The Hollow Crown: The Wars of the Roses

Henry VI Part I, Henry VI Part II and Richard III


A Neal Street Co-Production with Carnival / NBC Universal and Thirteen for BBC
Henry VI Part I

Henry V is dead, and against the backdrop of Wars in France the English nobles are beginning to quarrel. News of defeat at Orleans reaches the Duke of Gloucester, the Lord Protector, and other nobles in England. Henry VI, still an infant, is proclaimed King.

Seventeen years later the rivalries at Court have intensified; Gloucester and the Bishop of Winchester argue openly in front of the King. Rouen falls to the French but Plantagenet, recently restored as the Duke of York, Exeter and Talbot pledge to recapture the city from the Dauphin. Battle commences and the French, led by Joan of Arc, defeat the English. Valiant Talbot and his son John are killed.

Warwick and Somerset arrive after the battle to join forces with the survivors and retake Rouen. Somerset woos Margaret of Anjou as a potential bride for Henry VI. Plantagenet takes Joan of Arc prisoner and she is burnt at the stake.

Gloucester protests but still Margaret is introduced as Henry's queen. She begins to complain that the Duchess of Gloucester, Eleanor, behaves like an empress at court and their rivalry escalates. Eleanor is observed performing black magic and is banished, warning her husband Gloucester that he is in great danger.

Accused of high treason by Somerset, Suffolk and Winchester, Gloucester protests his innocence, but is murdered at the Tower whilst Somerset and Margaret make love in the Palace.
Henry banishes Somerset and Suffolk after Gloucester is found dead. Plantagenet is incensed when Margaret is able to bully Henry into reversing the sentence and makes his claim for the throne. The Houses of York and Lancaster are now in open opposition.

Duke of Gloucester is played by Hugh Bonneville, Henry VI by Tom Sturridge, Plantagenet by Adrian Dunbar, Exeter by Anton Lesser, Talbot by Philip Glenister, Joan of Arc by Laura Frances-Morgan, Warwick by Stanley Townsend, Somerset by Ben Miles, Margaret by Sophie Okonedo and Eleanor by Sally Hawkins.

**Henry VI Part II**

After victory at the Battle of St Albans, Plantagenet and the Yorkists ride to London to claim the throne. Henry VI negotiates with them to keep the Crown for his lifetime but it will revert to the House of York on his death, so disinheriting his and Margaret's son Prince Edward.

Margaret is outraged, disowns Henry and with her Lancastrian allies attacks Plantagenet at his house, slaughtering the Duke and his youngest son Edmund. The remaining sons, Edward, George and Richard, escape and swear to avenge the destruction of their family.

The Yorkists are again victorious at the Battle of Towton and Plantagenet's eldest son is crowned Edward IV. Henry VI is imprisoned in the Tower whilst Margaret escapes to France with their son Prince Edward.
Warwick travels to France to find the King a bride but receives word that Edward is already betrothed to Elizabeth Woodville. Humiliated and enraged, Warwick switches allegiance to the House of Lancaster. Together with Margaret and the King Louis of France, he vows to place Henry back on the throne and Warwick's daughter Anne is betrothed to Prince Edward to cement the alliance.

Edward IV's brother George joins Warwick's forces after failing to advance at Edward's Court but wracked by guilt, returns to the Yorkist cause moments before the Battle of Tewkesbury. The Lancastrians are defeated and Warwick is killed.

In the aftermath of the battle Richard slays Prince Edward in front of a distraught Margaret. Back in London, Richard murders the former King Henry in his cell. With the Yorkists secure on the throne, the Court congregates for the christening of Edward IV and Elizabeth’s newborn son.

Plantagenet is played by Adrian Dunbar, Margaret by Sophie Okonedo, Edward by Geoffrey Streatfeild, George by Sam Troughton, Richard by Benedict Cumberbatch, Henry VI by Tom Sturridge, Queen Elizabeth by Keeley Hawes, Warwick by Stanley Townsend, Louis of France by Andrew Scott and Anne by Phoebe Fox.

**Richard III**

At Westminster, Richard speaks about his deformity, the decadence of his brother Edward’s Court, and the nature of his evil plots.
After Richard’s subtle urgings, George is arrested during a birthday feast for young Prince Edward and is led away to the Tower. Soon after, King Edward is taken ill and collapses. With Catesby’s help, Richard arranges the murder of George. King Edward makes one last effort to end family disputes, but Richard breaks up the gathering with news of George’s death.

When Edward dies, Rivers and Grey – relatives of Queen Elizabeth’s - are executed for treason, and her young sons Princes Edward and Richard, are sent to the Tower. After Richard executes Hastings for treason, Buckingham persuades the Citizens of London to invite Richard to take up the unoccupied throne. He is crowned at Westminster Abbey with Anne as his Queen. Unrewarded for his efforts, Buckingham begins to distance himself from Richard. To eliminate all potential threats, Richard hires Tyrell to murder the Princes in the Tower.

The Lancastrian Duke of Richmond and his supporters land from France to seize the crown and overthrow Richard. In his underground quarters, Richard directs his forces via Stanley but is becoming increasingly isolated and paranoid. He takes Stanley's son hostage and arranges for the murder of his wife Anne.

Richard leads his army to Bosworth Field and where Buckingham has been captured and is executed for desertion. Stanley joins forces with Richmond and in battle Richard's army is overrun. Richmond delivers the fatal blow to Richard in single combat.

Margaret looks over the devastation of the battlefield. Richmond is crowned Henry VII and is married to Elizabeth, daughter of Edward IV. The Houses of York and Lancaster are finally united, the white rose with the red.

Richard III is played by Benedict Cumberbatch, George by Sam Troughton, King Edward IV by Geoffrey Streatfeild, Catesby by Paul Bazely, Rivers by Al Weaver, Grey by Samuel Valentine, Anne by Phoebe Fox, Buckingham by Ben Daniels, Tyrell by Gary Powell, Stanley by Simon Ginty and Margaret by Sophie Okonedo.
How did you connect with the character?

In terms of tackling the real historical figure versus the fictionalised version in Shakespeare, I think we’re smart enough as audiences that the two can coexist.

The script does all the heavy lifting. Richard tells the audience about how wrong he feels in his body, about being dejected and overlooked, and about being unable to be part of a royal courtly life with the Plantagenets.

In medieval England if you were not born perfect, you were often drowned at birth. It was a terrible social taboo. In Shakespeare’s story, Richard is fostered at a distance from the Kennedy-like family of perfect specimens. There’s very little care for him. His deep-seated anger and hurt leads to his ambition and everything we know of him. That was our way into humanising him.

Do you see Richard III as a villain or as an antihero?

His arc is hugely brilliant. In Richard III he gives a speech about how he’s going to go and kill the king, Henry, and how this ties into his feelings about himself as a disabled man. I think that humanises him. As an actor you have to flesh out your character. You can’t pantomime with the daggers and the looks, because that gets really dull.

There’s such humour in other moments where Richard relishes his plans. He’s an antihero because he lures us in. He’s very funny, hopefully. Audiences don't necessarily side with him but they revel in his villainy! I also don't want to burden Freudian analysis onto him and make him more understandable. I don’t want to say, ‘Oh, he’s just a victim of this cruel world. Oh, what other choice did he have?’ Of course he had choices. He very clearly makes the wrong ones and suffers the ultimate downfall for that.

What do you think of Ben Power’s scripts?

Richard III is often performed standalone, because you can mention it in the same breath as Macbeth and Othello, if not, say, Hamlet. It is a standalone of the histories in a way that the Henry VI’s aren't. What Ben has done is to create a sense of through line in the themes across the plays. He has created a real sense of urgency.

What's it like to work with such a stellar cast and crew?

It’s exciting to see the talent you can draw due to the shorter engagement period. For example, it took Judi Dench a matter of days to film her scenes playing my mother, but to get someone of that ilk to do that on stage would be tricky, if not well nigh impossible.

History cycles are sometimes done, but rarely with the same director, and in this medium I can’t think of these plays ever having been done with the same director back to back like this. This series of The Hollow Crown is a continual drama rather than three separate films.
Dominic Cooke is an extraordinary director and someone who managed the Royal Court, one of our best-loved theatres, through a period of one of the best incarnations of new writing. He is so beloved in our industry, as well as being utterly brilliant, very kind and generous. You feel in safe hands.

It’s a winning element that we have the combination of Ben Power, the script-writer, along with Karen Hartley Thomas who worked on the prosthetics, with Dominic overseeing all.

**What was it like working on location when shooting these scenes?**

One of the joys of the job was an extraordinary heritage tour of Great Britain. It was a real honour for all of us to have access to these incredible parts of our history. It was awe-inspiring to be on these hallowed bits of preserved or ruined ground which these characters might actually have walked upon. The settings immediately create a sense of drama and scope.

**What was like to recreate the medieval battles?**

We were carrying around weapons of steel and aluminium, which were props but could still do a great deal of damage. We were fighting in fields and in rivers with water literally up to our chests. It was brutal.

The broadsword as a weapon could crack your skull open with just a glancing blow. It really is such a barbarous way to go about winning power. I’m in awe of it. The training was tough… All of us would come away from training looking shell-shocked and pale!

**How do you reconcile the play with the historical Richard III, whose remains were recently discovered?**

Physicality has always been at the centre of playing Richard III. He is very clearly described as being a hunchback with disproportionate legs. His physicality is there in the play and the script, in his own analysis and in other people’s name-calling. It is unavoidable.

On camera, anatomical accuracy is even more important because of the scrutiny provided by the lens. In the opening shots of Richard III, we have the character topless so you can see every detail of the curvature of his spine. It took me about 3-4 hours to put on the prosthetics. The weight of the silicone is incredible. It’s painted to match the skin tone and it looks distressingly real. By contrast on stage Richard’s body has always been something to hide.
JUDI DENCH as DUCHESS OF YORK

How did you get involved in The Hollow Crown?

*The Hollow Crown* scripts were sent to me while I was busy with *Esio Trot*. I thought it was interesting but I put it to one side because I was busy. Then I went to Hay-on-Wye to do an interview with Richard Eyre and he asked me if I remembered any lines from the Shakespeare plays I’ve done. He wanted me to perform some scenes but I told him that there are a couple of moments when I need a line feeding first. During rehearsals Benedict Cumberbatch walked into the room and said he would do them. So, at the event, Richard surprised the audience and introduced him on stage with me to tumultuous applause.

During the Q&A afterwards, Benedict Cumberbatch suddenly asked if I would be in the production of Richard III that he was going to do. I was completely floored. I thought about it and said yes and that was it. It’s all thanks to Benedict.

It’s thrilling and lovely to play the Duchess of York, which is where I come from. I remembered seeing the plays at Stratford with Peggy Ashcroft, Brewster Mason and Donald Sinden. I remembered the *Henry VI* plays terribly well but I’ve never done this one before.

Tell us about the character you play in *The Hollow Crown*?

I play this old bag, Cecily the Duchess of York. Everybody she loves has been killed; her husband, her children. She knows who’s done it and is a kind of Miss Marple! [She knows who’s doing it and she lets him have it]. If anyone says, “I’m in a terribly bad way,” she says, “You may be in a bad way, just wait until you hear what’s happened to me!” That’s the Duchess of York in *Richard III*.

I was passionately hoping that Richard III’s body would be buried in York Minster, but we’ve lost him to Leicester.

What do you think Shakespeare offers in terms of female parts?

He writes some wonderful female parts in *Richard III*. There’s Mad Margaret, Elizabeth Woodville, Cecily and Lady Anne. Richard not only kills Lady Anne’s husband but he also gets her to marry him. There are wonderful parts for women in it and they are very much a comment on the play.

Why do you think the BBC has chosen now to make this production?

There’s no doubt that a bad production of Shakespeare puts schoolchildren off forever. But if you do a really good production of Shakespeare; imaginative, lively and enthusiastic, you take it out of the theatre and put it in its own surroundings. It can be very exciting and it can fire somebody’s imagination. If a child watches that, and perhaps sees somebody they recognise from something else, they can suddenly get energised by a good production. That’s good and it can bring them back to the theatre.

Often Shakespeare’s taught in a turgid kind of way but there are great and exciting things to discover in it. I’ve seen a lot of quite young children being excited by Shakespeare. We did
The Comedy of Errors at Stratford and at the end we used to invite people to come up and dance onstage. Sometimes we had to ask them to go away! It’s wonderful to engage the imagination. If something is well presented, and exciting, they’ll want to go and see another version of it in the theatre.

Why do you think Benedict’s right for the part?

He’s a terrific actor and he did the most spectacular reading of it. He’d just come back from the Toronto Film Festival the night before, after doing all those crazy junket interviews, walked in and then read the whole of the Henry VI plays followed by Richard III, He was wonderful.

He has that ability not to take himself too seriously, as well as being a terrific actor.
I was at Central and his mother was the year ahead of me. I think I met him when he was a little boy because I opened a theatre at Brambletye School, where he was before he went to Harrow.

This is Dominic Cooke’s first television production and it’s interesting that he’s doing all three films. Are you looking forward to working with him?

It’s going to be very challenging for him to accomplish. Maybe he was asked by Benedict in a Q&A session! It’s a huge amount for him to do and he hasn’t directed television before.
I’ve never worked with him before but the rehearsal so far and the way he works has been very stimulating indeed. He has a wonderful understanding of the great sweep of it all.

How does he work with the text?

Everybody does it in a different way. I would be upset if not enough attention was being paid to the text. That’s because I come from the school of Peter Hall, Trevor Nunn and John Barton, where the text was of paramount importance. But Dominic is like that too. He pays incredible attention to the metre and the verse.
HUGH BONNEVILLE as GLOUCESTER

Were you familiar with the plays before you came to *The Hollow Crown: The Wars of the Roses*?

It was one of the plays I was least familiar with. They are quite exciting because they are rough and sprawling being written early in the career of Shakespeare. I had seen them on the stage in the history cycles. They are about England tearing itself apart and trying to work out what it is.

The plays have been condensed from four plays to three films. At the time they were performed, the characters would have been vivid in the audience’s imagination and they would have understood the references. Artistic license has been necessary – this is very much a version of the story, a clear one. I enjoyed reading the scripts more than the original plays, which is a terrible thing to say about Shakespeare! They have been condensed to have a clear narrative line, which is only for the better.

It is interesting to see the seeds and themes of Shakespeare growing and being revisited across plays. *Richard III* is a one-man narrative of a descent into evil and madness. We see Shakespeare honing his craft.

What do you think of your character, Gloucester?

He’s a simple character. Shakespeare thinks he’s a good man. He is caught between the political and the emotional. The history plays are fascinating because they are about family. You see Gloucester devoted to his nephew, devoted to the memory of his brother Henry V. His downfall is ultimately because his wife Eleanor enjoys using the credit card too much!

There’s fantastic tension in that Gloucester is unable to let go, but Henry VI is also clearly not ready. Meanwhile Gloucester has also created power himself. You can see the same thing in modern day situations, from a dictatorship to a boardroom. The plays explore the nature of power. Henry VI would like to dismiss it all and devote himself to higher thoughts. Richard III couldn’t give a toss about higher thoughts, he just wants power!

It is Gloucester’s death that unleashes the Wars of the Roses. The stability he represented was a certain kind of peace. You take out the central pillar of any society, then you create a vacuum. I’m not making grand claims for this, but you see it in Yemen, or Iraq, or Syria. In the play you see the dukes piling in, and chaos begins. This is the heart of the Wars of the Roses.

Dominic [Cooke] and Ben [Power] said that the central question of these films is: ‘How many bad decisions does it take before a madman is in power?’ You are taken from the glory of Henry V, to civil war, to a madman in power in Richard III. History has repeated itself in that vein.

The ripples of these family feuds can shape nations and have ramifications for centuries to come. The history plays have profoundly truthful family relationships playing out. In Gloucester’s case, he can see the woman he loves bringing a bad image to the central family and to the court. It’s the same as Imelda Marcos’ shoe collection, it doesn’t look good to the populace!
Did you look at the historical Duke of Gloucester?

Shakespeare writes with a political slant, of course he will not alienate his audience or his monarch! He understands a good story. It’s always going to be biased! It was useful in rehearsals to look at the real history but the plays always develop history for dramatic effect. You can’t be a slave to the actual history. I didn’t spend hours with my nose in the history books. Sorry, scholars!

The plays have been played by iconic actors for 500 years. How does that feel?

Gloucester is easier because he’s not one of those amazing legendary characters. When I was at the RSC I used to watch Robert Stevens’ Falstaff and Michael Maloney as Hal in the wings. I drooled over that production. The previous Hollow Crown series as well. There are many brilliant productions.

I was given a ticket to the Barbican at the age of twenty to see Richard III. I thought I was the master of the universe and knew everything about acting. About 20 seconds in I had my thumb in my mouth and was transported by this extraordinary performance of Antony Sher as Richard III. I wrote him a letter afterwards saying how much I’d learned! All my naivety as a wannabe actor was thrown away.

These characters are endlessly reinterpretable. We’ve had both Sherlock and Dr Watson do the part in recent times!

What’s it like doing the plays on screen?

Theatre is endlessly refreshable. Every production finds new nuances and has new relevance to its audience. McKellan’s Richard III spoke about a militaristic attitude and context where Benedict’s interpretation is completely different. Shakespeare is extraordinary because the work bears re-examination. I would defend our approach to Henry VI because it’s made it exciting.

Tell us about Tom Sturridge, who plays Henry.

It’s an extraordinary performance. He is trying to be a man but he doesn’t have the experience to be a leader. It’s not in his nature! He’s a religious thinker. It’s difficult to pull off without seeming wet! He does have a strength in him, which Margaret has to pull out of him. From Gloucester’s perspective she seems like a conniving cow! Henry wants to be a saintly man rather than a king. It’s a difficult thing to pull off and Tom pulls it off beautifully. It’s a bold performance.

The first cycle was moved into different worlds for each film and done by three different productions. This second chunk is very special because we have one vision taking us through the three films, both in terms of director and designer.

Will this cycle open Shakespeare up to new audiences?

It’s a compelling narrative and beautifully narrated in our version. People shy away from these plays but our version is very accessible.
MICHAEL GAMBON as SIR EDMUND MORTIMER

What do you think it is about these history plays which means we keep coming back to them?

They’re brilliant, aren’t they? I’ve done a lot of Shakespeare in my life from *Antony and Cleopatra* to *King Lear*. A lot of Shakespeare. I love it all because it’s so brilliantly written. You jump at it if someone offers it to you. Stage actors are absolutely wrapped in it. I’ve always been a theatre actor. This is like a little present at the end of the week doing television.

What is it about Shakespeare that keeps you coming back to it, personally?

It’s brilliant and it is a big challenge. When I was younger, doing Shakespeare at Stratford, I never used to give it a second thought. I thought, this is the stuff. As you get older, you become much more aware of it all. I played King Lear at Stratford. If someone offered that to me now, I’d run a mile. When you’re that age, you’re so thick. You don’t realise the implications! That’s why I think a lot of actors, they play King Lear when they’re perhaps twenty-eight or something, and then they keep playing him.

What do you think are the differences in doing Shakespeare on TV, and what are the challenges of bringing Shakespeare to a TV audience?

I suppose you have to make it tight and real. Shakespeare on the stage is another world, but on television, with the camera there, you have to become something else. It’s much more interesting. I suppose theatregoers like Shakespeare in different ways, don’t they?

The person drawn into the theatre is drawn in. They can see everything, and that changes the experience. On the TV, you’re locked into the images. You could say that Shakespeare on the television could be much more interesting in certain ways. All of these big close-ups. You say the lines like they’ve never been said before, though I’m not sure I know how to do that!

Did you ever watch the last set of *The Hollow Crown* films?

Ben Whishaw was very good. Brilliant. And so is our boy here, Benedict.

What makes Benedict a good Richard III?

I’ve seen Benedict in lots of things. He does the most amazing things. Benedict Cumberbatch is great in these. I worked with him years ago and he is such an interesting actor. He plays complicated characters very well and is really gifted.

How do you hope these films will be received?

I hope people will love them. Doing Shakespeare on TV is a brilliant idea. Maybe the youth of today doesn’t want to go see a play, but they’ll watch it on TV.
How were you approached about taking part in *The Hollow Crown*?

I’ve known Dominic Cooke for a long time and have worked with him before. He asked me if I wanted to play Margaret. I had seen Richard II from the first series and loved it. I’d never read the original plays until I got Ben Power’s adapted scripts. What attracted me is the power of the stories and the words. It was a no-brainer.

What did you think of Margaret?

I was surprised I didn’t know about the character before. I don’t have a huge knowledge of Shakespeare – I’ve done a bit but not loads. I’m more familiar with the famous plays. I was amazed that there was such an extraordinary character. She becomes extraordinary throughout the whole cycle but one play on its own wouldn’t give you a sense of how she really is.

What role does she play in the stories?

She’s quite strong in the beginning but she doesn’t realise how Henry is going to behave until she gets to England and spends some time there. She realises that she has to take charge all the time because he’s got quite a spiritual nature and finds it hard to be forceful. The crown was thrust upon him at a very young age, so he’s very different from his father. She’s had to fill the gap and steer the ship to what she feels is the rightful place – Henry on the throne and the Yorks in charge.

Is she frustrated with the politics of the day?

She is particularly frustrated at the beginning because Gloucester seems to have such a powerful influence and Henry is treated like a child. They’re married so she feels he should be allowed to rule, with her alongside him. She feels a lot of the people around him are unruly and don’t treat him like a King, as they would have done with Henry V. She’s very unhappy about the situation she finds herself in. It’s not what she dreamt when she was on the boat coming to marry the King. She’s very savvy and has a quick instinct. She’s fearless, particularly for that time as a woman. She’s… got balls.

What’s it been like being on location?

It’s been very helpful going around all the castles in England and Wales. The words give you everything though. I could be on a bare stage and give you the words.

We’ve been like travelling gypsies. There’s a different energy to each film. I’ve got *The Hollow Crown* Episode One people, the Episode Two people, and the Episode Three people. They’re each quite separate groups and I’m in each group. There’ve been lots of really good nights out around the country in different hotels. Sam Troughton did a quiz night, which was really good.
The War of the Roses is essentially a family feud, with intensely familial relationships.

That’s always the case with Shakespeare, or at least with the bits that I’ve done. People are always the same, no matter what the period is. The same thoughts and feelings, inconsistencies and ambiguities still occur and Shakespeare goes to the heart of that.

What do you think Dominic's brought to the table?

Dominic is my all-time favourite director anyway, so working with him on his first TV film is fantastic. I’ve seen his previous projects and I’m a massive fan of his theatre work. He’s a person that I would say yes to absolutely anything he asked me to do. Also, he gave me the top part in this, so it was a double whammy! He’s intensely intelligent, coupled with a great instinct for humanity and what it is to be human, the human condition. He pours all that into his work. It’s always done with the utmost authenticity. He’s also a decent chap and quite a laugh. All of those qualities are probably why he’s got the cast he has, because a lot of people know him. I just can’t imagine another director getting this cast, but it’s because a lot of people simply want to work with him. First of all, it’s Shakespeare, Ben Power adapted it and it was very well received last time. You know when you do this that so many people will see it around the world because people study Shakespeare and they’ll be doing it for another generation. And Dominic doing it makes it incredibly exciting.

I’m glad we’re doing the whole thing. It’s a whole story. My character is the only one that runs through all three films so it’s great to have that continuity of having the same director. Benedict was saying it has been great for him to play Richard all the way through. It’s not often you get to do that. You can really get to see who he was and how he started. The same is true of Margaret. In a scene that’s often cut, in Richard III, you see her as a madwoman running along, but you don’t see how she got to that place.

Did you look at the real history?

With this, it was all about the words. I didn’t look into the real history because it was so different. I just made sure I understood all the words. The words give you the character. I looked at things about war and battles and the stress of battles and of death. I looked a little at the meaning of royalty in those days. But I really just went with the text and made sure I really understood everything about every word I said. I let the words and the energy of them guide me.

Did you go back to the play after reading Ben’s adaptation?

Occasionally I went to a speech of mine in the original, just to see what happened between the lines and see the imagery that was used. Mostly I just stuck with Ben’s script and didn’t get caught up in the history.

Does it inspire you when you’re working with actors of this calibre?

I think it brings quite a lot of relaxation. Everyone knows what they’re doing and they’re at the stage in their career when they’re no longer trying to prove things. It’s a relaxed atmosphere because you’re working with the best, and everybody is there to serve the play. It’s quite a laugh too which is important to me – I love the work but it’s important to have a
laugh as well. It’s been brilliant working with Benedict. I’ve known him for years anyway and have worked with him before. He’s pretty much the same as he was back then. He’s a great actor and really good casting for Richard III.

**Have you worked with Tom Sturridge before?**

No but I love working with him. He’s brilliant and a genius actor. We have a really good working relationship – I can throw anything at him and he’s really loose. That’s the way I like to work. I like things to be free. We get on very well and suit each other.

It’s a difficult part to play, challenging, but he makes it look really easy. He makes it look like there’s no other way of playing it, which is when you know someone’s really good. I believe everything he does. It’s a really interesting part, especially the way they’ve shaped it with Benedict. I don’t know how it was in the original. I think he’s got an interesting journey. The way I’m playing Margaret, she really loves him and is just a bit disappointed sometimes with his behaviour. I do try to put love into every character I play.

**What are your hopes for the audience and introducing it to new viewers?**

I just really hope people watch it. That’s the main thing. I hope that people watch it who perhaps wouldn’t have watched it the last time round. Another good thing about Benedict is that he’ll bring a whole audience that wasn’t there before. I hope they watch the ones before he comes in!
TOM STURRIDGE as Henry VI

What was it about this series and Henry VI specifically that made you want to do it?

First of all, it was a play which I didn’t know at all. I think very few people know it, so unlike with a lot of Shakespeare, people don’t come to it with preconceptions. It didn’t feel like you were taking on the burden of the long history of those characters, which is exciting, for something which is so beautifully written and extraordinary.

Dominic Cooke has also always been someone whose work I’ve admired. He was clearly so passionate and articulate about the project. In the landscape of Shakespeare, that’s the first thing you need when you have no idea what you’re doing.

What was it like playing Henry VI?

It was the question of how to play the transformative period of becoming a man. I always think that period between the ages of 18 and 24 is such a bizarre stage, and the two people at either end are always very different. The first word that always came in to my head with Henry VI was empathy. He doesn’t have a barrier between what other people feel and what he feels.

I think his perceived flaws as a king are to do with his great genius, which is that he can hold these two conflicting ideas in his head and have love, essentially, for both parties. That was considered weak at the time, because it means he can’t make decisions in the aggressive-minded way that is required in medieval England. Despite wearing the crown, Henry’s place is not to be a king. His primary evolution is through that realisation. He says at the end that all he wants to do is spend his last days in devotion.

What’s your history with Shakespeare?

It doesn’t exist! My experience is doing Macbeth for GCSE coursework and that’s as far as it goes. I’ve never done it as an actor. I didn’t really act in school and I didn’t go to drama school, so I didn’t have the opportunity to do it in an amateur way.

How did you prepare for the role?

I found the more I trusted my instincts and applied the same rules you would apply to any scene, the closer I got to how it’s meant to be acted. I think that ultimately people articulate the truth in relatively similar ways, no matter when it’s written.

We worked with a Shakespeare voice coach who was helpful for understanding the rules about iambic pentameter and rhythm and emphasis and all of that kind of stuff. Trying to be clear with what you want to articulate, as Dominic says, is the way to really make your points. As a Shakespeare character, if you can persuade someone in a sentence or a speech, you’ve got it right.

I can’t describe the difference I felt going into work in week eleven compared to in week three. Certain anxieties had gone by then! The time spent with the role was extraordinarily helpful.
Does it help you to look at the real historical character?

I realised very quickly that reading the history books was not helpful. The scripts, although they are Shakespeare’s words, have a very strong authorial voice of their own, which is difficult to articulate because they are only impressed upon you as you read them. That decision-making felt important to honour, not anything else. I didn’t even look at the original plays.

Shakespeare is a strange one, where because so many other people have played the part, you have the opportunity to watch other people play it. But it’s such a weird thing to do. I can’t imagine how it would be helpful in any way. It would only make you deeply depressed!

What was it like working with such a stellar ensemble cast?

It takes the pressure off! Things are always easier with talented people around, in all walks of life, simply because you support each other. In acting I react honestly to people who are behaving honestly.

What’s it like working with Benedict Cumberbatch?

I’ve never worked with him before though I’ve known him for a long time. It’s clear that he’s a bizarrely and exquisitely talented person!

What’s your character’s interaction with Margaret?

In a strange way, that’s where I felt the most space in the script to be interpretative. We very easily could have been two people who meet at the beginning and don’t love each other at all. I could be an asexual person. She could have already formed relationships with Somerset and so on. Or we could start off as two characters who have potential. That was exciting for the two of us, to both consciously and subconsciously form that relationship and find our own path.

What’s it like working with Dominic?

Dominic is just brilliant at two things. You need someone who can pull the ideas out of you, but also someone to have better ideas themselves. Directors giving notes is such a difficult thing, but he gives them really well.

What’s it like being on location?

With Shakespeare, if you’re in a room, you start saying the words in a certain preconceived way. If you’re standing half-naked covered in blood and mud and you are saying the words, all of that goes out of the window!

Do you enjoy the battle scenes?

Henry, unfortunately or fortunately, is not the most physical of characters. I have not been charging around on horses with swords. But I always like to be distracted from acting. My favourite scenes are scenes where you’re in the middle of the ocean swimming. You spend
the entire time trying not to drown, and you forget about trying to act well. As with everything, I just have to think about something else.

**Do you hope this programme will make Shakespeare more relevant to a wider audience?**

It will definitely offer them something, because I think the plays are really, really good. As far as a new audience goes, by definition it will because very few people have seen *Henry VI*. It will be on television, so more people will watch it. They should, because from what I’ve seen, working on a day-to-day basis, people are doing something really special, and there is nothing more exciting than watching a great actor doing some of his best work.
What did you think of the first series of *The Hollow Crown*?

The people gathered around the project were of really high standard. The quality of the acting, in particular, with people like Ben Whishaw, was particularly great. When I got an offer to play Plantagenet, I thought, ‘Oh my God, what a privilege to be involved.’ When I heard who else was in the cast, I was absolutely bowled over, because there’s so many wonderful, wonderful actors involved in this piece.

I’ve been lucky enough to do a tiny bit of Shakespeare onstage over the years. The chance to get involved with the language once more has been incredible. It has stimulated my interest in Shakespeare once again, so it’s been a win-win all round.

Had you read any of these plays before?

*Richard III* I knew, of course, but I hadn’t known the Henry plays. This is a much more political play, and it involves politics as we understand it. It’s been fascinating to watch the interaction of Gloucester and Eleanor, and interesting to see how Shakespeare portrays Henry VI in particular. Sadly for me, I don’t carry on through the series to get involved with what my son, Richard III, gets up to. I end up with my head on a spike prior to that!

What’s your impression of the characters?

I see these people as savage nobles. They don’t take any slight lightly. Although the Lancastrians might be a little more slick and politic, the Yorks are very much like we imagine Yorkshire men to be. When they believe they’re right, they believe they’re right.

In Shakespeare, the moral balances are very fine. Tom Sturridge is doing some of the most wonderful acting in portraying what’s essentially not a particularly attractive character, but allowing us to see how that seeming weakness can be effective. Shakespeare has done a fabulous job of showing us how things can transpire, and how horribly, absolutely ruthless these people can be in pursuit of power.

Tell us about the iconic roses scene in *Henry VI*.

Shakespeare has imagined how the Wars of the Roses started. Somebody that day was wearing a white rose, and somebody else wore a red rose to separate the sides. Shakespeare’s distilled that wonderfully and turned it into a theatrical event. I think the Wars of the Roses are still very alive in the English imagination in the roses on footballers’ shirts and so on. People are very attuned to the period. It is part of the language of cinema. There’s a lot of film out there set in medieval times and so many of the current video games are locked into this period. It’s not extraordinary for us to see people in chainmail and swords. It’s part of our language.

In terms of accessibility, people won’t feel threatened. The delivery of the language is very naturalistic, although you can’t be completely naturalistic for something that’s heightened realism like Shakespeare.
How helpful is it to you to look at the real history of the events in Henry VI?

How do you get hold of the real history? That’s an important question. Shakespeare was very political, but he was also a fabulous entertainer. That’s where his genius comes in as a playwright. As for the history itself, all countries are built on myth. Myth is sometimes more important than history.

Tell us about the battle scenes. What can audiences expect?

I think audiences can expect a level of reality from the battle scenes. They are realistic and gory. It’s going to be quite shocking. People chop people’s heads off. They didn’t stop with just that. They’d bring the head to show people they’d actually killed them.

It’s tremendously tiring if you’ve got armour on and a huge sword, and you’re wandering about trying to fight. The armourers explained to us that if you fall over in armour, you need somebody to help you to get up. Otherwise you’re just stuck on the ground. They used to employ these quick, fleet-footed young boys to run onto the battlefield and stab the knights who fell and couldn’t get up through the gaps in their armour.

What’s it like working with such a stellar cast?

You’ve got to bring your A-game to the set. It’s a Premier League team. It’s also very much an ensemble piece, so you feel a big sense of responsibility to get your parts right so that everyone can bounce off you and feed off your energy. As Plantagenet, I have to do that quite a lot of the time. It has been a huge sense of responsibility.

You feel very lucky to be involved, you really do. I filmed a scene where Mortimer, played by Michael Gambon, dies and tells me that I’ve got a claim to the throne. Acting the scene is going to be something I’m going to remember forever as an actor. These things don’t come along every day.

Is it helpful to film on location?

Costumes and setting are more important in a production like this than practically anything, unless you’re shooting sci-fi. There are real stone walls of two or three feet of stone. You can feel it. People speak, and the sound is really incredible, because it’s picking up the actual bounce off actual stonewalls.

Will The Hollow Crown: The Wars of the Roses open Shakespeare to a new audience?

A modern or younger audience will find the series accessible. That’s because the medieval period is so prevalent in the vocabulary of the cinema. I think the show is pitched perfectly for the present day.

On top of that, we have these incredible interesting stories with fascinating moral dilemmas and brutal people. There’s no brutality like medieval brutality. You can’t believe the levels of horror to which they will stoop, only to blithely move on. At the age of twelve, thirteen, fifteen, they’re making decisions about their lives and being betrothed. By the age of twenty you’ve been in two or three wars and seen death and destruction everywhere. There’s an
incredible intensity of life lived at a heightened level. That’s going to come across as well. People will be going to bed happy that we’ve got a nice little democracy going on, rather than dealing with these savage nobles!
ANTON LESSER as EXETER

What’s the story of The Hollow Crown: The Wars of the Roses?

A power vacuum exists with Gloucester and Winchester vying for power over the new young king. Exeter is old-school, reliable, keeper of the peace. He wants to honour the deceased king but he watches that world fragmenting. His perspective is a nice continuity for observing.

Henry’s powers have been thrust upon him. He would like to hand it over and concentrate on his spiritual journey. Yet at the same time he has a real conscience about being a good king. He’s very conflicted. Shakespeare explores what a king is without the trappings of royalty, and what makes a real king?

You played the same character in the first series of The Hollow Crown. What was it like to come back?

Someone, I’m not sure who, remembered that Exeter is a continuous character from the first set of plays to these, so I got the call to come back!

The production is very humane and this trickles down to every level of production. The privilege of working with this language and this writing makes me try not to forget that I’m part of the small part of the acting world who gets to work on stuff like this and that’s quite precious. Entering into it was a joy and it was hard work. It is hard to get into a cold suit of armour and go black and blue in my tender old age! I hope my tiny contribution will support the bigger performances so that they’re not in a vacuum.

Dominic is the kind of human I just love to spend time with, before even being a director. He’s one of the few who I’ll accept a project on the strength of his name, I know he’ll be working only on great things and because working with him is brilliant.

I’ve worked with Dominic many times in the theatre. He’s a director who, when you arrive, hasn’t got a concept all mapped out, yet. You’re in a space where everybody doesn’t know but everybody wants to find out how what we present will have that quality of the unknown. I think he’s brought that to his first television film. It’s crazy that it’s his first ever screen work! Rupert Ryle-Hodges, who was producer on both series, gets very excited about the work and its potential, which trickles down in that he gets involved with a director he resonates with. That atmosphere is there for the actors they cast. It’s a win-win.

How useful is it in your acting to look at real history?

Not at all, at least from the point of view of acting. But the history is terrifically interesting. The real Essex died when he was 49 years old but in the plays I go on ’til I’m about 80 or 90!

Tell us about Tom Sturridge’s interpretation of Henry.

The quality of vulnerability he has is perfect for the character, and perfect for the screen because it’s quite delicately drawn and you can mine it in a way you can’t on the large canvas of the stage.
What does television bring to Shakespeare?

The purpose of television is to open the audience’s hearts. It makes us pay attention for that length of time and it arrests us and surprises us. Each medium has its particular way of allowing that moment of not knowing what you’re watching and being open to its originality without the trappings of our familiarity with Shakespeare.

What do you think of Ben Power’s adaptations?

It’s difficult to know what to leave in and what to leave out when adapting Shakespeare. I’d done the plays so many years ago that I’d forgotten the lines, and I resisted the urge to go back to the plays because you start to bargain about what lines you have and haven’t retained! But I think Ben has done a fantastic job with the scripts. I’m sure he’s as sorry as the rest of us to have to cut Shakespeare.

Will it make Shakespeare accessible to a new audience?

Shakespeare reflects us back at ourselves, and so does reality television these days! The plays have political and psychological subtlety and sophistication but because they are Shakespeare’s earlier plays they have plenty of story and action. I hope they will appeal to those who might have thought Shakespeare is not for them. It’s not just dimly lit corridor acting!
Tell us about your character.

My feeling about Edward is that he’s a man of action, and a man of violence. He’s a great guy, which is his undoing in the sense that he likes the good life a bit too much!

What was it like joining the series, with your enormous amount of experience in Shakespeare?

It’s a real privilege. My previous Shakespeare experience was mostly with the history plays, so it feels doubly exciting because I know them really well. I’ve done them twice at the RSC on separate occasions so I really feel like I know them inside out. Of course, every production is different so you feel like you’re rediscovering them. Playing different parts also means you have a completely different perspective.

The plays are a specific Elizabethan vision of the period. Does it help you to look at the real history?

In terms of interpretation, I found it quite useful to look at contemporary accounts of what Edward was like. But it’s also important not to impose that on the text. The key with Shakespeare is to use what is written as the keys to your character, but also try to give the characters some hinterland about where they’ve come from and what their lives are like.

The Shakespeare plays are compressed for dramatic effect. There is a way of looking at these plays as Tudor propaganda, but Shakespeare’s smart enough to also undermine that along the way if he wants to. Shakespeare’s Richard III might not be who he was in history, but the character in history almost certainly murdered his nephews, so he was no angel! It’s fiction. It’s a historical drama.

What do you think of Ben Power’s scripts?

Having done the plays in the past, you do have certain interpretations and intonations in your head.

The odd thing was that when I was at Stratford, I understudied Edward, which is the part I’m playing in this, so I did know the part and I’d learned the lines. I never had to go on at Stratford because Forbes Masson played it rather brilliantly. Back then, I had to try and learn Forbes’s interpretation of the character. It was such a strong interpretation, so it’s been a challenge to try and forget it! The first time I did the play, Tom Beard played Edward, who in this production is playing Sir William Lucy. It was strange having someone who I’d watched play Edward around the set. Trying to make it your own and make it fresh is part of the fun.

What’s it like working with such a stellar ensemble cast?

It could potentially be quite intimidating. One of the strange things is that it’s actually been quite relaxing. We’ve been away a lot together as a group, staying in hotels, because we’re filming in wonderful locations. Therefore, we’ve had plenty of downtime together to hang out. Everybody’s been incredibly low-key and fun and not intimidating in the slightest. To
work with just one of these people would be a privilege, but the scale of this production and this cast is enormous.

What’s it like working with Benedict Cumberbatch, who plays Richard III?

What he is able to do with Richard’s part is that he can take the character on a long journey. He starts as a boy. You never normally get to see that in a film of Richard III. Normally you just see the ready-made psychopath, rather than somebody who is discovering how they feel about the world and their own alienation. This production is going to be simply brilliant in that you can see the real human being evolving, and therefore really understand the humanity in the character, rather than judge him as being pure evil. It is two films of civil war, creating Richard III.

I think Benedict is a proper actor in the sense that he’s generous and he listens. I’ve known him for a very long time: we were at university together and did plays at university. In a way, working with him again has been to rekindle a very old friendship, which has really helped in terms of playing brothers. When I first started at the RSC I worked with Sam Troughton as well. I’ve known both of them for ages. We’ve got a lot of shared history which means that our enjoyment of each other’s company has come naturally into the scenes. Benedict doesn’t carry any of the burdens of fame or anything onto the set. He’s just a treat. He hasn’t changed at all since university days.

And you had Judi Dench playing your mother!

She’s an icon. I spoke to her yesterday and I thanked her. She’s readily available and she’s given some advice about Shakespeare. She has these ten points of advice from some book, a biography of hers, which I read when I was a student. I said, ‘Thank you so much because that’s still the most useful bit of advice I’ve ever read about an actor doing Shakespeare’, and I said that to share a scene with her is a real privilege. She said she’d forgotten ever giving this advice, and what was it? Could I please tell her, because she’d rather like to know! And was it, ‘Remember not to laugh?’ Which is a very Judi Dench answer! Again, like Benedict, she doesn’t make you feel intimidated at all. It’s a pleasure to work with her.

The Wars of the Roses is a family feud. Does that make the conflicts all the more intimate?

It is rather like something such as The Sopranos, where they happen to be playing out something quite intimate and domestic on an epic scale, because it’s about running an entire country.

How much does the production design help you?

We were sitting with this medieval food and it was candlelit, and the ambience really does transport you into that world. It’s really exciting to have all that work done for you by production design and to be in such an astonishing building. It’s also true of the clothes, the wigs, having long hair and standing on hillsides, mounting horses or fighting on rivers. It’s extremely helpful because you have to do less work with your imagination, because you really are in that world.
Will *The Hollow Crown* be a good way for people to learn to appreciate Shakespeare?

We’ve got this weird world where Shakespeare is owned by an academic elite and has to be administered to everyone else like antibiotics, for the good of everybody! Hopefully this will smash that down, so that you turn on your TV, and if you like it, you keep watching. Perhaps at the end you might think, ‘That was weird because the language wasn’t inaccessible at all.’ The adaptations are good because they streamline the story and bring that to the forefront.

It does Shakespeare a great disservice to put him on a pedestal. Henry VI is one of Shakespeare’s earliest plays: it is Shakespeare before he was Shakespeare! He was just a young guy trying to write something exciting so that he could get the next commission. They were incredibly successful for him as a young writer and they really got him going. They are different from the first series, which are the more sophisticated, wordier later plays which we associate with Shakespeare. These are just dynamic and bloodthirsty, with people killing each other as quickly as they can. They have nothing to do with our high-falutin’ ideas about Shakespeare and his language. I would hope that you would watch it and say, who wrote that? Because they’re not particularly well-known as Shakespeare plays in the wider world. Hopefully they exist not as Shakespeare but just as really exciting historical films.

**Do you have any favourite scenes?**

I had to play medieval tennis. That was quite difficult!
PHOEBE FOX as ANNE

What’s it been like to film The Hollow Crown?

It’s been very surreal to work with a cast like this. Just turning up and getting to act with Ben and Judi, and getting to act this part, has been fantastic.

I asked my agent to audition for the part, because Anne is such a great character. I wouldn’t necessarily want to play her on the stage, which is because you get one great scene and then spend most of the play off-stage. This was great because you can do the scene and then go home!

Tell us about Anne. In the space of a single speech she goes from loathing Richard to agreeing to marry him. Did you prepare for it?

I’d never actually seen Richard III. I was aware of that scene in particular because it’s one that gets trotted out at drama school a lot. When I actually looked at it for the audition, I did wonder how to make it work. It’s been cut a bit, so the change now happens in an even shorter amount of time. It is still a really long scene for TV!

It got me thinking about people that have Stockholm syndrome. People who become obsessive over someone and hate them but love them at the same time. There’s a fine line between wanting to kill someone and wanting to have sex with them. That was my starting point.

Does Shakespeare write interesting parts for women?

Anne is fierce and she matches Richard intellectually. They mirror each other’s language. But she is also fragile. Shakespeare writes incredible parts for women, but his women are by no means perfect. He acknowledges that women can have a male kind of strength in them, but that at the same time women are more emotional than men.

Is it draining to perform such emotional scenes?

We were lucky, and yet unlucky, in that we performed the scene over two evenings. You could rehearse and perform this scene for days on end because of how intricate and complicated it is.

What’s Benedict like as a performer?

I didn’t know what to expect. But he’s a really good actor, and incredibly generous.

What’s it like working with the stellar ensemble cast?

When I realised I would have to do one of my scenes with Judi Dench, I suddenly didn’t want to deliver Shakespeare in front of her. There’s no way I can ever live up to her delivery! It’s always interesting how those feelings disintegrate. People like Judi Dench and Michael Gambon are like mythological gods in my mind, and then when you meet them, almost instantaneously, you realise they are just normal people.
I have these moments of being Phoebe and getting caught up in it all, before realising I’m meant to be in the scene, and pulling myself together!

The Wars of the Roses are a family feud. Is that their appeal?

Even though they are kings and queens, we recognise their behaviour. One of our most popular genres is the family kitchen sink drama. The comedians we like are the ones that tap into the way we talk to our mothers, and the way our dad dances at a wedding. It does make the story accessible.

How does The Hollow Crown appeal to an audience that is unfamiliar with Shakespeare?

Sometimes the first hurdle is getting people to go to the theatre. In comparison, it’s so easy to turn on the TV. I think it’s great that it has quite a lot of recognisable faces in it. People are already in tune to those people’s voices and the way they deliver things and what they look like. The locations we use make things easier, too. For example in the scene with Ben and I, we are in an actual forest. You’re doing some of the work for the audience because they don’t have to imagine where we are.

Does the costume help as well?

In part of the series, I am wearing a huge half wig, so I have a head of long, medieval hair. I did spend half the time feeling like I was being pulled backwards! But when you look in a mirror and feel unrecognisable, it does help you disappear into your character.

What effect will it have for Dominic Cooke to direct all three films?

I think there will be more cohesion, because Dominic has directed all three films, whereas in the first series the three films were directed by separate directors.

You can easily tell that Dominic has a theatre background, which is wonderful for an actor. He’s very much an actor’s director. I’ve seen him take notes on paper, which I don’t think I’ve ever seen on set! He’s very detailed in his notes. When you’re doing Shakespeare, such things are essential. He’s got his team on camera and around him which allows him to give us the attention we really need.
STANLEY TOWNSEND as WARWICK

Could you summarise your character?

My character Warwick is a warrior but also a politician, so there’s a fantastic combination at play for me, in that I get to do all the fighting but I get to be political as well.

Warwick switches sides in these stories. It’s a fantastic thing that Shakespeare has written. He’s written the most loyal of men, who changes sides. What’s great about this work is all the layers and the complexity. It’s much more an act of puzzle-solving and less an act of invention. A script for camera can be quite flash and quite straightforward, but *The Hollow Crown* isn’t like that. There’s a history to every character. That’s the joy of this material.

How did you get involved in *The Hollow Crown: The Wars of the Roses*?

It came to me through Dominic. He rang me up and asked me if I wanted a part. I read the three scripts and of course, I immediately wanted to do it because they’re fantastic. I started the year playing Kent in *King Lear*, directed by Sam Mendes. So I started the year with Shakespeare and I’m ending it with *The Hollow Crown*. It’s been my year of Shakespeare!

Were you familiar with the plays before?

As far as Will Shakespeare is concerned, he’s the reason I became an actor. I came over to the RSC as a boy on school trips, and I saw a production of *The Taming of the Shrew*. I just looked and thought, ‘I want to do that, I want to do it. I want to be in that.’

It was a combination of the exciting action of Jonathan Price kicking the whole set down and the language being used. People laughing at four-hundred-year-old jokes – that’s brilliant.

So here I am, finally, in it!

Does Shakespeare’s language feel the same regardless of the play?

My experience of it is of a riddle, which you want to solve, looking at the best way to run the rhythm out, the best way for meaning. There are keys to unlock the meaning, such as the rhythm of the line. If a word is unfamiliar I have to look it up. I visualise the meaning of the word when I’m performing and speaking the obscure word. I decide what part of the word I want to hit, and how to express what’s happening to that character. Ultimately, it’s meaning and communication. How do I make this set of sounds communicate? That’s your yardstick.

What kind of collaborator is Dominic?

He’s gold dust, really. He comes in and he might give you a little technical note. He might say, you’ve got to pronounce the ‘ed’ at the end of the word for the metre to run, and you find when you put that little flick in at the end, the whole line runs better. He gives me a point of concentration, for example, ‘Remember that you’ve been working your whole life to achieve this and now it’s here. Think about that the next take.’ Suddenly the line comes out of you and it feels like you’re saying it. Dominic makes you feel like you’re saying it, which is the greatest gift of all.
The Wars of the Roses were a family feud. Does that make the emotion all the more relatable?

The story is a combination of family and politics, which makes the stew very rich. It’s about fathers and sons. I don’t think there’s any family in the stories, which isn’t dysfunctional in some way, which you then couple with power and money.

Do you feel the history of the locations where you’re shooting?

Yes. The dip in the step that you walk over. The sway of the timber in the roof. The views, the aspects. Because all the buildings are old, they get the best views. They were the first to be built there. Looking out from Dover Castle, you feel the history. You’re in the place that people were in when they made these actions. It’s extraordinary.
How did *The Hollow Crown: The Wars of the Roses* come about?

I got a call from Sam Mendes who wanted one director to do the next series of *The Hollow Crown*. I come from theatre and wanted to start working on screen. I just thought bringing my own experience and love of Shakespeare gave me a great way of working on screen. It is frightening… in a good way!

What was the thinking behind the series?

We wanted to ask, ‘What makes a good leader, and what makes a bad leader?’ Henry V is an ideal leader because he understands how the common people live, and he’s balanced. He can be a killer or a listener.

The trilogy we are telling is the story of two men, an overly empathetic man called Henry VI and an overly villainous Richard III. The country, England, becomes very ill during this period. The series is an exploration of what makes a leader, and who can put the country first. Neither of these characters can do that which is why you end up with a barbaric murderous country at the end of the cycle.

We’re big on authenticity these days but we need to separate ourselves from that, because Shakespeare very much borrowed from history, stories and myths and reshaped them to what he wants to talk about. The series asks real questions. How do we get to the place where we allow tyrants to rule, and civil war to happen? Those questions are still relevant in today’s world. There’s also an appetite for myth, and Shakespeare is the master of myth. To see Shakespeare done well is really satisfying.

The trilogy poses the question, ‘How many bad decisions does it take to put a psychopath in power?’ Any elements which didn’t fit that central story were cut. The first film is about the loss of Henry’s inheritance and it focuses around Hugh Bonneville’s character Gloucester. Gloucester can’t let Henry go and be his own person. That’s his tragic downfall.

People are constantly acting out what has happened to them. Shakespeare was writing about post-traumatic stress disorder 400 years before the term was coined. All through Shakespeare’s work there is a deep understanding of human nature which predates our own modern understanding.

Famously, *Henry VI* is not considered one of Shakespeare’s greatest works.

During the editing, we decided to make the original play more concrete. We didn’t include most of the play set in France unless it has an impact on unity in England. The focus is on a king who isn’t ready. I wanted Hugh Bonneville to play Gloucester because he’s such a warm man. He has status and authority but you feel he is basically doing the right thing.

What’s the core of the story of Richard III?

What’s amazing about Richard III is that it takes one very simple idea and goes very deep. It’s about a leader who has no empathy who takes over an already damaged state. Richard
recognises that he has no connection to another human being, which is why at the end of the play when he faces his end, he has the appalling realisation that nobody will care if he dies.

Shakespeare is querying Machiavelli and what actually happens when you put Machiavellian thought into practise. Shakespeare shows us the mayhem and madness which results. He’s a humanist at heart.

Tell us about casting the series.

Actors love to do Shakespeare. The problem with doing Shakespeare on stage is that the runs are very long. Doing it on screen means the time is more broken up, and they can find the time in their schedules to do the parts. I was confident we’d have a great cast.

What’s it like working with Benedict Cumberbatch?

It felt great to go into the project with someone I really liked and trusted. He’s grown so much as an actor. He has worked with really good people and is at the height of his powers at the moment. I think he’s a genius. It’s like working with Olivier at his peak.

Interestingly, he’s an actor who responds to a lot of takes, which was tricky because we didn’t have much time. He is an actor who searches out the answer to the notes I have in the back of my mind, as he’s very inventive, so that in the end I don’t even need to provide the notes. There’s a level of madness in what he’s doing in this role as Richard III, like a Stalin or a Hitler.

What impressed you about Tom Sturridge?

I was really struck by him when he acted in the Royal Court. He has that mercurial sensitivity that Mark Rylance or Ben Whishaw have. He’s very special. Tom has that openness to play an overly empathetic actor. You can see right into his head on screen. I thought he was a no-brainer to cast as Henry VI.

What does Sophie Okonedo bring to the part of Margaret?

Her character Margaret tells the story of the civil war. She starts off as an innocent and ends up a wreck. She embodies the sense of loss in the cycle. Shakespeare always reminds us what has been lost.

Sophie is a friend I’ve worked with many, many times. She is a visceral, mercurial, instinctive actor. She’s done Shakespeare a lot and she was at the RSC. She had the courage to go to the raw place Margaret has to go to when she sees her son killed. She goes through betrayal and she is an outsider. She’s drawn to Somerset because they are similarly fiery. Sophie prepared very, very thoroughly for the part and she knew it inside out, which gave her a freedom on set and allowed her to act with a certain wildness to her character.

Some of the cast have done a lot of Shakespeare, and some haven’t done any, how does this impact the production?

The most important part of Shakespearian acting is making sense of the language, not just in terms of meaning but also viscerally and physically. Tom Sturridge and Keeley Hawes hadn’t
done Shakespeare before, but they are brilliant actors and they understood it. It was so great to watch them grow. Keeley really understands screen acting and is brilliant in that respect, as it’s very different to stage acting. Our rehearsals were wonderful. Judi Dench is a master of Shakespeare and she often sat down with Keeley, who is brilliant.

What’s really important is the connection to the words and the way the characters use the language to make a change in their situation.

**Tell us about the visual language of the films.**

The primary function of the visuals is character and world. Henry’s world is about simplicity, austerity, and cooler colours – a monkish world. Margaret comes in with a different aesthetic. Edward IV’s world is the conscious consumption of gold and red. Richard’s world is high-contrast, underground, and shadowy.

There’s a lot of reference to a lot of war films. Richard’s scenes are influenced by *Downfall*, a brilliant German film about the last days of Hitler in his bunker, and are monochromatic and austere.

**Tell us about the battles.**

We used our resources to tell the story in a creative way. We have six battles so we wanted each one to look different. St Alban’s is a skirmish in a town, which is as it was historically. We have a battle in fog, by a river, in a forest. The final battle, the Battle of Bosworth, is the most traditional. I make sure that each battle tells a story about our characters. Towton culminates in Henry’s psychological breakdown, so everything is shot and edited from his point of view.

**Do you hope to reach a new audience for Shakespeare?**

Film is such an accessible medium. These stories are like soap opera about family. I do think Shakespeare is the greatest writer who lived and I hope that these films can allow a new generation to get excited about Shakespeare and that we can engage people about the nature of political power and the choice of political leaders. We can never do the definitive Shakespeare but I hope this gives people a glimpse into his world.
What’s your history of working on Shakespeare?

Most of my work has been in the theatre. I am an adaptor, writer and a dramaturg. A lot of my work has been about attempting to make Shakespeare texts speak to a modern audience.

How much did you change in these plays?

A lot of the changes are about sense. Do we understand what’s happening? Do we understand what someone is saying? Sometimes the narrative complexity relies on an audience understanding that modern audiences simply don’t have access to. Sometimes the references are lost or words have changed their meaning.

You have to cut for film and you have to shape. With *The Hollow Crown: The Wars of the Roses* we have four plays becoming three films. There was a huge amount of adaptation so that the story makes emotional sense over three films.

Instinctively, we felt that in order to serve our central dramatic line then we had to cut away a lot of the more labyrinthine socio-political material, which is fascinating and brilliantly rendered, but not central to the story of these warring families. The starting point was the image that ends the first film: Plantagenet’s three children, Edward, George and Richard about to go to war with their father, their story was the story we wanted to tell.

How does this differ from the first series?

These plays were written much earlier than the plays of the first series. Shakespeare was a different writer, and the subject is a more chaotic period of history. The plays are younger and messier, but perhaps somehow more human. The Wars of the Roses tells the story of two families and the story of how a country goes from the loss of a great leader, Henry V, through chaos and civil war to the emergence of a tyrant in Richard III.

Is it exciting to find a new audience?

It’s wonderful that these films reach a larger audience than is possible in the theatre. We wanted to use contemporary film-making techniques to show that Shakespeare can be engaging, dynamic and cinematic, especially for audiences coming to these plays for the first time.

What’s the cycle’s relationship with actual history?

You have to see these plays in their performance context. London was always shifting in the 1590s. Shakespeare was talking to them directly about contemporary history. It’s like our relationship with the First World War. So this is a broadly accurate account, but he uses dramatic licence and so do we. First and foremost, these are dramatic works. Shakespeare is both writing and undermining subtly shifting national history as he goes. Our image of Richard III is, of course, formed by Shakespeare. He draws a disabled murderous psychopath but we enjoy him the most – it’s quite complex.
How does Henry VI’s character grow?

Henry doesn’t become the protagonist until the second film. We watch the damage to the country, and we see the impact on the man himself. At this point we find out what it means in human terms to fail your country. In many ways, he is a descendant of Richard II with some of the same foibles.

Tell us about Richard III’s character.

By seeing the character within the Henry VI plays, we are able to see him evolve, to watch him realise that he is the cleverest of the three brothers. When in the final film he kills his brother George we see what that means because you’ve followed their story from the start.

The writing of his character is at its best in the scenes with the women. Richard ruthlessly exploits first Anne and then Elizabeth’s vulnerability. We see the great writer Shakespeare is becoming. It’s an extraordinary moment: personal, romantic, sexual.

What’s it like working with such a stellar ensemble cast?

Filming these plays for the BBC allows us to get brilliant casting, especially in some of the smaller roles. Having Judi Dench playing the Duchess transforms those scenes, as does Michael Gambon as Mortimer in the first film. In the first series, we had Patrick Stewart as John of Gaunt, David Suchet as York. The combination of Shakespearean language and great screen acting is a heady one.

What’s it like working with Benedict Cumberbatch?

Casting Benedict as Richard III was a brilliantly obvious and easy decision. He is at the heart of the project. He can act intelligence, which you can’t teach. He shows it in all of his work, especially on stage. He is a rare combination of a mind actor and a body actor, as demonstrated in his performances in Frankenstein at the National Theatre, playing both doctor and monster. He plays outsiders brilliantly. There are so many moments in these films where he is simply watching, and we see the action through his eyes. He implicates the audience in what he’s doing.

What do you think of Tom Sturridge’s interpretation?

Tom has an amazing instinctive understanding of the role and the text. It is very different to Henry VI as we’ve seen on stage before. His Henry is questioning, brilliantly comic, and as the story moves on, tragic.

What’s it like working with Sophie Okonedo?

She is extraordinary. She brings such a contemporary sense of emotional reality to Margaret. Her energy and danger…when she enters the English court the world begins to turn upside down. She’s the catalyst for the whole thing.
You were a producer in the first series of *The Hollow Crown*, what does it feel like to be back?

It’s a very interesting thing to work on because it’s a mixture of theatre, film and television. I really enjoy that there aren’t the usual boundaries you get between the three disciplines. I’ve not worked in the theatre before but there’s so much which comes from the theatre and influences how we make this. That’s Dominic’s background. It’s a very interesting thing to be involved with, to have a director who knows Shakespeare and the plays so intimately, and who has the complete respect of the cast and crew. It is definitely a director-led piece. This really is a personal way of telling a story.

As the producer you’re bringing all these elements together for Dominic to shoot. For you, what does a normal day require?

Of course, it’s a lot of planning. Once you’ve picked a location, there’s a lot of infrastructure which needs to go in. For example, we have rain planned, so one of the difficulties is keeping the costumes warm overnight so that they can be worn the next day after a rain sequence. We’ve been quite lucky because we’ve had some natural rain.

There’s also planning in terms of the cameras. Our Director of Photography, Zac, has three cameras on some days. Costume alone is difficult. A huge amount of work goes into the armour and the different banners from the art department. Our horse master brings together all the horsemen. On our biggest day, the Battle of Bosworth, we were feeding 250 people for lunch which is also quite a big exercise!

What have been your biggest challenges?

Doing all three films at once is quite a challenge because we’re actually mixing them up with the cast and the locations, and shooting them all together. It’s not something we did in the last series, where each film was made as an individual unit. This is even more epic in terms of the logistical side and the numbers of locations we’re visiting, along with the numbers of cast we’re working with. The thing that’s interesting is the span of time we’re trying to cover, from Henry VI as a baby right the way through to Henry VII being crowned. That’s a challenge in terms of ageing the cast and trying to differentiate between the different dynasties and hierarchies which are exchanging the throne.

Do you get a moment to stand back and think that you’re bringing Shakespeare to life?

You can’t pause for too long as we’ve got a very complex schedule! Really, when this is happening, you’re planning and working on the next thing all the time. But I do think you have to take a bit of pleasure from seeing this come together. It is the reward of not only what you’re spending but also the effort everyone’s put in to getting the banners and the costumes right. It’s a tremendous amount of effort. I can’t tell you how many alarm clocks have gone off very early this morning to get this ready to be filming by half-past nine. It is good to have a moment just to sit and watch and enjoy what’s happening in front of the camera.
JOHN STEVENSON
Production Designer

What were your first thoughts about being brought on board a project of this scale?

Fear, essentially! I’m joking. It is an enormous job to undertake. Last season there were three different designers and three different directors, but for this series there is one director and one designer. It’s an enormous amount of work!

We’re telling a huge chunk of history: seventy years span, approximately. The whole idea was tying the series to a palette with which we could work. When you’re watching six hours of television, it’s quite a challenge!

What are the overarching themes of the series?

Dominic, the director, has a great idea about how when Richard takes power, he moves into a subterranean world. It was a really exciting idea. He’s not in a palace with all the bells and whistles, but instead he’s underground, under the mud with the dripping ceiling. It’s similar to a film called Downfall, which was a film that we used as a reference for exactly that idea. A man who is terrified by the outside world becomes a kind of recluse.

Shakespeare’s plays are questionable in terms of accuracy. Does that give you license to embellish?

We do execute more of a general brushstroke of the period. If it feels right and it looks right, then we go by the general mantra that it is right. We’re creating a world. We can’t be 100% accurate. It was as important to demonstrate the brutality of war for anyone involved.

What were the battle arenas like?

If we could have had our way, we would have ploughed the field and turned it into mud, had five hundred extras and a cavalry of horses, but of course we didn’t have that! We had forty extras for Bosworth. It’s all about the choreography of how the camera moves in those circumstances. When you’re trying to have stuff shot quickly and you’ve got two cameras, it is a big ask to create the Battle of Bosworth, which had eighty-thousand soldiers on one side.

Rather than have all the battles on open ground, Dominic wanted battles like Towton to be based around a river. Tewkesbury was going to be in a wood. Bosworth was the only open field conflict that we saw. Rouen has castles as a backdrop.

How much artistic license can you have?

We’re trying as much as we can to do it in the period where this event took place. There’s certain places where we can’t get rid of Elizabethan or even modern architecture. There’s some places where we’ve forgiven ourselves and thought that we can get away with it. We’ve gone all around the country, specifically because these are the locations which offer us what we need in terms of location for the film. Wherever possible we’ve tried to stay true to the period.
How do you work with palette?

We’ve worked very hard to maintain a palette, though of course when you are on set you are working with the location that you have. Our biggest enemy is green grass! It’s so vibrant in a lot of these battle scenes. The mud with its texture and palette feels a lot more medieval and dirty and grubby.

Richard has very dark colours with a sort of gilt edge. With Edward we’ve gone for a very simple, plain palette.

Are there concerns from your perspective about staging Shakespeare for the screen?

I think what’s brilliant about getting Dominic involved is that he’s had huge experience of working with the stage and with actors in the theatre environment. In terms of the transition from stage to screen, I think they work really well as films. Certainly the last Hollow Crown was superb in that respect. There were great performances. If you can get actors to speak Shakespeare well, amazing things happen. I’ve never been a huge fan of Shakespeare but I watched the first series and I changed my mind on it completely! That was mainly because it wasn’t being told to me by an English teacher. It was being spoken to me by an actor who made it come alive. It made a big difference, and that’s why I was excited to come on board.
What costumes did you work on for *The Hollow Crown: The Wars of the Roses*?

Benedict has had a very specific suit of armour designed for him. He has a hump, so we’ve designed the armour around his posture, while also making it correct for the period. It breaks in two at the back so that it accommodates the stoop and doesn’t throttle him. Benedict’s armour reflects the way he wants to develop the character of Richard. He develops from when he’s very young and he’s a knight, to when he becomes a king. At the battle he wears the grandest piece of armour, which is mounted with the helmet crown.

The armour is a crucial part of it for me. I’ve loved doing it and giving each character a slightly different style of armour.

How did you achieve Dominic’s vision?

The vibe I get from Dominic is that he’s very interested in making a war film with court elements. The war sections of the series really feel like blood, and danger, and metal, and mud and rain. A lot of thought has gone into it on his part, and the producer’s part, to give a certain feel to each individual battle, whether it’s in a forest or by a river. All of this adds a crucial ingredient to the whole piece.

We’ve been pushing the amount of metal chronologically, so there’s more as you move towards the big battle, so that you see Richard resplendent in his armour and crown. Bosworth is in mud and rain and a mire of misery. Rouen is something slightly different with more of a siege affair.

Margaret has quite a different design. Can you tell us about that?

Sophie’s armoured look was difficult to come up with because there aren’t a lot of points of reference. I thought it would be interesting to give a feminine look and use the Lancastrian colours within her costume.

What she’s wearing underneath her armour has to travel on, so we used the tooth-open sleeve, which in the armour is a flourish, a point of change. I thought it would be interesting to use that detail as something which becomes ragged and floppy, and adds to her character as itinerant and witch-like in her continuing misery.

What’s it like to film the Battle of Bosworth?

It’s a huge challenge for the whole wardrobe and costume team. They’re in rain and mud, and a lot of great people are churning out great costumes, changing them from Lancaster to York, changing their colour palette across. It’s a huge job for everybody concerned, because the costumes come back wet and muddy and the actors have to put them on the following day. Jo (Mosley, Costume Supervisor) and her team have to not only put them in order and take them off but also dry them out the next morning to put them back on again.
How do you differentiate the sides of the battle?

We’ve made a few key pieces to follow Lancaster and York colours through. There’s a colour palette for the two sides, roughly speaking, of natural linen colours, gold, and green for the Yorkists, and red, blue, and grey for the Lancastrians. That’s slightly theatrical as a method but it’s a way of separating the sides visually. We’ve tried to spot colour coming through on each side. So the banners, we see one colour clash against the other. It’s a United versus City type affair. In France it’d be blue versus red.
What does a day on set entail for you?

As armourers we have our feet in two camps. We’ve been developing the costume armour for the actors and stuntmen to wear, but also we’re the armourers to the effect that we’re providing all the swords and daggers being used in combat.

We also have to take into consideration the fact that this isn’t real combat. Various bits and pieces have to be tweaked, for safety reasons, and to allow the actors to create the best performance without being hindered by a suit of armour.

How much weight are the actors carrying whilst wearing the armour?

Benedict’s very lucky because he’s not wearing nearly the amount of metal that a real knight would be wearing. We’re constructing our suits of armour out of plastic and resins, so that they have all the appearance of armour, but there’s no weight to them at all. On this production, the principals are doing an awful lot of the riding and fighting themselves.

What pieces are they using as their weaponry?

The normal precaution is to cast copies of the swords. However, from the start, the actors decided that they wanted to use the real thing; I think it’s made a huge difference to their performances. No matter how great an actor you are, it’s very difficult to pretend that you’re hitting something with a heavy sword if it is just made of plastic. The fact that these actors are skilled and trained enough to actually execute their own fights made it a real benefit that they had their own weighted metal swords to actually fight with. Some of the sword fights have been very impressive, very full contact, very savage.

What can we expect for Henry and Edward?

We’re using three styles of armour. There is the early brigandine type of armour, which is plates riveted or sewn into leather suits, with some pieces of plate armour protecting the arms and the head. We then go into the Bosworth armour, which is really as much as we can get onto people while still being sensible. Then there is the French issue, and Joan of Arc comes in later. Again, it’s a different time period; the armour has a more traditional look to it. Working closely with the costume designer, we are choosing the colour tones and the textures and the finishes. We are deliberately making it easy when you view the programme, to feel that you are going through a transition of time.

Sophie Okonedo plays Margaret in rather impressive gear. What will we see for her armour?

We had to work hard so that Sophie looked like she was dressed for war, but still looked like a Queen. We didn’t put her in a helmet but we have a chainmail hood. We designed a very slender breast and backplate, with tassets and a small skirt. She very much keeps her femininity but there is enough armour so that when she draws her sword and gets angry, it is a look of war.
How long does it take to train stunts?

Routines and moves for the actors take time and we don’t have a great deal of time filming, so it’s been very full on. The actors have to learn the moves they’re going to do, then they have to learn the dance, then perfect it and make it look real!

Benedict and Luke [Treadaway] have a theatre background, where they’ve learned stage combat. Screen combat’s a little different. We need to make everything work for the camera. We need to work on that realism. The energy and aggression to make it work for the camera.

How do you make all aspects of the stunts come together?

For anything to do with the action, we need to look at the numbers, what sort of choreography I need to have and safe proximities.

A lot of the scenes will have CGI arrows. A line of soldiers runs towards another line of soldiers, firing crossbows. They will release the mechanism but there will be no arrow or bolt in the weapon, and the CGI will make them hit the guys on the other side, and they will fall and react.

Horses are unpredictable and do their own thing! They’re working in close proximity to a lot of extras and a lot of artists. With a horse fall, it’s simulating that it’s been hit by an arrow. The arrow going into the horse is done by CGI. The rider, who is trained, will ride the horse over and land it on a bed that’s been dug out and set in a pre-set area.

You’re bringing the Wars of Roses back to life. Is there a sense of satisfaction?

You get a sense of satisfaction when you watch back rushes and see that it all works because the entire department’s put their time in. My side is making the action look real and authentic, with minimal accidents, because accidents can happen. If everyone is trained and knows what they’re doing, we can control that. It’s great to go home with no injuries – perfect.
Can you tell us what a horse drop is?

A horse drop, or a horse fall, is where you are cantering along, when the horse acts as if it’s been hit by an arrow, flips, and falls on the floor, with the rider as well. The horse that was used was called Peter. He’s specifically trained for falling. He doesn’t do the general shots of riding and galloping. It’s a process of training, but once they get it, it’s like riding a bike to them; they just know exactly what to do.

We’ve just seen a mechanical horse. What’s that for?

This one in particular is a rearing mechanical horse. For this particular scene, Blunt comes and stabs Richard III’s horse, in the side. It rears up and he falls off. This mechanical horse is for when we get the close-ups of Benedict rearing. We can’t have him on a real horse, but you can get the feel of it.

How would you go about setting up the choreography?

The actors were great. Benedict did most of it himself, as did Luke [Treadaway], who’s playing Richmond. In the conditions we had to do it, all of them, did such a great job. It’s all about making it look real. You have to blag it! You could have one horse that could mess everything up!

How do you take someone like Luke, who has no experience, and teach him to ride for the scenes?

Luke was very keen from the start. It’s always a help when the actors really want to do it. He picked things up quickly, which helped of course, but he put so much effort into it and stayed until he got things right. It’s paid off. In one shot he was cantering along and he had ten to fifteen extras charging and screaming behind him. They’re in full battle mode. He was at the front leading the charge, with a tracking vehicle in front of him. The fact that he’s only ever done that four times just goes to show how much effort he put in, because he pulled it completely out of the bag.

How long does it take to train a horse?

It depends on their temperament. With some horses after six months training, I would be happy to put an actor on them and have them cantering across a field. With others, you wonder why you bought them!

Would you trade your kingdom for a horse?

It depends on the horse!
Where did you begin deciding what these characters would look like?

I don’t only look at the period in detail – we looked at it, and then we stepped back a little from it. If you look at Benedict Cumberbatch, he never has that classic Richard III bob. Because the scripts span such a long period of time, we took his character first of all, and he goes from very young to older. Never once do we touch on that bob look. His final look is something you would never see Richard III looking like.

We looked at the Plantagenets and the Yorkists to try to create a difference between the two families. The Plantagenets have long hair to start with; and the Yorkists, apart from the King, who’s the special one with his long hair, are all fighting types and have shorter, more modern haircuts. It’s also about telling the story through the characters, and that’s more what we were driven by rather than by slavish historical accuracy.

And to be honest, who is going to look good in that bob? That is a practical consideration!

Is it challenging to stay on top of the continuity?

The Hollow Crown has been the most challenging job I’ve ever done! Keeping on top of it has been almost the most difficult aspect of the work because everything is shot out of sequence.

You have to use wigs when people have got a big ageing process to start on and I start with wigs rather than lots of ageing prosthetics. I’ve done lots of things where people age a lot and in my experience, less is always more. Sophie does have ageing pieces, as does Anton.

Can you describe Henry’s look?

When we were plotting the character with Tom Sturridge, we wanted him to look distinct from the Yorkist group. We wanted his hair to be slightly feminine and longer. We tried out different wigs on Tom, different lengths, different types of curl. He has a journey: he ends up in prison, he has two different beards, and he has stubble. It’s all about plotting that in sympathy with the character.

Do you ever look to previous productions of Richard III?

When I knew I was doing it, I’ll be frank, I read and re-read the script, and thought, ‘How am I going to get this in my mind?’ I would never normally look at something that has been done before. I did look at the past stuff, because it helped me get the story into my mind. But I wouldn’t ever be guided by what anyone else has done. Dominic and I wanted to be really brave on this. I think we felt it was our world and we would do what we wanted to create our story and to develop the characters.

Tell us about Richard’s prosthetics.

The hump and the whole look of Richard were much talked about from the beginning. We went to osteopaths to talk about the hump and its size. There is only one shot where you see
the hump exposed. It looks amazing. My role was quite analytical, thinking about how big it would have been, because we wanted to make it believable. We wanted scoliosis rather than just putting a hump on the back of him.

What’s it like with the battles?

The battle is possibly one of the most difficult things to do. I think that’s what sets this production apart, because the big battles are very expensive and difficult to recreate. The battles look amazing. It looks real: they’re covered in blood; they’re covered in mud.

Do you have a favourite character or piece in the show?

I don’t think I could single out one particular character. I’ve never done a show where everyone is ageing, everyone has three different wigs, and there’s so much to think about for each person. It’s extraordinary. It is the greatest privilege of my career, and I have done a lot of period drama working with these actors. We got Sir Michael Gambon in for one scene today. I had Dame Judi Dench in my chair yesterday. I don’t think it gets much better than that, does it?
**Credits**

**Cast**

**Henry VI Part I**

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<th>Actor</th>
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<td>TOM STURRIDGE</td>
<td>Henry VI</td>
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<td>SOPHIE OKONEDO</td>
<td>Queen Margaret</td>
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<td>HUGH BONNEVILLE</td>
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<td>SALLY HAWKINS</td>
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**Henry VI Part II**

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<td>ANDREW SCOTT</td>
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### Richard III

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<td>AL WEAVER</td>
<td>Rivers</td>
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<tr>
<td>SAMUEL VALENTINE</td>
<td>Grey</td>
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<tr>
<td>GARY POWELL</td>
<td>Tyrell</td>
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<tr>
<td>SIMON GINTY</td>
<td>Stanley</td>
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<tr>
<td>JAMES FLEET</td>
<td>Hastings</td>
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### Production

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Name</th>
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<tr>
<td>Director / Adaptor</td>
<td>DOMINIC COOKE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adaptor</td>
<td>BEN POWER</td>
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<tr>
<td>Executive Producer</td>
<td>PIPPA HARRIS</td>
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<tr>
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<td>SAM MENDES</td>
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<tr>
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<td>NICOLAS BROWN</td>
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<td>GARETH NEAME</td>
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<tr>
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<td>DAVID HORN</td>
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<tr>
<td>Producer</td>
<td>RUPERT RYLE-HODGES</td>
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