial Lounge (Figure 10.3). It had been dedicated in memory of a young officer killed in 1915 and sponsored by his mother, the prolific travel writer Mrs Alec Tweedie (occasionally wrongly credited with founding the Shakespeare Hut³¹). This part of the Hut became a memorial within a memorial while the adjacent performance space was dedicated to providing Shakespearean entertainments to an exclusive audience of active servicemen. At the Hut, Shakespeare is 'remembered' via an eponymous building in which Shakespeare is performed, where an individual soldier is commemorated and in which many more servicemen remember their lost friends: a recursive commemorative effect. The process of Shakespearean commemoration reflects the act of

³¹ For example, Mrs Tweedie is described as the "Prime mover" in the Shakespeare Hut project in 'H.H.' 'The Shakespeare Hut' in the *British Journal of Nursing*, Volume 57, 16th September 1916, 234. See also Ailsa Grant Ferguson, "When wasteful war shall statues overturn...".

commemoration of war dead in a *mise en abyme* of acts of remembrance.

[Insert Figure 10.3 here]

Figure 10.3: The Leslie Tweedie Memorial Lounge, The Shakespeare Hut.

A similarly recursive process can be read in Alexander's sombre inscription which seems to interweave – even conflate – the act of commemorating Shakespeare with the acts of commemorating war dead. “Some [actors]... have died for King and Country...we are all ‘we few, we happy few, we band of brothers’ – united in love and gratitude for the man who...ennobled our calling”. Shakespeare's Tercentenary also becomes an occasion to merge notions of commemoration with those of the ‘lost’ actors who have already died “for King and Country”. Shakespeare is part of that nationhood for which the men are dying and the sense of pride in the actors' sacrifice in particular is clear. Alexander indicates many actors joined up “voluntarily - long before compulsory service was mooted”, suggesting that the acting profession is one of particular patriotism (the less sentimental view being that it is a profession of notoriously variable income, making military service more appealing). While this passage renders this particular copy of the Souvenir Programme a fascinating intersection of commemorations, it did not appear in other copies, even though the inscription did appear in print on the more functional event programme. Unlike the Shakespeare Hut, the Drury Lane gala ostensibly functioned purely as a commemoration of Shakespeare in its content and audience (though it did raise funds for the Red Cross). It is Alexander's words alone that impart the recursive commemorative function at least of the book, if not the performance too.

However, elements in the Souvenir Programme hint at a dualism in the commemorative function of both the event and the volume. The Foreword by W.L.Courtney, the event's Literary Advisor, is as much a piece of patriotic fervor as a dedication to Shakespeare's work. Shakespeare, the "Great Englishman", is represented as a paragon of English cultural identity. However, Courtney also views this commemoration, in its wartime context, in terms of Shakespeare's work and art itself as an immortal, transcendental force: "For all his countrymen alike the deathless art of Shakespeare – especially at a time like this, so unpropitious to the higher levels of imaginative creation – is at once a vindication and a pledge that Art itself is immortal."³² Courtney sees the war as a barrier to "imaginative creation" while Shakespeare is something like an antidote, clearly on the side of "all his countrymen". Mixing notions of art as transcendental, even defying death, with a very tangible jingoism has a jarring result but one arguably typical of the use of Shakespeare in England during the Great War.

While the debates surrounding Shakespeare's Tercentenary commemorations divided bardolators, enthusiasts, practitioners and academics, the onset of war meant that Shakespearean performance adopted new agendas, in which both practicalities and sensitivities contributed to a shift in production styles and performance modes. Both the Drury Lane and Shakespeare Hut galas purported to function as commemorations of Shakespeare. Yet neither could possibly offer such a 'celebration' in wartime without tacitly functioning as war commemorations, patriotic expressions or in other senses becoming part of the English wartime performance - and commemorative – landscape. This new environment was troubled by opposing notions of the validity of theatre in times of conspicuous austerity, especially in the capital. When a new Entertainment tax

³² Courtney, W.L., 'Foreword', in *A Tribute to...* no page numbers.

(1916) suddenly increased theatre and cinema ticket prices and an increasingly vocal puritanical rhetoric on the frivolity of theatre in wartime began to take hold, perceived categories of entertainment and cultural value began to blur. So-called legitimate theatre struggled to cater for the wartime need for escapism, while popular performance and cinema was criticized for its lack of respect for the austere times.³³

In the textual choices and editorial interventions of these two very different venues' presentations of Shakespeare as 'gala', boundaries between legitimate and popular theatres of the early twentieth century are blurred. The Shakespeare Hut revues and galas are unequivocally transgressive, while the Drury Lane production flouts tradition less decisively. It mixed a 'complete' performance of *Julius Caesar* with a programme of music and Shakespearean pageant that recalls pre-war SMNT fundraising events.

Plans for the staging of the pageant are described in *The Observer* on April 16th 1916:

All the characters will enter the stage at the top of a great staircase. They will walk downstairs and group themselves at the foot...

Celebrated artists will be seen in the various groups, notably Miss Mary Anderson as Hermione, the part she played in her production of 'The Winter's Tale' at the Lyceum many years ago, and Miss Ellen Terry as Portia.³⁴

This pageant echoes the extravagant Shakespeare Costume Ball of 1911, a fundraiser for the SMNT. Devoid of text, these representations are pure spectacle and their stars remind the audience of those old days at the height of Victorian spectacular Shakespeare.

³³ Andrew Shail *Cinema and the Origins of Literary Modernism*, (London/New York: Routledge, 2012), 178.

³⁴ 'The Shakespeare Celebration', p13.

Embedded as it had become in high class social entertainments, the pageant is less modally transgressive than that of the Shakespeare Hut revue, which clearly overlapped with music hall modes characterized by short dramatic sketches interspersed with music. However, in the early twentieth century, Shakespeare's status in performance as either legitimate or populist was becoming increasingly vexed. In late Victorian and Edwardian critical debates on the relationship between popular performance, especially music hall versus 'legitimate' theatre, Shakespeare's weight is thrown around a great deal. Exponents of the validity of music hall as a timeless, populist expression, such as Elizabeth Robins Pennell argued that "variety" performance such as music hall arose from ancient popular desire, and was itself a legitimate cultural form not to be demoted below the 'classical'. Pennell's notion of "variety" performance as an ancient popular desire³⁵ leads to the argument for music hall - and broader variety entertainments - as itself a legitimate form of cultural expression not to be demoted 'below' the classical or legitimate.

The merging of Shakespeare and variety at the Shakespeare Hut moves further into a transgression of the legitimate and the popular than does the pageant of the Drury Lane gala. The Hut's audience of servicemen, at a time when "public preference was for bright and informal entertainment",³⁶ was perhaps perceived as requiring a popularised Shakespeare, which provided a compromise between lighter amusement and a perceived

³⁵ Pennell, Elizabeth Robins (1893) 'The Pedigree of the Music Hall' in *Contemporary Review* 63 April 1893, pp575-83, p583.

³⁶ Williams, *British Theatre*, 148.

need for ‘quality’ entertainment for the troops³⁷. Essentially, the commemorative galas and indeed regular, smaller productions at the Hut, respond to the debate on Shakespeare’s popularism at a time when the austerity and patriotism brought by the war collide with aficionados’ compulsion to commemorate Shakespeare. While pre-war Shakespeare memorial debates touted Shakespeare as ‘of the people’, the ill-conceived extravagance of events such as the Shakespeare Ball (1911) and Exhibition (1912) had branded the campaign as very much for the upper class and arguably led to its failure. With the onset of war, the need to present Shakespeare as both popular *and* culturally ‘elite’ was exploited as much by recruitment agencies as by Tercentenary memorial supporters.

Furthermore, the Hut’s challenging approach to acceptable modes of Shakespearean transmission was influenced by its female direction.³⁸ Its Chair of Entertainments, Gertrude Elliott (Lady Forbes-Robertson), had been President of the Actresses Franchise League, while the Hut’s main director, Edith Craig, also a prominent AFL member, had directed the pro-suffrage Pioneer Players. Meanwhile, though the pageant format at Drury Lane recalls fundraising pageants organized by female socialites rather than pro-suffrage agitprop, several “arrang[ers]” of these pageant pieces were, like the Shakespeare Hut’s core directors, AFL leading lights: Lillah MacCarthy, Violet Vanbrugh and, again, Edith Craig. The recent pro-suffrage activism of these women, especially the Hut’s leading creative directors, may have brought with it the challenge to legitimacy that had characterised pro-suffrage agitprop productions of the immediate pre-war period. These performances were distinct in their “refusal to distinguish

³⁷ Williams, *British Theatre*, 151.

³⁸ Grant Ferguson, (2013), 233-242.

between...the value of a play or a sketch, a raffle and a recitation”,³⁹ presenting the transgression of ‘high’ and ‘low’ cultural modes. The leveling of ‘value’ onstage in pro-suffrage plays came to represent the concept of universal franchise and, to an extent, burgeoning ideals of popular ‘equality’.

In wartime, the franchise agenda had been tactfully (by pro-suffrage groups) sidelined, and the female dominance of the Hut stage, while offering an opportunity to women directors, also reflected the absence of young male actors. In Alexander’s inscription, he estimates that some two thousand actors were away in active service, while at least forty were already dead by the time of his writing. Cross-dressed young actresses regularly appeared on the Hut’s stage as part of the Shakespeare Day commemorative galas, which carnivalistically reverses original practice but could also be viewed as a poignant near-necessity in the absence of all those young male actors away at war or already lost. Yet, while tactfully sidestepping any overt feminist agenda (in the absence of so many young men) by performing ‘war work’, the Hut performances took a similar creative approach to that of the suffrage performances via female-led direction of Shakespeare. Remembering Shakespeare in the Hut’s performances became inextricable from its charitable, ‘war work’ agenda and, more subtly, its engagement with progress in women’s theatre. A democratic Shakespeare might be fragmented and interspersed with songs, talks and skits, and still be presented as ‘legitimate’, just as, in the Hut, the war work of the female directors also legitimized female theatrical leadership without the political stigma of suffragism in wartime.

Women onstage at the Hut were also changing Shakespeare commemoration. While

³⁹ Katherine Cockin, *Edith Craig: Dramatic Lives* (London: Cassell, 1998), 93.

men did regularly appear on its stage, most performances were female dominated, in terms of simple numbers. A most fascinating example is the Hut's Junior Players, led by Edith Craig. By contrast to Drury Lane's avoidance of *Henry V*, the Shakespeare Hut presented an all-female representation of extracts from the play for its soldier-audience. In all surviving programmes from the 1917-19 Shakespeare memorial galas, we find a group of young girls, the Junior Players, listed as performing extracts from the play. In her 1978 autobiography, Fabia Drake, who would become a well-known British actress and director, recalls playing Henry V on the Hut Stage when she was just fifteen years old:

...as...we would be playing to soldiers, it was decided that the scene we would enact should be from *Henry V*...We had no extras, we had no army, but we had an audience of four hundred soldiers and Edy Craig had the inspiration that I should come out in front of the curtain and speak the Agincourt speech to my Army on the floor.

...Four hundred war-weary men rallied to the cry of 'God for Harry, England and Saint George', springing to their feet and cheering to the rafters.⁴⁰

She spells out the rationale for using these "magnificent speeches" as she calls them, citing their "urgency and a rallying force that can be incandescent".⁴¹ The approach to performing a stripped-down Shakespeare, with "no extras...no army" strikes a contrast with the hundreds onstage at the Drury Lane gala and the notion of the "army on the floor" conjures a picture of an inclusive, interactive, even immersive exchange between performer and audience at the Hut. The youthful player and audience are both, it seems, whipped into a frenzy by Shakespeare's stirring words. Drake appears proud of the

⁴⁰ Fabia Drake *Blind Fortune* (London: William Kimber & Co, 1978), 36-7.

⁴¹ Drake, 37.

contribution she perceives herself to have made to the morale of the troops she entertained as a diminutive, cross-dressed, Henry V. A female *Henry V* in wartime, a “rallying” cry from a young woman dressed as a King, reminds the audience of the absence of young men, of the war contribution of women and even of women’s political and rhetorical potential.

Such Shakespearean male impersonation was another way in which the Hut performances transgressed boundaries between legitimate and populist traditions. Yet including male impersonation as a regular feature of its Shakespearean performances is another way in which the Hut performances transgressed the boundaries between the classical or legitimate and the populist, music hall traditions. The male impersonator had become a popular and regular fixture in the Edwardian and wartime music halls.⁴² Drake’s appearance on the Hut stage, impersonating Henry V, publicly treated as Shakespeare’s male paragon of warlike, patriotic masculinity, is a fascinating meeting of the popular and the classical stage at that moment. Certainly, in music hall tradition, cross-dressing was a norm. As Alison Oram articulates, “the gender-crossing woman came from the world of entertainment, comedy, and marvelous happenings. What is fascinating about women’s gender-crossing is how strongly it continued to carry this playful and humorous tone, and how late it was in the twentieth century before it was reinterpreted as sexual deviance”.⁴³ So Drake’s Henry would not have been perceived to be politically, socially or sexually challenging in the context of a “variety” stage format.

⁴² See JK.S. Bratton, “Beating the bounds: gender play and role reversal in the Edwardian music hall”, in *The Edwardian Theatre: Essays on Performance and the Stage*, ed. Michael R. Booth and Joel H. Kaplan (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 86-111.

⁴³ Oram, Alison *Her Husband was a Woman!: Women’s Gender-Crossing in Modern British Popular Culture* (London/New York: Routledge, 2013), 4.

However, with hindsight, this female Henry V hints at a more significant moment in female theatre history. Directed by openly gay, pro-suffrage Edith Craig and Actresses Franchise League president, Gertrude Elliott, Henry's magnetism and leadership, the very fact he is a soldier-king, embodied in the form of a young woman amounts to a significant theatrical and socio-political moment.⁴⁴ While Drury Lane's tribute to Shakespeare had a male-dominated centerpiece and stopped short of a real foray into the variety stage, the Hut's fluid transgression of theatrical modes allowed a female-led Shakespeare to flourish.

These onstage transgressions, though, also present a major question of how to commemorate Shakespeare in 1916. Even before the outbreak of war, the question of whether to commemorate Shakespeare with some functional memorial, such as a theatre, library, or even almshouse, or with a statue was vexed. Most prominent in the debate was the proposal of a Shakespeare Memorial National Theatre and it was on land purchased for this purpose that the Shakespeare Hut was built. The notion of a Shakespeare 'for the people' who should be commemorated in some way that is usable by 'all' was in contrast to the idea of a statue, which some viewed as conspicuously expensive and without practical function.⁴⁵ As one newspaper article commented, "from one point of view the War seems to have done real good in regard to the Shakespeare Tercentenary...At least, there is now withdrawn all temptation to waste

⁴⁴ Shakespeare had been used by suffragists in the pre-war years, including arguments that his work shows a proto-suffragist outlook (for example, 'Shakespeare as Suffragist', *The Vote*, 29 July 1911).

⁴⁵ For an excellent study of the notion of a 'people's Shakespeare' see Andrew Murphy, *Shakespeare for the People: Working Class Readers, 1800–1900* (Cambridge University Press, 2010).

any money on statues and marble shrines”.⁴⁶ The statue would have presented Shakespeare literally as a monolith, aloof from the public, despite being constructed among them. This was a proposition many were beginning to consider expensive, outmoded, and untenable in a wartime London where virtually every new monument commemorated war dead.

In the context of broader debates about the cultural value of theatre, it was perhaps inevitable that the notion of an Elizabethan ‘golden age’ would figure significantly. In his 1913 essay ‘The Music-Hall’, G.H. Mair proclaims the “pur[ity]” of the music hall by referring to this perceived past. “The music hall is our one pure-blooded native amusement. It has a pedigree that is clear and undoubted, through the tavern, that great agent of social continuity, back to Elizabethan days - to the days when the theatre did really represent and embody the soul of the nation.”⁴⁷ As Barry J. Faulk articulates, Mair “assimilat[es] the unique figure of Shakespeare, a fountainhead of legitimate culture, into the broad inclusive stream of the popular”.⁴⁸ However, Mair’s eugenic discourse of “native[ness]”, “pure-blooded[ness]” and purity draws the popular music hall into line with a specific notion of pure English heritage, belonging to the same tradition and “pure” cultural line as Shakespeare, hinted at in the reference back to some Elizabethan utopia. Such a version of England that would seem so very much ‘worth fighting for’ intensified within Shakespeare Tercentenary rhetoric during the war.

Returning to the Souvenir Programme’s Foreword, “to all artists,” writes Courtney, “the

⁴⁶ Unidentifiable newspaper clipping in Sir Israel Gollancz’s papers, NT Archive [uncatalogued to item level] SMNT1. Handwritten ‘6th February 1916’.

⁴⁷ G. H. Mair, ‘The Music Hall’ in *The English Review* (August-September, 1911) p.124.

⁴⁸ Barry J. Faulk, *Music Hall and Modernity: The Late-Victorian Discovery of Popular Culture* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2009), 42.

memory of the Great Englishman is as dear to those who recall with gratitude his patriotic love of his native land”. His rhetoric is punctuated, like Mair’s, with a racialised notion of Shakespeare’s ‘value’, his language – “native land”, “master intellect” – reminiscent of eugenic discourses. Here, as became the norm during the war, the assertion of Shakespeare as a paragon of Englishness overwhelms the single commemorative function of ‘remembering’ an individual and becomes a celebration of English patriotism.

Both Drury Lane and the Shakespeare Hut might be read as presenting Shakespeare as inherent to Englishness itself. However, the Hut, by virtue of its very existence as a space for Dominion soldiers to experience ‘merry old England’ explicitly situates Shakespeare as central to the motherland myth. Its commemorative function becomes more than a monument to Shakespeare, closer to a monument to a particular notion of Englishness. Its environmentally incongruous mock-Tudor architectural style (Figure 1) was deliberately designed to represent ‘Shakespeare’s England’. This new way of constructing a cultural ‘memory’ of Shakespeare’s age was far more successful than attempts made pre-War to capture public support of the commemoration of Shakespeare via [‘re’]construction. In a letter to Sir Israel Gollancz in March 1916, YMCA Chairman Basil Yeaxlee compliments the Hut’s architect, Charles Waymouth, for the Elizabethan references in his design concept, his “Tudor touches”.⁴⁹ Waymouth’s contrivance of ‘Elizabethan’ style renders the Shakespeare Hut as a stage set of the past, rather than just as the functional space provided by other YMCA huts. In this way, it presented its transient Anzac residents with a unique package of English ‘heritage’.

⁴⁹ Letter: Basil Yeaxlee to Sir Israel Gollancz, 3rd March 1916, National Theatre Archive, SMNT/2/2/55.

An editorial ruminating on the Tercentenary appeared in *The Times* on 22nd April 1916. ‘Perhaps only a soldier can best pay worthy honour to Shakespeare now’, the writer ponders. ‘Perhaps the truest way of celebrating his fame is not so much by remembrance as by decision, and by decision converted into deeds’.⁵⁰ In this climate of an inextricable blend of patriotic duty with cultural memory, the idea of commemoration through performance produced, at Drury Lane in 1916 and at the Shakespeare Hut for the next three years, differing results. While the Drury Lane gala was, in many ways, a last hurrah for the spectacular Shakespeare of the pre-war decades, the limitations of the performance facilities at the Shakespeare Hut gave rise to a stripped-down Shakespeare that bridged the gap between the avant garde and the austere, the ‘original’ and the modern. Nevertheless, these galas, commemorating as they did a civilian in wartime, both produced a recursive commemorative effect, whereby the act of ‘remembering’ Shakespeare reflects the wartime environment of commemoration and loss in which the events took place.

Infinitely reflexive, these acts of public remembrance beget each other and become inextricable. Drury Lane’s spectacle and the Shakespeare Hut’s modesty both aspired to represent a version of Shakespeare that honoured a nation’s ‘memory’ of a figure bound so tightly to English national identity as to have become almost synonymous with England. In wartime, this would inevitably lead to commemorations becoming as much expressions of national identity. Yet those Anzac troops that Fabia Drake claimed “raised the rafters” at her cross-dressed delivery of the Agincourt speeches or the suffragists who directed elements of the Drury Lane gala and dominated the creative direction at the hut provide a glimpse of changes to come in the redefinition of what it

⁵⁰ ‘Once More Unto the Breech’ in *The Times*, 22 April 1916, 5.

meant to be English and 'remembering' Shakespeare. Challenging the hierarchy of elite and popular entertainment, gender roles in theatre, and traditional modes of performing Shakespeare, all under the guise of YMCA-approved 'quality' entertainments, the Shakespeare Hut performances were certainly more transgressive than could ever be claimed for the more conservative Drury Lane gala. Nevertheless, in all these galas performances, de- and re-constructions of Shakespeare mark a unique intersection, even amalgamation, of commemoration and performance, as they 'remember' Shakespeare in wartime.