Review

The New Shakespeare: Text and Performance

John Russell Brown, *Shakespeare in Performance: An Introduction Through Six Major Plays* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976)
Stanley Wells, *Royal Shakespeare* (Manchester University Press, 1977)
Ralph Berry, *On Directing Shakespeare* (London: Croom Helm, 1977)
Marvin Rosenberg, *The Masks of Macbeth* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978)
J. L. Styan, *The Shakespeare Revolution* (Cambridge University Press, 1977)

For many years the catch-cry of literary criticism has been "the words on the page", but for the critic of drama this won't do. His slogan must be, "the words on the stage." The echo and the contrast are deliberate and make a simple point: out on that platform where actions speak louder than words and silence can be eloquent, words work in an unusual way. Communication between author and audience is no longer direct as in reading, because the words are spoken by actors. How they are spoken, the response of the others onstage, how the actors look, where they stand, what they are doing, the scenery, the lighting, will all affect the way the words work. The play script is not a purer version of the author's intention that has to survive these intermediaries, it takes its life from them and becomes three dimensional. A "play" is a script brought to life by actors before an audience, and any study that forgets or ignores either the performance or the effect on the audience is not a study of the "play" at all.

All this is basic and obvious enough, but it does not prevent plays from being read and discussed as novels and it is only in the last twenty years that the study of Shakespeare's plays in the context of performance has gained a measure of acceptance. As recently as 1966, John Russell Brown was advancing arguments similar to those above in a book simply entitled *Shakespeare's Plays in Performance*. The mere fact that nobody had used the title before reveals a great deal.[1] Even more recently, Stanley Wells

1 This is not to deny that much important work had been done already. There had been pioneering works of stage history from George Odell, *Shakespeare from Betterton to Irving* (New York 1920), and A. C. Sprague, *Shakespeare and The Actors* (Cambridge, Mass., 1944), and many important books on the nature of the Shakespearean stage. Perhaps most important of all, Harley Granville-Barker's series of *Prefaces to Shakespeare* (London 1924-47) had shown how the insights of an actor/director could illuminate the plays. However, from the 1930s, the emphasis of Shakespeare studies was not on the plays in performance, but on the plays as poems. William Empson, Caroline Spurgeon, F. R. Leavis, L. C. Knights, Derek Traversi, Cleanth Brooks and Wolfgang Clemen are just a selection of the names associated with an approach that subjected the plays to close textual analysis, exploring image patterns and locating meanings which sometimes paid little attention to the possibility of theatrical realization. In the 1960s, often as a direct reaction, there appeared a number of books that placed the emphasis on Shakespeare as theatrical craftsman rather than poet. Titles include: Bernard Beckerman, *Shakespeare at the Globe* (New York 1962); Muriel Bradbrook, *Shakespeare the Craftsman* (London 1969); John Russell Brown, *Shakespeare's Plays in Performance* (London 1966); Nevill Coghill, *Shakespeare's Professional Skills* (Cambridge 1964)

thought it necessary to devote a small book to the fact that "literature" and "drama" are not the same.[2] The battle for the study of Shakespeare's plays as "plays" is by no means over, but it is now well under way. The purpose of this article is to reconsider some recent developments and to suggest where they may lead in the future.

Text

The format of single-play editions — lengthy "Introduction" (often a mistitled critical essay) and fully annotated text — has become commonplace in the years since World War II, but there is no reason to assume that future editions will merely reproduce or elaborate it. This is one reason why I have chosen to focus this section on *Shakespeare in Performance: An Introduction Through Six Major Plays* (New York 1976) edited by John Russell Brown. I suspect that this edition with its photographs, descriptions of famous productions and "running commentary" on performance possibilities, will seem less of a new departure in years to come. Manchester University Press is currently planning a series containing running notes on performance and while the new series in preparation at Oxford and Cambridge are likely to be more traditional, at Oxford, where Stanley Wells shares the general editorship with S. Schoenbaum, the format will probably contain more information about performance than is usual. Professor Brown's edition also provides an opportunity to review his whole approach to the study of Shakespeare, an approach based on the belief summed up in the first lines of his Preface: "Shakespeare's plays are fully alive only in performance. Shakespeare wrote for his actors, and in reading ... the student must be encouraged to keep in mind a sense of how the plays would be performed" (p. v).

Reading in this way requires a special talent that even the best general reader may lack: the ability to visualize a performance in the mind may need to be learnt. A primary problem when reading, as Professor Brown acknowledged in an earlier book,[3] is that it is easy to think only of the character who is speaking and forget the importance of the listeners. A character says little and in performance his silence and its significance are obvious, but in reading he may get overlooked altogether. The clues to action, gesture, movement and so forth are usually implied in the text, but unless we are alive to the implications we may miss the point of a scene because of a failure to visualize. Jaques' famous "seven ages" speech in *As You Like It* (II. vii.) is a case in point. A reader who responds to the changes in tone and has an ear for the controlled slowing of the rhythm to the final sonorous line, "Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything," will recognize something of the power the speech can have in the theatre, but even if he has noted the theatrical metaphor with which Jaques begins, he may forget that all men "have their exits and their entrances" and overlook the stage direction that immediately follows the speech:

2 Stanley Wells, *Literature and Drama, with special reference to Shakespeare and his contemporaries* (London 1970).

3 *Shakespeare's Plays in Performance*, pp. 54-55.

and J. L. Styan, *Shakespeare's Stagecraft* (Cambridge 1967). Also in this period, major journals, such as *Shakespeare Survey* and *Shakespeare Quarterly*, began to devote more space to description and evaluation of contemporary productions.

"Enter Orlando with Adam." The point may be missed even though Duke Senior's welcoming words, "Set down your venerable burden/And let him feed," imply just what kind of entrance this is. Orlando enters carrying an old man as if he were a child, and this striking image picks up Jaques's penultimate line where the last age "Is second childishness and mere oblivion." Indeed, on the Globe's deep thrust stage it is possible the entrance began on that line. This must remain conjecture, but the timing of the entrance is a crucial decision for the director, because the visual image does not just underline Jaques's words, it is Shakespeare's way of commenting upon them. For all its wit and power, the melancholic's vision is resolutely one-sided and negative, but while we hear that man's life leads only to physical decay and death we see other possibilities: an image of youth helping age, a master repaying the kindness of a faithful servant. As the scene moves into a song that asserts that with all its hardships "This life is most jolly", we see another image of community and social generosity as Adam and Orlando are made welcome and helped to food by the Duke's party. Only *after* this do ideas of regeneration and friendship emerge in the language, during the Duke's short concluding speech. The scene is beautifully balanced and the point of balance is Orlando's entrance. Unless this is clearly visualized, it is possible to conclude, with some nineteenth-century readers, that Jaques's view is Shakespeare's own.

Ironically, a moment like this that does not depend upon words may take a good deal of commentary to elucidate. Of course, a teacher can always provide the commentary, but it is far better if the student can be led to realize the effect for himself. In his book *Free Shakespeare* (London 1974), John Russell Brown suggests how this can be done:

> The reader provides himself with a board the shape of the platform stage familiar in reconstructions of the Globe Playhouse, with entrances marked at the rear. It should be the correct size for pawns from a chess set to represent standing men. These pawns are then coloured, or marked in some way, so that each represents a different character in the play. (Toy soldiers or pieces from a game of Halma are easily available substitutes.) This is all the practical equipment needed — although there are obvious ways of making it more sophisticated — and the experiment begins by "walking" the characters through the play. This sounds easy, but it is not: problems arise at once about the use of the two entry doors, the closeness of one figure to another, precedence on entry or exit, the timing of entries and (especially) exits, and so forth. But soon structural patterns become clear: the repetition of certain groups, the unusual nature of the movement in one particular scene, the complexity of one scene in comparison with its predecessors ... An engagement which started very simply and with nothing more than practical common sense and a certain scepticism about the worth of the experiment, ends with many books studied in an attempt to discover the nature of Elizabethan theatres, the authority behind the stage directions of the text, the meaning of particular words, the rank of a particular character. Many solutions are attempted and a grasp of the dramatic action gained which leaves the student endlessly curious because his invention, if not his imagination, has been awakened. A free, unlimited, three-dimensional exploration of the text has started. (pp. 102-3)

The method is simple and effective, both in small groups, where I have used it as a preliminary to working up a semi-dramatized reading, and in private study. Its strength, and the reason I point to it here, is that it doesn't do too much. It simply provides a framework within which the imagination and enthusiasm are stimulated. *Free Shakespeare* is filled with perceptive commentary on recent productions and useful suggestions about production and teaching methods. It strikes me as one of Professor

Brown's most successful books to date. About his latest, the edition of the six plays, I am far less sure.

For Professor Brown, previous editions have included too little information. He believes an editor must do more if he is to provide "the expert help that is appropriate and necessary to a full understanding of Shakespeare's plays" (p. v). This raises the question of just what kind and amount of "help" is "appropriate and necessary" for the modern student and, more pertinently, just what is appropriate for inclusion in an edition of a play, as opposed to a critical study.

The six plays — *Romeo and Juliet, Henry IV (Part 1), Twelfth Night, Othello, King Lear* and *The Tempest* — span Shakespeare's career and illustrate something of his diversity, and the editor has chosen to provide his "help" as follows. On the wide page, the text is centred, with gloss and annotations conveniently situated in the right-hand margin. The left-hand margin contains a "running commentary" designed to "alert the student to the effect of silences, to physical actions that contrast with or support the words that are being spoken, and to the impressiveness and meaning of certain movements, regroupings, and slow or sudden exits or entrances" (p. vi). To assist in this work, the editor includes "primary photographs" from outstanding productions which illustrate "crucial moments" in each play. There are also additional photographs of actors and descriptions of their interpretation of a particular line or moment and this information runs across the foot of the page. Each play is preceded by a short introduction which concentrates on theatrical effects and possibilities and is followed by the usual list of textual variants plus a list of productions used to provide the illustrations.

The production history, something either ignored or skimped in most editions, is a valuable feature of the book. I was left wishing there was more of it, because the editor reserves this detailed approach for a few obviously dramatic moments. In the first act of *Othello*, for example, Iago's line "I am not what I am", Othello's "Keep up your bright swords", Desdemona's first entrance and (an odd choice) the dramatic possibilities of Roderigo, are expanded in this way. The appetite is whetted and this is obviously the intention. Short descriptions of memorable interpretations reveal the richness of the text while keeping performance uppermost in the reader's mind.

The photographs are another successful innovation. At times they are more valuable than any commentary. The final illustration for *Twelfth Night* shows the two pairs of lovers, Viola and Orsino and Olivia and Sebastian. The stance of the couples is identical: in a half embrace, they gaze into each other's eyes. The pattern is picked up in the twins' identical garb which contrasts with the richness of the aristocrats' costume. Downstage right is another contrast as Feste sits huddled over the instrument he will use for his final song: his back to the lovers, he gazes out blankly and despondently towards the audience. The picture is a fine summation of this play of contrasts and reversals with its complex tone of gaiety modified by sorrow, and realizing its value the editor has enlarged it to fill a page.

The feature of the edition with which I am least happy is the "running commentary". My main objection is to the whole concept of such a commentary, but the editor does not live up to his own large claims for

what he provides. Admittedly, he is responsive to the implications of the text, especially the way variations of rhythm within a speech suggest clues to movement, the way groupings and entrances in one scene are echoed in another and the way audience expectations are controlled, but often what he provides does both too much and too little. In dwelling on points that are obvious, he neglects more difficult dramatic moments or barely mentions them.

In his commentary on *Othello* III. iv., for example, he seems to have forgotten his own point about the importance of the listener. Othello demands the handkerchief of Desdemona and Emilia is onstage during the whole conversation. Whether she hears everything, depends upon the director, but obviously she hears something, because on Othello's exit she says: "Is not this man jealous?" This comment, sparked by his shouting for the handkerchief, is a direct reference to the beginning of the scene when Desdemona told Emilia its loss would not make Othello jealous. Since Emilia gave the object of all this fuss to Iago in the previous scene, the question any actress playing the part must answer is, just how will she respond to Desdemona's distress and Othello's anger? Professor Brown doesn't even ask the question, and it is an important one since it opens up the whole problem of the extent to which Emilia suspects Iago. If she suspects nothing, she can be played as a "stupid woman",[4] but if she does suspect (and this need be no more than an indefinite and growing awareness), many of her comments become richly ambiguous, her relationship with her husband assumes a new importance and the dramatic tension of certain later scenes is increased. The possibility that Emilia suspects is there in the text. In the final act, when she denounces Iago, she says "I think: I smell't! O villainy! / I thought so then." The actress must decide whether that "then" is a clue to an interpretation and, if it is, exactly what point in the play it designates. The commentary makes no mention of these possibilities.

It may seem less than fair to criticize the editor for providing too little, when I've said I object to the commentary *per se*. Professor Brown might justifiably reply that in asking for more, I am endorsing his approach and suggest his aim is to encourage further thought and research. If his commentary does this, it is clearly successful, but I fear it may have a very different effect.

The value of the "chess board" exercise was that it stimulated the imagination and forced the student to consider the problems and possibilities of performance. The danger of the running commentary is that it provides a ready-made imaginative reading that may prevent the reader thinking for himself. The "chess board" exercise trusted the student to make his own discoveries, the commentary doesn't: it wants to make those discoveries for him.

The question at issue here is the relation of criticism or commentary (I think we can ignore semantics for the editor frequently interprets as he comments) to the text itself. I believe the reader's primary response should be to the text. After that, the reading of criticism can provide further useful insights, but this stage should not precede nor even accom-

4 A. C. Bradley's reading, *Shakespearean Tragedy* (London 1904: repr. 1969), Note P (p. 375).

pany the initial reading of the text. I suggested at the start that a play is different from any other work of literature, but I think the same rules apply.

The text, the play script, comes to life in two ways: in actual performance in the theatre, and in imagined performance on the stage of the reader's mind. Professor Brown introduces a third element, the commentary, in the hope of conveying the life of performance directly to the reader's imagination. He wants to provide "help" and encouragement, but he creates an obstacle. His descriptions cannot recreate the experience of seeing an actual performance, but what they may do, is supplant the *imagined* performance altogether.

The experience of reading a play is obviously quite different from that of seeing it, but the two have something in common: a sense of immediacy and excitement. In the theatre this is generated by the actors. In reading it is generated by the activity of the imagination recreating the play in performance. The commentary runs the risk of removing the immediacy and excitement from play reading by inhibiting the imagination. The editor wants to bring the plays to life, but ironically his approach endangers their life, making the experience of reading drily intellectual.

In a different context, the commentary would have the value of a critical essay, but the editor wants it to be something else: to provide the help he believes many readers require *as they read*. Obviously, some readers do need help, but what is needed is a way of stimulating the imagination that doesn't impede its function or replace it. Professor Brown's experiment is by no means unique: to my knowledge there are at least two other series, the Renown edition under the general editorship of W. J. Steele and the Players Shakespeare edited by J. H. Walter, that attempt to provide similar "help". Steele, who makes extensive use of photographs, locates his commentary at the end of each scene and Walter, whose comments are much more sophisticated, tends to ask leading questions rather than provide answers. His whole approach strikes me as more successful than that of Professor Brown. Both series are intended for schools, the Renown for age eleven to sixteen, the Players for senior High School students and beyond, and both emphasize that the student should first read the play, ignoring notes and commentary until a second reading. Both also assume the students would do well to act the text. In W. J. Steele's enthusiastic, if slightly patronizing, words: "Live the play. Get out of your seats in the classroom and let it be an essential part of your experience to act in the play." This injunction to get out of the seats strikes me as "necessary" and would have been "appropriate" coming from John Russell Brown who is an associate director of Britain's National Theatre, but his edition gives no indication that he expects his readers to act. This is a great pity, because while I acknowledge the problem the editors are trying to solve and while I admire their attempts — the Players Shakespeare is a first-rate series — it does seem to me that all the introductory information, commentary, notes and photographs are finally no substitute for acting the text. Over sixty years ago, in an excellent book entitled *The Play Way* (London 1917), Caldwell Cook recounted how a school visitor asked him:

> "What do you do with a play of Shakespeare?" "Act it," I replied. "What else can you do with a play?" What the old-fashioned pedant could do to a

> play of Shakespeare is too well-known to bear relation, but, incredible though it may seem, it is still rare to find acting the principal means of dealing with plays in school. (pp. 194-5)

Sixty years later, the comment has lost none of its freshness: it is still rare to find students, at any level, exploring the play through acting it. And Cook meant more than just reading aloud: "So long as the boys were allowed to sit in their desks and read in turn, even stage directions were of no account, but as soon as they begin acting everything is changed" (p. 188).

Perhaps it may be thought impossibly idealistic to expect students to engage in performance, even if this is only a rehearsal of part of a scene, and thus make their own discoveries "cold" from the text. However, in a time when all editions provide more and more information and leave a decreasing space for the student's response, the idea strikes me as not so much idealistic as downright "necessary".

Performance

> Each time a reader takes up a copy of a play, he also puts on a pair of spectacles. The frame of these spectacles is not plastic or bone but history. The lenses are not optical glass but accumulated dramatic practice and theory. Fashioned by generations of creative and critical theater artists, these glasses are compacted of preconceptions about what constitutes drama and how it produces its effects. Each scene and each act is filtered through these invisible panes before reaching the imagination. Though similar intermediaries lie between the reader and the novel, their influence is not so decisive because the novel is a finished work. A play, however, is a mere skeleton; performance fleshes out the bones. Reading an "unfinished" play script depends upon the governing vision of one's spectacles.
>
> (Bernard Beckerman, *Dynamics of Drama*, New York 1970, p. 3)

Two events have had a profound effect on our modern "governing vision" of Shakespeare: the finding of the De Witt sketch of the Swan in 1888 and the publication by W. W. Greg[5] of *Henslowe's Diary* (1904, 1908) and *Papers* (1907). The sketch, with its contemporary view of an Elizabethan public theatre, and the dimensions of another such theatre in the Fortune contract (in the *Papers*) provided scholars with the basis for reconstructions of the Globe, while the detailed information about the everyday working of an acting company (in the *Diary*) fleshed out the skeleton of the building. Although the idea that Shakespeare made the best of crude conditions continued to exist, the plays began to be seen against a theatrical context very different from that provided by the proscenium arch theatres of the time. Eventually, these two events would not only change critical awareness of the plays, they would also affect theatre architecture and dramatic practice.

Of course, there is a great deal of documentary evidence apart from these sources and later scholarship owes an enormous debt to E. K.

5 The Henslowe material had been discovered over one hundred years previously by the great eighteenth-century scholar Edmund Malone. He based his *An Historic Account of the Rise and Progress of the English Stage, and the Oeconomy and Usuages of the Ancient Theatres in England* (London 1792) on this and on the Revels accounts, but this work was largely ignored. *Henslowe's Diary* was originally published by J. P. Collier in 1845, but when his later forgeries were discovered his work was discredited and his edition held suspect. It was left to Greg to reveal the importance of the Henslowe material. There are now excellent editions edited by R. A. Foakes and R. T. Rickert, *Henslowe's Diary* (Cambridge 1961) and *The Henslowe Papers* (London 1977).

Chambers' monumental *Elizabethan Stage* (4 vols., Oxford 1923) where it was first collected. John Cranford Adams and later C. Walter Hodges produced reconstructions of the Globe and there were useful interpretative works by S. L. Bethell, Alfred Harbage and others, but, of necessity, much of this work remains conjectural and the "preconceptions" about how drama "produces its effects", noted by Beckerman, have taken their toll. The shadow of the proscenium arch still falls across much modern thinking, but no scholar today would support W. J. Lawrence's "alternation theory", whereby scenes were supposedly played alternately fore and aft of a traverse curtain, and few continue to support the idea of an "inner stage" acting area. The full implications of Shakespeare's non-representational stage are still emerging and our understanding of its dramatic possibilities has been helped as much by the practical work of theatre men like Tyrone Guthrie as it has been by the productions of scholars. Muriel Bradbrook, whose own academic career has been much occupied with establishing the conventions, conditions and theatrical context on which Shakespeare relied, suggests why such historical study is important:

> Writers of appreciative criticism who neglect the historic approach are liable to blunder on questions of tone; to mistake conventions for faults, to rationalise an illogical custom of the theatre, or to miss the point of a device ... But perhaps the chief value of the knowledge of stage conditions is a negative one. It prevents wrong assumptions, or the laying of emphasis in the wrong place. This unobtrusive correcting of the critical focus is almost impossible to define or describe, like the change of vision produced by wearing glasses. (*Elizabethan Stage Conditions: A Study of their Place in the Interpretation of Shakespeare's Plays*, Cambridge 1932, pp. 4-6)

If the first requirement is to see the plays as texts that are realized in performance, the second is to establish the original context for performance. Dr Bradbrook's distinction is a most important one: a knowledge of this context will not enable us to see the plays as did Shakespeare's audience, but it may prevent mistakes. Often it cannot accomplish even this, because it is impossible to know if a mistake has been made without the information to establish what is right. A critic or a director may suspect his interpretation is correct, but he can never be sure. It is appropriate that the play so much concerned with uncertainty, *King Lear*, should provide the most extreme example in the canon.

> And my poor fool is hang'd! No, no, no life!
> Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life,
> And thou no breath at all? Thou'lt come no more,
> Never, never, never, never, never!
> Pray you, undo this button: thank you, Sir.
> Do you see this? Look on her, look, her lips,
> Look there, look there!

This is the Folio version of Lear's final speech, but the Quarto omits the last two lines and contains the printer's formula for a death cry, "O, o, o, o" (perhaps an idiosyncrasy of Burbage, since the Quarto *Hamlet* has a similar death cry). Obviously, the substitution of the lines for the cry is a considerable change of emphasis, but it is impossible to determine which ending Shakespeare favoured, if indeed both are his. The Folio seems to have been set from a prompt copy used by the King's Men, but, if the lines above were an acting version, how were they acted? This question is only the first of many.

Where is the button? If it is at Cordelia's throat, it may open to reveal the lacerations of the noose. Perhaps her mouth, to which Lear draws attention, falls open and again utters "nothing", not this time as a word but as an enduring silence. As Granville-Barker suggests in his *Preface*, the relative stage positions, with Lear surrounded once more by his three daughters, may complete the connection with the opening scene.[6] Or the button may be at Lear's throat, thus making the transition to Cordelia's body logical as the King, gasping for air, remembers his hanged daughter. Who undoes the button? If it is a supernumerary, the King may appear subdued and clear-eyed, but if it is Kent he addresses as "Sir", the audience may see a man losing his grip on reality. Where is Lear? If he stands close to Cordelia, or kneels clasping her, his death is at the focus of the audience's attention, but the effect is quite different if he moves away to have the button undone. Then, his insistent commands turn the attention of all onstage, and of the audience, towards the body and away from himself. The shock of his death is far greater if as he falls heads are turned away. Where does he look? What does he see? Can the audience guess from the expression on his face? Does he die believing Cordelia is reviving, or does his heart break as he realizes the shattering reality of her death? A Lear who believes Cordelia is alive may be transcending earthly limitations, suffering under the final self-deception of a man who still "but slenderly" knows himself, or taking refuge from reality in madness. In contrast, an awareness of Cordelia's death may be the culmination of a process of deepening knowledge of the self and the world. The text, both of this scene, in which Lear vacillates between certainty that Cordelia is dead and hope that she lives, and of the play as a whole with its uncertainties and reversals of expectations, allows all these interpretations. No director can play this plurality of meaning. The questions must be answered and decisions taken in the knowledge that the way the lines are played (and I've said nothing about how the words are spoken) *determines* meaning: in this case it may determine the meaning of the whole play. In the absence of explicit stage directions or contemporary eye-witness reports, we cannot know what Shakespeare intended, we can only guess at his meaning. Indeed, we may well err in speaking of the "meaning" of *King Lear,* since the play allows a series of conflicting interpretations.

This is not a cause for dismay; it is the reason Shakespeare's plays remain alive. *King Lear* continues to grow and to change as each century sees in its mirror the nature of its own particular concerns. The plays continue to be performed (rather than studied) because, to rework Jan Kott's phrase, each age can make Shakespeare their contemporary. Theatrical historian Andrew Gurr, whose *The Shakespearean Stage* (Cambridge 1970) is an excellent conspectus of the scholarship up to the date of publication, suggests this is also the reason for continued critical interest. "The business of Shakespeare criticism would have no point if it were not necessary to re-read him to suit the always changing interests of the times" (p. vii). As those interests change, so do the plays. *The Merchant of Venice* played today reflects the sympathetic portrayal of

6 Harley Granville-Barker, *Prefaces to Shakespeare* (1947: Princeton Paperback reprint, 1965), pp. 17-18.

Shylock begun by Sir Henry Irving, but more importantly the context in which it is played contains a knowledge of Hitler's death camps which has determined our modern image of the "Jew". During World War II, Olivier could play *Henry V* as a great nationalistic play with a laudable hero. Twenty years later, during the Vietnam war, the context was one of cynicism and scepticism and John Barton and Peter Hall presented a play in which the heroics were questionable, the nationalism not unlike the "colonial imperialism" decried by the anti-war movement, the values tarnished and the motives suspect. The possibilities, of a sympathetic Shylock and a questionable Henry, were always there in what Shakespeare wrote, but the changing interests brought them into focus.

To return to the quotation from Beckerman, once it is accepted that "a play is a mere skeleton; performance fleshes out the bones", it follows that the life of a play is not fixed and its meaning will depend upon the entire context of performance, including the nature of the audience, the element without which there is no performance. John Russell Brown suggests that the question we should ask is therefore not "What is the meaning?", but "What is the effect?"[7] and performance criticism has evolved as a way of considering effects, acknowledging rather than ignoring the plurality of meaning in a Shakespeare text.

My example from *King Lear* was extreme, but in a sense each performance is a new interpretation. The variables not only change from theatre to theatre, they change from night to night. Aware of this, the performance critic visits a production several times during the run. When this is impossible, his invaluable aid is the prompt book, the version of the text used in performance which often includes the director's marginal production notes. Even when there are no notes, detailing moves, gestures and sometimes interpretation, the cuts in a playing text can reveal a great deal about the director's concept of the play. They also provide a salutary reminder that critical views are moulded as much by what the critic does not see as by what he does. When Johnson in the eighteenth century and Coleridge in the nineteenth objected to the blinding of Gloucester, they had never witnessed the scene in performance. When A. C. Bradley argued that the blinding was "a blot on *King Lear* as a stage play"[8] it is likely that he too had never seen it performed. There are relatively few prompt books from before the eighteenth century, but from this point they grow in number until today most major professional companies make a point of lodging copies with libraries. Charles H. Shattuck's *The Shakespeare Promptbooks: A Descriptive Catalogue* (Urbana 1965) lists the locations of all major prompt books available in England and America and has useful notes on their contents. Robert Halstead is presently engaged on an even more ambitious project, collating all the known prompt copies of individual plays to produce, in effect, a performance Variorum under the title *Shakespeare as Spoken.* The project is scheduled to run to twelve volumes and be completed sometime in the 1980s.

Prompt books can reveal only a small part of performance, because there is always a difference between the conception of an actor or director and the perception an audience takes away. The performance critic reads

7 *Shakespeare's Plays in Performance*, pp. 26-7.
8 *Shakespearean Tragedy*, p. 205.

the prompt books in conjunction with material which may reveal this perception: reviews, photographs where they exist, and eye-witness reports.[9] Some libraries have developed collections containing such source material. The Folger Shakespeare Library is one such centre in America while in England there is the Shakespeare section of the Birmingham Reference Library (one of the most comprehensive collections in the world) and the Shakespeare Centre at Stratford where all prompt copies, reviews and production material connected with the Royal Shakespeare Company are housed.

Today, performance studies is in its infancy and the critic is usually involved in the painstaking work of reconstruction using the channels outlined above, but the critic of the future will find comprehensive and well-documented studies of major productions. One fine example is Stanley Wells' *Royal Shakespeare* (Manchester 1977) in which he discusses four R.S.C. productions: *Coriolanus* (1959) and *Hamlet* (1965) both directed by Peter Hall, and *Twelfth Night* and *Richard II* directed by John Barton. The productions "were all ones (he) had enjoyed" and he admits this was "the main reason" for his choice, but he also "felt that they raised matters of general interest about the plays and their theatrical realization" and "illustrate(d) the general swing from the domination of the actor to the domination of the director" (p. 3). Wells writes with great perception, taking up different aspects of each production. In *Coriolanus* he explores in detail the effects of the cuts made to the text; in *Hamlet* the way certain ideas prevalent in the 1960s affected the interpretation; in *Twelfth Night* the way a performance can present what John Barton calls the text's "enormous range of emotions and moods", and in *Richard II* the way a director can bring out "structural patterns ... present in Shakespeare's text." In each case the interpretations of the major roles are discussed and visual elements, such as costume, staging, particularly striking movement, gesture and business, are evaluated. The book certainly raises those "matters of general interest", not to say major questions:

> How is it that a director can, as it were, project his opinions about a play at the same time as presenting the play itself? Does the play not have its own voice? How much of the meaning of a play is determined by the author, how much by his interpreters? (p. 25)

Wells admits "there are no simple answers", but, while this may be so, his own views remain ambiguous. He seems to disagree with Peter Hall's interpretation of *Hamlet*, but side-steps the important issues raised above by stating: "I am not particularly concerned now by the ethics of theatrical interpretation" (p. 37). In his discussion of Barton's *Richard II* the problem becomes acute. This production was, in Wells' words, "strongly stylized and symbolical." Many speeches were spoken directly to the audience, hobby-horses were used in several scenes and the leading actors (Ian Richardson and Richard Pasco) alternated the roles of Richard and Bolingbroke.[10] Barton emphasized that all on his largely bare stage were performers, that they like the king and his adversary were playing a role. Wells obviously found the production highly stimulating and he terms it

9 Gamini Salgado's *Eye Witnesses of Shakespeare* (Sussex 1975) provides a useful collection of responses through the ages.

10 For a detailed description of this production see James Tulip, "Dramatic Representation in Shakespeare's *Richard II*," *Sydney Studies in English* I (1975-6), 32-45.

"a genuine and positive interpretation" (p. 46) and later "the most strongly interpretative production of a Shakespeare play that I have ever seen" (p. 65). The question at issue here is not "the ethics of theatrical interpretation", but rather a problem of definition: when does "interpretation" cease and "recreation" begin? Wells' descriptions reveal something of what Barton did with the play and suggest his own ambivalent response:

> In his presentation of the relationship between Northumberland and Bolingbroke, the director was creating a simplified pattern from Shakespeare's multiplicity of suggestiveness. Partly he was reinforcing structural patterns that are present in Shakespeare's text; partly he was distorting them. These processes were observable elsewhere. At times they resulted in clear improvements. (p. 74)
> [Of the scene of "the gages", IV.i.] Mr. Barton had so rearranged the lines and reassigned the speeches that he had virtually rewritten the scene. It came over powerfully, with no hint of comedy. (p. 74)
> The suggestion of equivalence between Richard and Bolingbroke which Mr. Barton's production undoubtedly gave required the importation of lines from *2 Henry IV* and the transference of an important passage in *Richard II* to Bolingbroke from another character. (The groom in the prison scene was Bolingbroke in disguise, half way through the scene he revealed himself). (p. 75)
> Mr. Barton even gave Bolingbroke the soliloquy Shakespeare failed to provide. (p. 78)

The last comment is surely not without a measure of irony, as later Wells describes the soliloquy (made up of lines from several scenes in *2 Henry IV*, some earlier lines of Richard and others of Mr Barton's devising based on lines in *2 Henry IV*) as "this extraordinary piece of cobbling" (p. 78). He also admits that he found the substitution of Bolingbroke for the groom "strained" and says the moment "illustrates a danger in Mr. Barton's production methods; that, at their extremes, they were directing their audience what to think, instead of stimulating their imaginations to think it" (p. 80): a very difficult distinction in theatrical terms and one that continues to beg the question. In a sense, Barton was "improving" Shakespeare in exactly the way that Nahum Tate thought he was. Personally, I can see no reason why a director should not make-over the play in his own image, but he needs to recognize and then admit what he is doing, to himself and his audience. Bernard Beckerman has made this point well. He comments on "the strong feeling ... among many theater directors that the text is merely a point of departure for the creation of a new event, that there is no *a priori* form beyond what is currently performed" and he goes on: "The shape of a potential event inheres in the text. A director may choose to alter that shape, but he cannot assume it does not exist."[11] John Barton and William Shakespeare's *Richard II* was undoubtedly a fine piece of theatre, but it does raise several questions about the way the modern theatre treats Shakespeare and the way a critic can judge a performance. Upon what is he to base his evaluation? If the text comes to realization in performance, can we judge a performance with reference to the text, or do we judge the text with reference to the performance? Which is the chicken and which the egg? The obvious answer is that the text always comes first and Beckerman's further distinction, based on the "potential event" that inheres within it, is a useful one, although it presents problems in practice. Sometimes the critic may remain unaware of this potential *until* he witnesses a performance: one

11 "Some Problems in Teaching Shakespeare's Plays as Works of Drama," in *Teaching Shakespeare* ed. Walter Edens (Princeton 1977), p. 310.

interesting example was the way Tyrone Guthrie's production of *Love's Labours Lost* changed John Dover Wilson's understanding of the play.[12]

Barton's *Richard II* followed close on the heels of Peter Brook's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1970) and both productions inflamed the argument about "director's theatre". John Russell Brown made a call in *Free Shakespeare* for a return to the structure of a Shakespearean company: with no director and no informing production concept there would be, he hoped, a chance for a fresh rendering of the text. Several other academics made a plea for "straight" Shakespeare without the gimmicks and Peter Thompson, by no means an ally of director's theatre himself, asked some pertinent questions in *Shakespeare Survey 27* (Cambridge 1974): "What is a 'straight' playing of *Macbeth*'s witches, or of Caliban, or of *Measure for Measure*? Why should we suppose that what cannot be agreed in the study should be defined in the theatre?" (p. 145). He went on to make a couple of perceptive comments: " 'Straight' Shakespeare is all too likely to mean 'Shakespeare as I'd make the actors do him' ... the scholar who knows what he wants ... would be a dictatorial, line-pushing director of the worst kind" (p. 146). Jonathan Miller, himself a director of some controversial productions, made some even more pertinent remarks on those who wanted "the text to speak for itself":

> One might sympathise with this dogma if the text in question contained, in addition to the speeches that comprise it, additional clues which specified the sort of diction that would count. Given the fact that Shakespeare left no collateral instructions it is hard to imagine how one would ever know that one was in the presence of a version wherein the text was speaking for itself. How would the characters speak in such a performance? What accents would they use and where would the proper emphases fall? How would the cast stand and what would they all be dressed in?

These remarks originally appeared in that time-honoured debating ground, the letters column of *The Times*, and they are reprinted in the Preface to Ralph Berry's *On Directing Shakespeare* (London 1977), a series of interviews with a selection of the world's leading Shakespeare directors, including Robin Phillips, Giorgio Strehler and Peter Brook.

The book reveals the directors' views on the whole question of liberty of interpretation and provides an insight into the thinking informing some of the best-known productions of recent years. The interview with Peter Brook is, as one might expect from such an intelligent director, particularly interesting. In discussing Lear's final lines, I suggested that a director must select from the plurality of meaning contained in the text, but Brook — who directed Paul Scofield to stare out into the auditorium on his final words and maintain the stare in death (Stratford, 1962) — emphasizes that the director must open out rather than close off the rich "vibrating" meanings of a Shakespeare play. Attempts to "fix the line's correct music" (p. 121) or "to fix" an actor's performance, or the meaning of a word, the period of a costume, or a parallel with a contemporary political situation are "diminishing the play unnecessarily" (p. 124). He explains what he means:

> ... every interpretation if it works in its place and its moment has some life. But I think that into that totally permissive view, that everything is possible, one can introduce a certain scale of values. One can ask whether the act of interpretation takes the smallest or the widest view of what the play contains

12 John Dover Wilson, *Shakespeare's Happy Comedies* (London 1962), ch. III.

> ... if I *use* the play, the permissive attitude is at its worst. Because the play is then no longer a vehicle for a re-exploration of truth, it becomes a vehicle for exploitation. (pp. 124-5)

Therefore, the director attempts to present the "reality" that is a play by Shakespeare in the knowledge that the plays "are always more than the last interpretation trying to say the last word on something on which the last word can't be said" (p. 117). This sentence contains the *raison d'être* for performance criticism, the awareness that every production reveals something of the play's richness. My earlier quotation from Beckerman, and the one above from Brook, should make it plain that this is very different from suggesting that all interpretations are equally valid; rather it acknowledges that from each we have something to learn.

This is one reason for the value of the books in *The Masks of* ... series by Marvin Rosenberg. Three have appeared so far: *The Masks of Othello* (Berkeley 1961); *The Masks of King Lear* (1972) and, most recently, *The Masks of Macbeth* (1978). These books, and the last has grown to encyclopaedic proportions, are erected upon the belief that Shakespeare's plays reveal a "polyphony", a multiplicity of meanings that often work in terms of the dialectic that Norman Rabkin articulates: "the dramatic structure sets up opposed elements as equally valid ... and equally destructive, so that the choice the play forces the reader to make becomes impossible."[13] Rosenberg combines this belief in dialectic with a complementary belief that "We must not only suspend disbelief; we must suspend memory. We must not know 'what happens next' " (p. xi). Thus, he takes the idea that performance "fleshes out the bones" of a play to its logical conclusion. We must see every performance as though we have never seen or read the play before and this way we may be able to recover something of the initial impact on the original audience. To accomplish this Rosenberg supplements the usual approaches of the performance critic by staging the play before audiences of "naive spectators", people who have never seen or read it before, and he then questions them about their responses. This has led some critics to object to his work, because in the last two books he has treated the play serially, analysing in detail each moment in each scene from the first line to the last, because he believes that in the theatre our response is serial and cumulative. His approach is nothing if not comprehensive — the bibliographies (there are four of them) for the *Masks of Macbeth* run to seventy-five pages — because, as well as considering the way each line has been played, Rosenberg also examines the way it has been read by generations of scholars and critics. Apart from their encyclopaedic use — a critic or teacher who wishes to check an idea against performance possibilities need only refer to the scene in question — I think the books are an excellent combination of textual and performance criticism, an attempt to close the gap between the study and the stage. He and his team of researchers are currently at work on *The Masks of Hamlet* and for Rosenberg the work of criticism, like the work of theatre, is a group undertaking:

> This study would not have been possible without the help of colleagues, actors, directors and libraries throughout the world. I am particularly thankful to those readers of my *Othello* and *Lear* studies who knew what I was looking for, and responded to my invitation to inform me of interpretations of *Macbeth* I might have missed. I hope any readers of this book with information on in-

13 *Shakespeare and the Common Understanding* (New York and London 1967), p. 12.

> terpretations of any of these plays, and particularly of *Hamlet*, my next subject, will communicate with me. (p. xiii)

It seems to me particularly appropriate that a critic concerned with drama should feel that, like an actor, he can respond to his audience and learn from them.

I suggested above that there is "a gap between the stage and the study" and, while the gap is narrowing, the continuing debate about "director's theatre" makes plain that it still exists. When there is a connection, it is often, as Adrian Colman suggests in an apt phrase, "a shotgun liaison".[14] An index of the distance that has always existed is that books concerned with the history of Shakespearean criticism generally ignored the theatre. The critic apparently learnt from and reacted against other critics, but the theatre had little influence upon him, nor he on it.

In response to the appearance of another such "history", which seemed to him a misrepresentation of the situation, J. L. Styan wrote *The Shakespeare Revolution* (Cambridge 1977). He admits "The record of any direct indebtedness of criticism to practice, or of practice to criticism, is ridiculously sparse", but he contends that

> In spite of the chasm between acting and criticism, Shakespeare production since Irving and Beerbohm Tree has undergone something of a revolution, comparable and in parallel with a less apparent, but no less profound, change in criticism. (p. 3)

Professor Styan's name is usually associated with his work on modern drama, particularly *The Dark Comedy* (Cambridge 1962, revised 1968) and *Chekhov in Performance* (Cambridge 1971), but he has always championed the study of drama in and through performance[15] and one of his earlier books, *Shakespeare's Stagecraft* (Cambridge 1967), was an attempt to see the plays in their original theatrical context. His knowledge of theory and practice in twentieth-century European theatre is perhaps partly responsible for the fresh perspective he brings to this history of the study and performance of Shakespeare.

The book traces the change from the ultra-realistic spectacle that characterized Victorian and Edwardian productions to the "non-illusory statements" of Peter Brook, and Styan argues that this "revolution", that has permanently affected our view of the plays, owes as much to the work of scholars and critics as it does to that of directors and actors. A description of the book's thesis does little justice to Styan's work, for the value is in the detail: not only are there descriptions and evaluations of individual productions, but continual connections are made, between production and production, director and director, and between a change of emphasis in criticism and a similar change in theatrical practice. Brook's production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is, in Styan's view, the culmination of "the new direction and focus of scholarly thinking" and "the new freedom from the constrictions of realism and the proscenium arch" (p. 6), and his exploration of the changing response to this particular play (he discusses productions by Kean, Tree, Benson, Granville-Barker, Bridges-Adams and Peter Hall) is one of many patterns that run through the book. The names that emerge as formative influences — William Poel,

14 *The Shotgun Liaison: Theatre and the Universities* (Sydney 1976), first published in *Southerly*, XXXV (1975), 332-41.

15 For Styan's views on teaching Shakespeare through performance see, "Direct Method Shakespeare," *Shakespeare Quarterly 25* (Spring 1974), pp. 198-200.

Harley Granville-Barker, Muriel Bradbrook, G. Wilson Knight, Tyrone Guthrie, Peter Brook — will not surprise the theatrical historian, but they may surprise the textual critic. Near the end of his study the author suggests that "histories and surveys of Shakespeare criticism, which appear with desperate regularity as contributions to Shakespeare periodicals as well as in book form, cannot hereafter ignore the events and developments that are usually collected separately in 'stage histories' " (p. 233). It is a tribute to Professor Styan's book that he is undoubtedly correct. It is a fine contribution to Shakespeare studies that no critic can afford to ignore.

Nevertheless, it seems fitting to conclude with a comment Styan made during a recent interview[16] which "places" his own work and recalls the point I made at the end of the section on Text:

> I believe the kind of study that is growing up, the historical study of Shakespeare productions ... is a very exciting way of understanding what a play is capable of. *Macbeth* wasn't finished in 1605, because the play is still with us and we are still watching it growing and coming to mean different things, and that is a study in itself. But production history is somewhat separate from the business of direct confrontation with the text of a play.

Production history can emphasize the possibilities of performance, but "direct confrontation" is something undertaken by the performer, shared by the audience, and recreated by the reader, reading the text as "play".

DEREK PEAT

16 The interview was mainly concerned with teaching Shakespeare through performance and was conducted by the author in February 1979.