



Marlowe Society of America Newsletter

Vol. X, No. 2, Fall 1990

MSA ANNUAL MEETINGS CHICAGO, MLA 1990

Desire and Society in Doctor Faustus and Edward II

Sunday, December 30, 10:15-11:30 a.m. Presiding: Constance Brown Kuriyama, Texas Tech University

1. "Christopher Marlowe and the Economy of Eros," Steven Bruhm, McGill University.
2. "Friends and Lovers in The Tragedie of Doctor Faustus," Ruth Stevenson, Union College, New York.
3. "Submitting to History: Edward II and the Social Construction of Meaning," Judith D. Haber, Tufts University.

Christopher Marlowe Workshop: Marlowe's History - Textual, Personal, National

Sunday, December 30, 1:45-3:00 p.m. Presiding: Sara Munson Deats, University of South Florida

1. "Theatrical Manuscripts and the B-Text of Doctor Faustus," Eric Rasmussen, University of Chicago
2. "The Politics of Marlowe Biography," Rebecca Weld Bushnell, University of Pennsylvania.
3. "Dido Queene of Carthage and the Discourses of Rulership and Romance," Theodora A. Jankowski, University of North Carolina, Charlotte.

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Colleagues:

After spending the last nine months accustoming myself to the role of President of the Marlowe

Society, I'd like to take a few moments to share some thoughts with you.

First of all, I'd like to thank the membership on behalf of all the newly elected officers for your overwhelming support in the last election. A relatively small scholarly organization such as ours needs a committed membership to function effectively. Sara, Bob, Bruce, Laurie, and I were all gratified by the confidence our members expressed in us, and we will do our best during our terms of office to justify it.

I'd also like to thank Matt Proser for his excellent service during his two terms as President. Matt established the Roma Gill Prize, put the society on a sound constitutional basis, organized the Second International Marlowe Conference at Oxford in conjunction with Bob Logan, and presided over many fine MLA programs. His continuation of Jean Jofen's work in founding the society has been distinguished, and the society will continue to benefit from his contributions as President for many years to come.

Finally, I'd like to urge the entire membership to continue to support the group as actively and vigorously as possible. Plans are already underway for a Third International Marlowe Conference, to be held at Cambridge University in 1993. It is not too early for members to begin considering how they might contribute to this program. We continue to need strong submissions from members for MLA programs, and we also need to increase our membership. Some members, I know, have already actively and successfully recruited students and colleagues. Those who have not considered this possibility might like to give it some thought. A larger society can obviously further its goals and serve its members better than a smaller one, and there is no danger of such a specialized group becoming too large.

I look forward to seeing many of you in Chicago this December.

Very best regards
Constance B. Kuriyama, President

CALL FOR PAPERS
MARLOWE SOCIETY, 1991

The Society is now soliciting papers for its December 1991 sessions at the MLA Convention in San Francisco. A possible topic for one session is Marlowe and his theatrical context. The other topic is still open. Send abstracts or papers of fifteen-minute length by Feb. 20 to Professor Constance B. Kuriyama, President, Marlowe Society of America, Department of English, Box 4530, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas 79409.

STUDIES IN MARLOWE

Burnett, Mark Thornton. "Christopher Marlowe: An Elizabethan Witness." L'Artiste, Temoïn de Son Temps. Ed. Pierre Sahel. Centre Aixois de Recherches Anglaises 11 [forthcoming 1990].

---. "Tamburlaine the Great." The International Dictionary of the Theatre: Plays. Ed. Mark Hawkins-Dady. London: St. James Press [forthcoming mid-1991].

---. "Tamburlaine and the Body." Criticism [forthcoming].

Cole, Douglas. "The Impact of Goethe's Faust on Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Criticism of Marlowe's Doctor Faustus." Faust through Four Centuries: Retrospect and Analysis/Vierhundert Jahre Faust: Ruckblick und Analyse. Ed. Peter Boerner and Sidney Johnson. Tubingen: Niemeyer, 1989. 185-196.

Hardin, Richard F. "Irony and Privilege in Marlowe." The Centennial Review 33.3 (1989): 207-227.

Knutson, Roslyn L. "Evidence for the Assignment of Plays to the Repertory of Shakespeare's Company." Medieval & Renaissance Drama in England 4 (1989): 67-89.

Lunney, Ruth. "Faustus and the Angels." Sidney Studies in English 16 (1990-91): 3-19.

Phillips, K. J. "Exorcising Faustus from Africa: Wole Soyinka's The Road." Comparative Literature Studies 27 (1990): 140-157.

Taggie, Ben. "Marlowe and Shakespeare: Edward II and Richard II." Publications of the Missouri Philological Association 13 (1988): 16-21.

Watt, Ian. "Faust as a Myth of Modern Individualism: Three of Marlowe's Contributions." Faust through Four Centuries: Retrospect and Analysis/Vierhundert Jahre Faust: Ruckblick und Analyse. Ed. Peter Boerner and Sidney Johnson. Tubingen: Niemeyer, 1989. 41-52.

MARLOWE SOCIETY OF AMERICA

Constance B. Kuriyama, President
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MSA Newsletter publishes reviews of Renaissance, and especially Marlovian, drama; notices of recent and forthcoming publications; announcements; and brief articles or notes of interest to Marlovian scholars. The opinions expressed are those of the authors, and do not necessarily reflect that of the MSA. The editor reserves the right to refuse items, to ask for revisions, and to make stylistic changes that he deems appropriate. MSAN reviews are usually around 800 words long, but may occasionally be longer. The beginning of a review should identify the company, the dates of performance, and the director. MSA members are encouraged to announce publications and other items or meetings of interest to the membership. Materials for the next issue of MSAN should be received by April 10, 1991. Send inquiries, announcements, and submissions to Professor Bruce E. Brandt, Editor, MSAN, at the above address.

MSA Book Reviews publishes reviews of books on Marlowe and his period. Reviews, suggestions for reviews, and inquiries should be sent to the Reviews Editor:

Professor Paul W. White, Editor
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EDWARD II

The Swan Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon. The Royal Shakespeare Company. Directed by Gerard Murphy. From June 27, 1990.

A bare wooden chair occupies the center of the stage in the new RSC production of Marlowe's bleak historical drama, Edward II. Overturned and righted repeatedly, and used variously as a throne and a platform, it dominates the action as a potent image of the insecurity of monarchy and the vanity of political aspirations. Around it are placed piles of scrap metal, stark indicators of decay, dissolution, and the abandonment of responsibilities. This somberness of tone is underscored by the dun colors of the costumes; Edward's soldiers are black figures in Balacclavas, the discontented and gray-suited nobles gather on upper levels of the stage like malevolent harpies. Only the occasional brighter color relieves the gloom, such as Isabella's golden dress and Gaveston's white, studded leather jacket--glimmers of light in an otherwise dark world.

Directed by Gerard Murphy, the production offers a brooding reflection upon the collision of public and private obligations, and the attempts by a political faction to control what is perceived as a deviant sexuality. Sexual impulses govern the behavior of the central characters and shape the schemes they ambitiously pursue. The Three Poor Men (George Anton, Ian Embleton, and Lloyd Hutchinson) paw invitingly at the interested Gaveston; Edward enjoys an acrobatic display by three semi-naked performers (Shura Greenberg, John Hodgkinson, and Anthony Skordi) to the accompaniment of orgiastic sounds; and the younger Spencer (Dominic Mafham) and Baldock (Jamie Hinde) are introduced as lovers. Even Marlowe's taut, unembellished language is invested with an erotic urgency, as when Mortimer, asking Isabella to "sail" with him, begins his courtship.

At the center of this maelstrom of sexual energies is Edward, interpreted by Simon Russell Beale as a weak sensualist who wields a touchy authority until robbed of his crown. Giggling with Gaveston and constantly soliciting attention, he is an increasingly pathetic figure who spends much of the latter half of the play incarcerated beneath the stage; anticipating a final moment of sexual pleasure, he greets as a lover Lightborn (George Anton), his executioner. The murder is particularly shocking as a naked Edward, dispatched with a red hot spit thrust up his anus, jerks in agony, and his amplified scream fills the theater.

If Edward scoffs at his kingly duties, then the other characters are similarly irreverent. Grant Thatcher plays Gaveston as a grasping aspirant who delights in scandalizing prim sensibilities, and his

fall from grace is paralleled with Mortimer's rise to greatness. Of glowering power and menacing presence, Mortimer (Ciaran Hinds) emerges as a shrewd Machiavelian, schooling Isabella in the niceties of political rhetoric and proclaiming the terror of his name. While also commanding, Isabella (Katy Behean) never rivals her lover; she disentangles herself from Edward painfully, and the rest of the play shows her as Mortimer's pawn, pregnant with his child.

At the start, a funeral cortège processes across the stage; censers swing, a brazier burns, smoke rises and the wind moans. The cluster of infernal associations introduced here finds its echo in Edward's death and in the closing stages. It is Edward's coffin that is displayed in the final scene and Prince Edward (Callum Dixon) who mourns. Little has changed, however. Although he declares his "innocency," Prince Edward is not untainted; ringed by scheming lords, he is stricken with powerlessness. This excellent production, that illuminates many dark corners of Marlowe's drama and is admirably controlled and compelling in its vision of a biting, duplicitous, and unstable society, concludes with an image of fragile youth, a "lamb encompassed by wolves."

Mark Thornton Burnett

The Queen's University of Belfast

EAST MEETS WEST, PAST MEETS PRESENT: TWO REVIEWS

THE TEMPEST

Performed at Kennedy Theatre, University of Hawaii. Directed by Terence Knapp. Oct. 20-21, 26-29, 1989.

The putative last play of Shakespeare was performed as part of the series "China Visions," held to celebrate the bicentennial anniversary of Chinese immigration to Hawaii. Directed by drama professor Terence Knapp, The Tempest was staged as a blend of East and West, being set on an island off the coast of China inhabited by human beings, a monster, and spirits clad in Chinese costumes. For Knapp such eclectic productions are not new; he has directed a pidgin-English version of Twelfth Night in Tokyo and Asian-styled productions of Much Ado about Nothing and The Tempest. Knapp has asserted that Shakespeare's universality allows his plays to be presented within a Chinese frame as long as the essence of the play, which resides in its text or language, is not tampered with. Assisting Knapp in this production was Sherwood Xuehua Hu who has directed the Beijing Khong Zheng Drama Group and the Shanghai People's Art Theater.

The play opens with an effective scene on a

split stage: on the right, sailors cling precariously to a single mast bemoaning their fate and bathed in eerie strobe lighting; on the right, Prospero, resplendent in a red Chinese satin robe with a sunburst design and sage's cap, stands atop his cell-like cave and directs the storm. The sailors are sent headlong into the ocean and then in a slow, balletic movement, beautifully choreographed by Harriet Glass, the sailors swim slowly to the surface and to the island, clawing and crawling over each other in a sustained but stately panic enacted through a colored mist.

The Chinese influence is expressed primarily by costuming, dance, music, speech intonations, and martial arts movements. Alonso and Prospero share gorgeous satin Oriental robes with dragon and sun designs, respectively, marking them as leaders. The clowns Trinculo and Stephano are dressed in piebald Chinese peasant outfits, while Caliban is a stripped-down Chinese slave with no shoes, cut-off pants, a bare chest, and a rubber monster mask.

Sometimes, the introduction of Asian stage matter is dissonant and unintentionally comic, but at other times it is consonant with the action. For example, when Alonso incorporates kabuki-style movements and intonations as he attempts to assert his waning majesty on this bare island, his actions appear almost comic and adventitious. By contrast, Caliban's exaggerated karate chops upon meeting the drunken Stephano and Trinculo fit the scene because of the sustained comic qualities of their interplay.

The most graphic example of the uneven nature of Knapp's cross-cultural staging occurs in Cere's masque. The goddesses Ceres, Juno, and Iris adopt a highly stylized speaking delivery supposed to resemble the singsong style of the Beijing Opera, but the effect is a mixture of pidgin and a quasi-Brooklynese style associated with stereotypical bored telephone operators, which undercuts the visual beauty of the masque. On the other hand, the goddesses are dressed in diaphanous robes of gold, silver, and floral-printed cloth, jewel-like headdresses, and flowing shawls and scarves, which enhance these enchanting spirits who resemble dragon dancers waving streamers in tune with the offstage Chinese music. At this point, Knapp's cross-cultural production reaches its highest point of Shakespearean and Asian beauty.

ELIZABETH I

Performed at Kennedy Lab Theatre, University of Hawaii. Directed by Cathee Mang. March 22-25, 1990.

Paul Foster's Elizabeth I, which originally opened in New York in 1972, was directed by master's candidate

Cathee Mang, and five members of the Music department's Collegium Musicum provided superb modern and Renaissance accompaniment to the rollicking events onstage. The drama revolves around a troupe of itinerant and irreverent Elizabethan actors who perform the play about Queen Elizabeth I before her royal majesty, who sits in a balcony box watching the play-within-a-play unfold. We see the "real Elizabeth" watching the "false Elizabeth" onstage dreaming about her reign as it comes to life in a dream vision. Fourteen scruffy actors wheel their makeshift state, which folds into a dilapidated cart, around the stage as they move from Shoreditch to Cambridge and finally to the court. The actors play multiple roles in this sprawling, clownish, satirical, and surrealistic reduction of the grand march of Elizabethan history leading to the glorious defeat of the Spanish Armada. It's a cartoon-like depiction of Elizabeth's relationships with Mary, Queen of Scots and Philip II of Spain. The actors engage in quick-change roles moving from the noble to the common. For example, R. Kevin Doyle plays Sir Francis Bacon, a Huguenot, Pope Gregory XIII, Archbishop Whitgift, and English ship, a fool, chorus, and Lord Darnley. The combination of high and low characters embodied by one actor establishes Foster's satiric deflation of political history, a perspective that arises from the origins of this play in the anti-establishment sixties. Accordingly, there is a running metaphor about dirty underwear being washed in public. In one scene, the Queen's attendants wash Elizabeth's soiled undergarments, which have been sullied by the execution of Mary. In a further attempt to expunge her guilt, Elizabeth also "washes" the papers which contained the order of execution.

The stage is crowded with actors who sing, mug, dance, don masks, run through their paces, and convey a sense of rough Elizabethan theatricality and Brechtian disengagement as they continually break the illusion to talk about their roles in the play and in history. Much of the humor arises from the anachronistic blending of Elizabethan with contemporary motifs. For example, Sir Francis Bacon as the heralded intellectual of court life is ushered in as a kind of rock hero surrounded by fawning groupies--ladies-in-waiting. The scene is silly, but it does convey something of Bacon's proud personality as resident genius, a failing which later led to his disgrace. Similarly, Philip II is presented as a sadomasochistic ascetic who takes voluptuous pleasure in hearing about the tortures being inflicted by the Inquisition as he himself is scourged. Another effective pastiche is the moneylending scene when Philip II and Elizabeth visit Lazarus, the Jewish moneylender in Holland. This scene combines Jewish schtick with macabre humor about the monarchs' need to bleed countries to get money for their wars.

The climactic scene is the glorious defeat of

the Spanish Armada. Philip plots the invasion of England with toy ships that he maneuvers in a basin of water. But the winds blow and the ships are scattered; the battle is recreated in a mime scene with actors carrying cardboard cutouts of ships in front of them as they warily stalk each other. The English fire ships sail out, surround, and destroy their Spanish rivals.

In sum, the play is rowdy, rambunctious, oversized, scattered, entertaining, and even insightful at certain times. But often there's too much frenetic activity on too many levels, and as a result, the significance of the dialogue and the quick scenes is often muted. In its deft combination of multiple theatrical motifs, dance, music, and street fair scruffiness, the play achieves an eclectic vibrancy, but it never succeeds as a cohesive ensemble piece and coherent satire of Elizabeth's reign. Finally, although Foster's belittlement of Elizabethan events may have fit the iconoclastic ethos of the sixties, now the diminishment of a genuinely heroic age seems strident and silly.

Frank Ardolino

University of Hawaii

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM AND KING LEAR

Presented at the Elgin Theatre in Toronto. June 11 and 12 (respectively), 1990. Directed by Kenneth Branagh.

Whatever one's conceptions of A Midsummer Night's Dream, Kenneth Branagh's production is likely to provide some surprises and fresh insight. To begin with, there was a single set, a large, raked, circular disk with a two-thirds, semi-circular moat a bit back from the curving ramp at the front of the stage. The floor of the disk consisted of what appeared to be red and purple flakes. The aluminum walls were the luster and color of pewter with imploded star-shaped holes of various sizes and, at stage right on the wall, a moon-shaped fixture, hung authoritatively. Apart from the moat, there were three openings for entrances and exits, one at each side of the stage and one at the back; the latter had the appearance of an armoire or wardrobe and it opened inwardly toward the audience. Jenny Tiramani's set was suggestive and evocative, rather than defined or realistic. Often the lighting of Jon Linstrum was used to make it theatrically engaging. That the audience was called upon to respond to the set with an active imagination not only held to the spirit of Renaissance staging but identified the agent largely responsible for the strength and pleasure of our response. Our participating imagination became significant in another way, too; for, even as Shakespeare dramatized his view of

the transforming power of the imagination, we were called upon to experience it. The result was that our felt experience validated and enriched our perceived experience.

I have never been one to look with less than skepticism upon gimmickry in Shakespearian productions. Thus, the mix of what passed for ancient Athenian garb among those figures who appeared at court, the Halloween costumes of the fairy folk, and the 1990s garb of the mechanicals might have seemed to offer grounds for complaint. But it did not. The costuming simply aided in pulling out all the audience's imaginative stops and in providing more sources for comic incongruity. At the play within the play, for example, Peter Quince, dressed in an ill-fitting tuxedo with a scarlet bow tie, acted the overzealous emcee for his troupe of actors, at once comically foolish in his exaggerated attempts at theatrical propriety and touching in his paternalistic concern for his troupe. The costume enabled us, even as it evoked our mirth, to perceive through a visual symbol his confusion and intense earnestness.

Throughout the performance of A Midsummer Night's Dream, most immediately and permanently enjoyable was the actor's command of the language and their confidence in their understanding of it (the Scottish burrs of some of the actors notwithstanding). The inflection and interpretation of their lines indicated that they always knew whereof they spoke and, ultimately, that they found the center to the play in the mysterious powers of the imagination, a faculty as easily the source of darkness as of light. Of particularly impressive note were Francine Morgan who managed to make Hermia into a flesh-and-blood character instead of a caricature; Emma Thompson who made Helena's mix of wit and witlessness comic, touching, and thoroughly likable, and who invested the soliloquy at the end of the first scene with philosophical meaning without losing its psychological significance as part of her own humanity; and Simon Roberts who, although at times too effeminate as Theseus (if not as Oberon), gave a reading to Theseus's well-known speech at the beginning of Act V that indicated the ruler's individual generosity of spirit as well as the reasoning, authoritative voice of society.

Giving coherence to the production was director Branagh's sense of the thinness of the line that separates comedy from tragedy. A case in point was Hippolyta's concern and evident displeasure at the Athenian law's tough pronouncement on Hermia's love for Lysander. Another indication, although less obvious, came from the characterizations. The characters had depth and were not simply the stock or flat characters from comedy. I was particularly taken with the conception of Demetrius who, more overtly nasty than in the usual conception of him, paid for his intense emotional stress by having to use techniques

of meditation as both an anodyne and a soporific. Another example was in the characterization of Nick Bottom who, although splendidly comic, was less singlemindedly egocentric, more vulnerable, and less of a blusterer than one is used to. Still another was conveyed by the campy, erotic words and actions of a raspy-voiced Hippolyta, giving the fairy queen just the right blend of naturalness and artificiality. She could be overbearing and a bit menacing, but she was also a comic delight.

Of the members of the company who stood out for their acting ability, the mechanicals as a whole can easily be commended. This was especially true of Richard Briers who managed to invest Nick Bottom with humanity without slighting the role's opportunities for exhibiting a superb comic sense. I would also point to the fine ensemble acting of Kenneth Branagh as Peter Quince, sometimes officious, often befuddled, but always energetic and well intentioned; Gerard Horan as an awkward, lumbering Francis Flute and, in the play put on by the mechanicals, a comically oafish, firmly male Thisby dressed incongruously in a flowing white bridal gown; Karl James as the perplexed but always helpful Snug; and Bryan Kennedy as the largely bewildered, silent Tom Snout. The one weak major characterization was that of Puck, played and overplayed by Ethna Roddy. The conception of Puck as a raucous, squealing female ninny is a bit puzzling, but I suspect had something to do with Branagh's notion of the dark side of the imagination and his intention, through the portrayals of the fairy folk, not to eschew it.

Most impressive, I think, was the genuineness of the fun and the good humor of this production. I have never known an audience, including myself, to be so truly convulsed with laughter at a production of this play. And with good reason. The mechanicals inspired humor through their many incongruities of language, action, and dress. Their play within a play ended with an all-out song and dance routine reminiscent of "The Lambeth Walk" from Me and My Girl: the laborer-actors spurred on the three pairs of aristocratic lovers to join in with their singing and dancing in a grand pastiche of a Broadway musical show-stopper. The tradition of the royal audience and the actors joining in on a dance at the climax has authenticity as part of the tradition of the production of Renaissance court masques and may have actually taken place at the first performance of the play, if in fact it was written as an entertainment for a wedding. Branagh's sense of the play as musical comedy worked especially well, even if the show-stopping conclusion to the play within the play somewhat undercut the climax of the play itself. Moreover, at times (e.g., during Theseus' speech at the beginning of Act V) Patrick Doyle's music was intrusive. In all, however, out of the dozen or so productions of A Midsummer Night's Dream that I have

seen, this was easily the most enjoyable.

Sad to say, just the opposite was true of the production of King Lear. It was here that Branagh's lack of experience showed, and, consequently, that his intelligence and understanding faltered. That he had not clarified in his own mind his conception of the play was evident from the blocking, the costumes, and the characterizations, in particular those of King Lear (Richard Briers) and Edgar (Branagh himself).

The set for King Lear was identical with that of A Midsummer Night's Dream, except for two torches mounted on the back wall and a trap door in the middle of the disk. The shavings of flakes seemed orange and I noticed, as I had not for the production of A Midsummer Night's Dream, that the entrance ways had what appeared to be splatterings of blood at their base. To represent the storm, Branagh used unsuccessfully his one major special effect, a thin line of water that, as it splashed down on the stage, drowned out the words of the actors, especially those of Lear whose voice lacked force and majesty to begin with. The usefulness of this special effect could be understood as an indication of Branagh's inexperience, especially because it was in bold contrast to the otherwise economic, conservatively traditional staging of the play.

It may be difficult for anyone who has read the play to conceive of it as monotonous, but this production was. Part of the trouble was in the blocking. Too much of the time, the actors stood without movement. One tended to notice it more because they spoke their lines in inaudible, neutral, or detached voices. If the intention was to act in an understated manner, the effect was create voice boxes or stick figures who were neither internalizing their words nor suggesting a psychology that prompted them. The costumes were also something of a puzzle. The Britons wore solidly scarlet or fire-engine red gowns, pants, and capes reminiscent of those associated with the era of Napoleon. The French wore bright blue, the servants black, the Fool black and white, and Edgar as Mad Tom at first a brown Tarzan loincloth and then drab olive green rags, and boots. Overall, the costumes, startling at first, contributed to the monotony, not to a clear conception of the play.

Every once in a while the acting rose above the mundane: Richard Briers (as Lear), Emma Thompson (as the Fool), Karl James (as Albany), and James Larkin (as Oswald). The production as a whole lacked the cutting edge that the barbaric, primitive elements of the text suggest, and that includes the acting. Although clearly a comic actor of skill, Briers often lacked the force, intensity, and heroic stature required of the enraged, crazed king. By the same token, Francine Morgan and Siobhán Redmond as Regan and Goneril lacked the severe nastiness they needed to

make Lear's distress convincing. It seemed to have been transferred instead--almost to the point of caricature--to Jimmy Yuill's Kent once he took on the disguise of Caius.

Perhaps the most disappointing performance was that of Branagh as Edgar. The role is a magnificent one for an actor. At first, we see a naive, earnest, good-natured Edgar, then the role-player who as Mad Tom acts the religious fanatic with vivid theatricality, and finally the sadder but wiser man. As Branagh played Edgar, there was little distinction among these three phases of his character. Another indication of his lack of a firm conception of the character, was the detached, uninflected reading he gave the lines. One had the sense that understatement had given way to uncertainty.

With the Fool, there is great room for interpretation. This Fool was clearly a thoroughly unhappy creature, at times affecting in his desperate need to find a human bond with enough meaning in it to act as a buffer to the emptiness and atrocities of his wretched existence. Made up in a white death's head face, with a hump and a wooden leg, the Fool spoke in a fake, hollow, low voice, often with a vigorous synopsis that was probably intended to accentuate the character's mental and physical ills. When Ms. Thompson sang--and she did all too often--one heard the trained voice of a singer in the mezzo-soprano range and lost the sense of the character that the baritone speaking voice brought to us. In the text, the Fool's final words are, "And I'll go to bed at noon" (III.vi.83). But in this production, the Fool adds to this by singing the cryptic "prophecy" that concludes Act III, scene ii (81-95). Since the prophecy is difficult enough to follow when read, it was perplexing to see it included here and even more perplexing to hear it sung. Ms. Thompson has such mastery of technique that the thought that Mr. Branagh, her husband, allowed her to do a bit of a star turn may be uncharitable. But, clearly, her Fool, instead of providing a clue to the overall conception of the play, too often merely led us to reflect on the achievements of the actor playing him. In showing up the lack of technique in her fellow actors, it also gave the production an unintended weakness.

Branagh's directorial response to the play indicated that he missed the grotesque comedy in it. Nor was he able to convey the admirable energy of Lear, the majesty and conviction of the angry and violent speeches of the King, and the larger resonances of the play. Moreover, Branagh has not yet learned that stage imagery can have literal and symbolic power simultaneously. He does appear to understand the domestic melodrama and the dark side of the play, however, even if he is unable to invest either with the grandeur and magniloquence they deserve. Finally, if we can readily applaud Branagh's

energy and bravado in attempting to stage King Lear, we can also hope that he will attempt it again in another decade or two.

Robert A. Logan

University of Hartford

RE-VIEWING POLANSKI'S MACBETH

Jack Jorgens suggests that Polanski's is "quite a good film."¹ I still do not agree, basing my objections on such old-fashioned and non-filmic criteria as the film's shrinking of cosmic to domestic, Francesca Annis's half-Lady, moving in her later vulnerability, wholly unconvincing in her early power plays, Finch's blank Macbeth, Polanski's misrepresentation of the Norse past-present-future patterning of the Weird Sisters, etc., etc.²

Having looked at the film again, I am still troubled at the level of premises. I have no problem with a film called "Throne of Blood." I might not have a problem were Polanski's called "Blood in the Highlands." But I raise a large and probably irrelevant issue.

Looking at the Polanski film again, I discover a brilliant and powerful couple of beats--a minute and ten seconds worth of time in the film.

Macbeth gets a sword between the plates. He staggers away as Macduff retrieves his sword. Macbeth stumbles up the steps and falls. Macduff raises his sword and swings it down. The camera makes a 90 degree jump-cut as the sword chunks off Macbeth's head, even as his hands grope for it and for the crown on top of it. The head falls away as the body clatters down the steps. Malcolm rationalizes his horror with "Such a day as this is cheaply bought." Macduff stands on the platform and says, "Hail, King, for so thou art. Behold where lies the usurper's cursed head." The head, meanwhile, has splattered onto a lower platform. The camera follows a stain of blood until it finds the head, crown in place, eyes wide open. "The time is free," Macduff says, as we look at the head. Ross removes the crown and carries it towards Malcolm. The latter removes his helmet as all shout "Hail!" Ross shouts, "Hail, King of Scotland!" and Malcolm dons the crown.

An eerie chord sounds as Macbeth's head is placed upon a pike. The camera tracks past cheering soldiers, blurred, mouths open but silent, as if time passes in some strange, slow-motion sequence. The head bleeds, the eyes are open. The camera creates a quick montage--three times to the head, twice to the silent roar of the soldiers, and then to the cheers from the courtyard balconies, which resemble an amphitheatre, or the galleries of an Elizabethan

theatre. Macbeth's head rises on the other side, subject of the victorious cheering.³

The head, of course, observes all of this--honor, love, obedience, troops of friends, all glimpsed through the profoundly ironic transparency of death. There is speculation in the eyes which seem merely to glare. But instead of being the destroyer of a would-be ceremony of amity, as is Banquo's half-corpse, half-apparition, Macbeth's head is the focal point of such a celebration.

It may be that Polanski borrows from Camus's quotation of Fr. Devoyod's description of an execution by guillotine: "His head fell into the trough in front of the guillotine and the body was immediately put into the basket; but by some mistake, the basket was closed before the head was put in. The assistant who was carrying the head had to wait a moment until the basket was opened again; now, during that brief space of time we could see the condemned man's eyes fixed on me with a look of supplication, as if to ask forgiveness. Instinctively we made the cross to bless the head, and then the lids blinked, the expression of the eyes softened, and finally the look, that had remained full of expression, became vague."⁴

Polanski could have done more with his remarkable exercise in point of view. While the film tries too often to edge into the genre of "horror film," the effect here is brilliant. Polanski takes what we used to call "the theme of time" and forces us to experience that theme. The time is not as free as Macduff and Malcolm would make it. As Jorgens says, "The time is not free at the end of Polanski's melodrama, for there will be no end to the chain of ambitious killings, repression, and fear."⁵

I remain unconvinced that the script offers this interpretation as an option, but Polanski's camera has suggested that time is not necessarily what the Elizabethan World Picture would insist that it be. For an instant Polanski escapes to the imagination that the script invites even within the closed "world-view" that the script imposes. For once, Polanski makes the "Macbeth leap." For the most part, however, I agree with Jorgens that, for all of the virtues of the film as film, it remains "a naturalistic portrait of meaningless violence acted out in a wasteland."^{6*}

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* The film is, for better or for worse, a precise working out of the thesis enunciated by Harry Berger in "Text Against Performance: The Example of Macbeth," Genre 15.1-2 (Spring & Summer, 1982): 49-79, although Berger appears not to have noticed.

¹ Jack J. Jorgens, Shakespeare on Film (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977): 161.

² "Polanski's Macbeth: A Dissent," The University of Dayton Review 14.1 (Winter, 1979-1980): 95-97. In the same issue, see also Virginia Wright Wexman, "Macbeth and Polanski's Theme of Regression," 85-88, and David Middleton, "The Self-Reflexive Nature of Roman Polanski's Macbeth," 89-94. See also Normand Berlin, "Macbeth: Polanski and Shakespeare," and Michael Mullin, "Macbeth on Film," Literature/Film Quarterly: 1.4 (Fall 1973): 291-298 and 332-342; Kenneth Rothwell, "Roman Polanski's Macbeth: Golgotha Triumphant," Literature/Film Quarterly, 1.1 (January 1973): 71-75; Bruna Gushurst, "Polanski's Determining of Power in Macbeth," Shakespeare on Film Newsletter, 13.2 (April 1989): 7; Pauline Kael, "The Current Cinema," The New Yorker (5 February 1971), 76; and Stanley Kauffman, The New Republic (1 January 1972): 32.

³ The moment is visually powerful. Cf. Wexman: "Finally decapitated, [Macbeth] is literally reduced to a head, and in this state he is swept through a jeering crowd on the end of a stick" (87). Jorgens remarks "the remarkable silent, fast motion, point of view shots of jeering soldiers as Macbeth's head is rushed towards the ramparts" (172).

⁴ Albert Camus, "Reflections on the Guillotine," Resistance, Rebellion, and Death (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1951): 184-185.

⁵ Jorgens, p. 168.

⁶ Jorgens, p. 166.

FROM THE EDITOR

This issue of the Newsletter features a variety of reviews. Mark Thornton Burnett shares his reactions to the RSC's Edward II. Robert Logan examines two productions by the much discussed Kenneth Branagh. Frank Ardolino looks at two productions which focus on our period from different cultural and temporal perspectives. H. R. Coursen reassesses Polanski's Macbeth. It is a good mix, and one which I hope will appeal to all of you.

The MSA Newsletter depends upon the membership for its contents, and it can be as interesting and as exciting as we wish to make it. I am always in need of film or drama reviews, announcements, and brief articles or notes which would be interesting to Marlovians. Reviews of Marlowe productions are certainly central to what we are about, but as was discussed in last fall's Newsletter, and is exemplified in this issue, we can cast our nets widely and creatively around the interest that we share in Marlowe.

I would appreciate receiving contributions for the spring issue by April 10, 1991.