

PLACE-NAMES IN SHAKESPEARE'S GRAND DESIGN  
FOR THE HENRY VI PLAYS

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The Henry VI plays of Shakespeare are among his earliest and the first of his English history cycle.<sup>1</sup> In them occur a profusion of topographical references<sup>2</sup> which add an imaginative geographical dimension to the panorama of English history: the power struggle between the contending factions of Lancaster and York, the battles with France in the Hundred Years' War, and the internal upheaval of the Cade revolt.

The young Shakespeare seems to have sought to establish on a stage of limited space<sup>3</sup> a grander sense of the vast area of English historical concerns. Although his toponyms extend only to places in England and France, they convey a sense of movement and geographical scope which would to an Elizabethan audience seem vast.

Then, as now, distance would be determined by the modes of transportation available. A letter could be delivered by post on horseback at a speed of no more than seven miles per hour in summer, and five miles per hour in winter.<sup>4</sup> A trip from London to Scotland or Ireland could take two months (Crofts 49), and travel by ship, entirely dependent on wind, was only two to six knots (1.15 statute miles) per hour (Waters 576). To an audience of that time, therefore, distances would seem far greater than they do to us today.

This was, moreover, a time which the maritime historian, Kenneth Andrews, describes as having become geographically alive, due to the flurry of voyages of discovery and conquest, to what he distinguishes as "global thinking" (85). We sense this "global thinking" at work in a more localized way in the Henry VI plays.

One toponymic aspect to be found in all three plays of the cycle, thematic rather than dramatic, is the sense of a lost English empire, as the memory of Henry V, who conquered France, is constantly invoked. His name becomes a symbol for France, as one character after another considers how France has been lost in the reign of his son, Henry VI.

At the beginning of the cycle the Duke of Gloucester cries out,

Is Paris lost? Is Roan yielded up?  
 If Henry were recall'd to life again,  
 These news would cause him once more yield  
 the ghost. (1H6 1.1.65-67)<sup>5</sup>

The Duke of Exeter reinforces this theme of lost empire by extending it to combine royal- and place-names, in a topographical prophecy established at their birth,

Which in the time of Henry nam'd the Fift  
 Was in the mouth of every sucking babe,  
 That Henry born at Monmouth should win all,  
 And Henry born at Windsor lose all... (1H6 3.1.195-98)

The loss of empire is underscored by a missing syllable in the last line, making the prophesied loss aurally emphatic: in the second Folio edition the missing syllable is, lamentably, "restored" to should lose (Riverside 628).

Henry VI takes up the theme of empire long after it has been lost, pitifully invoking the conquest of his father to assert his own right to the throne,

I am the son of Henry the Fift,  
 Who made the Dolphin and the French to stoop,  
 And seiz'd upon their towns and provinces.

(3H6 1.1.107-9)

Again, a missing syllable: "I am the son of Henry the

Fift," conveys a sense of a falling-off in the son who, so late in his reign, needs to brandish his father's name and glory in a claim to legitimize his own right to the crown he wears. These victories, as well as the leadership, of Henry V are echoed by King Edward (2.2.150-51), Clifford (2.2.37-38, 2.6.14-16), and the Earl of Oxford (3.3.85-86).

Early in the cycle the loss of France is extended to include the duchy of Anjou and the county of Maine, when Henry VI restores these regions to the father of his bride, Margaret of Anjou (1H6 5.3.154); these toponyms, whenever they are recalled, exacerbate the wound of lost empire, adding a greater dimension to that theme. Thus, Warwick cries out,

Anjou and Maine? myself did win them both.

...And are the cities that I got with wounds

Deliver'd up again with peaceful words? (2H6 1.1.119-22)

and York exclaims: "Anjou and Maine both given unto the French!" (1.1.236). Even the rebels smart at and deplore this national loss, mistakenly blaming Lord Say for it. Dick calls for Lord Say's head "for selling the dukedom of Maine" (4.2.160-61), and Jack Cade adds bite to the toponym by expanding its meaning and function,

And good reason; for thereby is England/ main'd...

Lord Say hath gelded the commonwealth, and/ made  
it an eunuch... (162-66)

Thus, from the nobility down to the lower classes, the name of Maine, as part of the lost English empire, triggers a universal sense of loss and national grievance.<sup>6</sup>

This regret for lost empire in the play finds its counterpart in sixteenth-century England's loss of Calais shortly before Elizabeth I came to the throne. Elizabeth never gave up hope for its return.<sup>7</sup> Its loss, moreover, like that of Anjou, Maine and France, which Shakespeare depicts, was generally regarded as a great stain on England's honor (Read, 1955: 240). **Thus the occurrences of** a century before had contemporary relevance for Shakespeare and his audience.

Place-names take on a dramatic function in 2Henry VI when the Cade rebels invade London. The play was performed before a London audience. Whereas France, Anjou and Maine were far off and a bit nebulous to the average Londoner, each London place-name would vividly recall the immediate world outside the playhouse. Each outrage of the mob is reported on in urgent terms, making the sack of the city seem as real as if it had been actually enacted on the stage.

A messenger enters and announces to the king, "The rebels are in Southwark; fly, my lord!" Another messenger reports the rebels' advance into the city proper,

Jack Cade hath gotten London Bridge:

The citizens fly and forsake their houses;

The rascal people...

Join with the traitor, and they jointly swear

To spoil the city and your royal court. (2H6 4.4.27,49-53)

A citizen calls out to Lord Scales at the Tower,

They/ have won the Bridge, killing all those that

withstand/ them. The Lord Mayor craves aid of

your honor from/ the Tower to defend the city

from the rebels. (4.5.2-5)

and Lord Scales replies,

...get you to Smithfield and gather head...

Fight for your king, your country, and your lives.

(4.5.9, 11)

Cade enters as victor and desecrates familiar place-  
names as he ordains,

here, sitting upon London Stone, I charge and com/-

mand that of the city's cost, the pissing-conduit

run/ nothing but claret wine this first year of

our reign. (4.6.2-4).

London Stone was a famous landmark of Roman origin  
(Wheatley 2.433); the city's conduits did on great oc-  
casions run wine instead of water (Shakespeare's England  
2.165), but so to celebrate this terrible occasion would  
strike an ironic note which would not be lost on a Lon-  
don audience.

The mob's violence strikes at one well-known place-  
name after another: an army gathers at Smithfield, and  
Cade commands,

go and set London Bridge on fire, and if you can,  
burn down the Tower too. (4.6.14-15)

and leads them on, in a fury,

Up Fish Street! Down St. Magnus' / Corner! Kill  
and knock down! throw them into / Thames! (4.8.1-3)

His sack of London, verbally re-enacted and triggered by  
toponyms familiar by name and custom to the audience,  
takes on the urgency which only a modern film might more  
graphically depict.

Shakespeare uses the same topological device to  
expand the dimensions of the famous battle of Barnet,  
as he heightens dramatic tension when the Earl of Warwick  
commands levies of men from the Midlands and home coun-  
ties--this scene is Shakespeare's own and is not to be  
found in his historical sources for the play.

Warwick, acting for the king, reports on the approach  
of the Yorkist enemy, place-naming to make the army's ad-  
vance westward seem more imminent,

Edward from Belgia,

With hasty Germans and blunt Hollanders,

Hath pass'd in safety through to Narrow Seas

And with his troops doth march amain to London...

(3H6 4.8.1-4)

He prepares for the Battle of Barnet, to be assembled  
at Coventry, nominating as he commands,

In Warwickshire I have true-hearted friends...  
Those will I muster up; and thou, son Clarence,  
Shall stir up in Suffolk, Norfolk, and in Kent,  
The knights and gentlemen to come with thee.  
Thou, brother Montague, in Buckingham,  
Northampton and in Leicestershire, shalt find  
Men well inclin'd to hear what thou command'st;  
And thou brave Oxford, wondrous well belov'd,  
In Oxfordshire shalt muster up thy friends.  
My sovereign...  
Shall rest in London till we come to him...  
Farewell, sweet lords, let's meet at Coventry.

(4.8.9-22, 32)

For a moment, as he grandly commands levies for four  
armies from eight counties, we almost forget that the  
Lancaster forces lost this battle. Yet King Henry's  
next words, although seemingly congratulatory, abruptly  
disabuse us as he takes leave of Warwick, signalling the  
battle's outcome by a classical toponym,

Farewell, my Hector, and my Troy's true hope.

(4.8.25)

These brief but weighted words, comparing Warwick to  
Hector and England to Troy, ironically dash all hope for  
victory at Barnet.



I have tried to demonstrate that Shakespeare used toponyms in the Henry VI plays in a grand design in order to expand the dimensions of his stage. In the later play, Henry V, we find evidence of a more overt intention in the same direction, traceable through the Chorus, who urges on his audience to take an imaginative leap geographically at three different points in the play.<sup>9</sup>

At the outset the Chorus-Prologue entreats: "On your imaginary forces work," to aid the invoked "Muse of fire" to depict adequately the "swelling scene" of "two mighty monarchies," about to be enacted on his "unworthy scaffold" (Prol. 18, 1, 4, 20, 10). Again, at the beginning of Act Two he spurs on the audience to move south out of London to the port of Southampton,

The King is set from London, and the scene  
Is now transported, gentles, to Southampton;  
There is the playhouse now, there must you sit...

(2Chorus 34-36)

and again, in Act Three, he leads them on, now to France,

Suppose that you have seen  
The well-appointed king at [Hampton] pier  
Embark his royalty; and his brave fleet...  
...Follow, follow!

Grapple your minds to sternage of this navy,  
And leave your England...to France...(3Chorus 3-5,  
17-19, 24)

and offers a final plea,

... Still be kind,

And eche out our performance with your mind.

(3Chorus 34-35)

It would appear from the Chorus' urgent pleas for audience cooperation that Shakespeare had found shortcomings in having merely named places in the earlier Henry VI plays, although even in a reading the Cade sack of London and the gallant levy of men for the battle of Barnet come alive on the page. In performance the Henry VI plays were surely exciting and grand theatrically, for we have evidence of their great popularity in their time (Harbage 48-49), and Shakespeare's Epilogue in Henry V confirms this view when he invokes the earlier plays, "which oft our stage hath shown" as precedent for the audience's "acceptance" of the present play (13-14).

Shakespeare's use of toponyms to extend the parameters of his stage may have been influenced by his predecessor, Christopher Marlowe, whose Tamburlaine plays also exploit place-names to expand their geographical dimension, for Marlowe was already a celebrated playwright when the young Shakespeare wrote his Henry VI plays.<sup>10</sup>

Both men reflect the "global thinking" of their time. Whereas Marlowe chose a great world-conqueror for his hero, Shakespeare chose an English king. He was thereby limited to a smaller part of the globe. Shake-

spere tried to extend his range by reaching back continually to Henry V's past conquests across the Channel, and by expanding through toponyms the sack of London and the preparations for the battle of Barnet. He thereby achieved a different, yet a grander dimension, for his plays were written about his audience's own England. His method may have seemed to his discerning eye to have been in some way insufficient, as the Chorus' exhortations to the audience of Henry V suggest, but there remains much to be admired in the toponymology of the Henry VI plays.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>The three plays are assigned dates from 1590-92 (Harbage and Schoenbaum 56). It is not the purpose of this paper to argue for single authorship, yet the pattern of linking Henry V with France (as discussed below) remains consistent in all three parts of Henry VI and in Henry V (see also note 6), suggesting the work of one mind in their plan.

<sup>2</sup>A count of place-names mentioned one or more times in the first and second tetralogies reveal the following:

<u>1Henry VI</u>	33	<u>Richard II</u>	28
<u>2Henry VI</u>	23	<u>1Henry IV</u>	41
<u>3Henry VI</u>	43	<u>2Henry IV</u>	48
<u>Richard III</u>	40	<u>Henry V</u>	26

I have omitted toponymic additions for bishops, nobles and princes, as well as all references to England, which have symbolic as well as toponymic value and warrant a separate study. The constant repetition of the names France, Anjou and Maine led me to examine the Henry VI plays more closely, although all of the plays of the first and second tetralogies deserve toponymic attention.

<sup>3</sup>Our only hard evidence for the dimensions for an Elizabethan stage at an outdoor playhouse is to be found in the Fortune contract of 1599, for a stage 43' x 27½' (Riverside 1849-50). Its size, as a stage, is actually admirable; as the place for displaying the actions of "two mighty monarchies" any stage might seem unworthy.

<sup>4</sup>These figures are for ideal conditions, which rarely obtained (LaMar 5).

<sup>5</sup>All citations of Shakespeare's plays refer to The Riverside Shakespeare.

<sup>6</sup>In Henry V, dated 1599 (Harbage and Schoenbaum 70), the name of France haunts the play from its opening Prologue (12); thus Shakespeare's concern for representing the English craving for empire in the earlier plays is established and in the glorious victories of Henry V is fulfilled. For a discussion of Shakespeare as a spokesman for imperialism, see Green (5-6, 46-47).

<sup>7</sup>For Elizabeth's ongoing desire for Calais' return, see Read, Elizabeth's historian (1925, 1955, 1960, passim); for the popular view see Read (1955:240, 246).

<sup>8</sup>For a discussion of the size of an Elizabethan stage, see note 6.

<sup>9</sup>I cite the Chorus' invocations in the first three acts insofar as they name the places to which the audience must "follow" in the ensuing scenes. (For a discussion of an inconsistency in place-naming in Act Two, see Brennan 45.) The Chorus in Act Four, however, requires no such shift of scene; in Act Five the Chorus performs in the traditional sense of his role, depicting scenes the audience cannot "follow," in what Brennan describes as "abridging the story" (49).

<sup>10</sup>Marlowe's influence on Shakespeare has often been argued; for one view of Marlowe as a "presiding inspiration" see Riggs (126-27, et passim).

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