

msan

Marlowe Society of America Newsletter

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MARLOWE CONFERENCE

The Third International Marlowe Conference will be held as planned at Corpus Christi College from June 28 to July 2, 1993. The program is set. There will be some seventy papers, which will make it the largest of the conferences we have sponsored. Those attending may be interested to know that the RSC productions around that time will include King Lear and The Merchant of Venice at Stratford and Antony and Cleopatra, The Winter's Tale, and As You Like It at the Barbican in London.

MSA ELECTION

Nominations for MSA Secretary have closed. There are three candidates for the office: Norman Boyer, Roslyn L. Knutson, and Viviana Comensoli. Information about the candidates and a ballot will be distributed to the membership in late summer.

Doctor Faustus

Directed by Brigid Larmour at the Contact Theatre, Manchester, April 15-May 8, 1993.

Brigid Larmour's production of Doctor Faustus is based on the A-text, with minor additions from the B-text in the Emperor scene, and comes in at just under two hours, with a twenty-minute interval. The large, open, rectangular stage of the Contact Theatre has been given a rough, sandy surface interspersed with the broken remains of a mosaic pavement, an image picked up in the half-finished half-destroyed cartoon Renaissance freschi on the back and side walls. Above these is a balcony, running around all three sides of the stage, and used primarily by the chorus. The stage itself is bare except for a vertical ladder, frequently used for making entrances and exits to symbolic effect, and a horizontal structure which functions variously as a table for Faustus' books and a

catwalk for a cabaret-like Seven Deadly Sins. I found this idea an interesting one; although in execution it in fact proves rather slow-paced, the stylish, model-like movements of the actors, and the row of small spotlights which picked out the balcony above them, suggested something of the spectacular nature of the Sins' appearance.

Indeed, most of the good ideas in this production are visual ones: an exceptionally agile, dance-trained Mephostopholis (James Durrell) making his entrance hanging upside down from a swing, and then later using movements on it to demonstrate those of the planets; the Old Man (here doubled by Anni Domingo's Good Angel) crawling painfully up the ladder towards God; and a startling tableau at the end when tiny pinpricks of light appear above the back wall surrounding a face which may well be meant to represent God's, but is also very recognizably that of the actor (James Duke) who has, significantly, doubled Lucifer, the Pope, and the Emperor Charles. There is also a very effective use of subdued, red lighting to evoke a genuinely hellish effect, complemented by much use of acrid smoke and an extremely atmospheric score by Mark Vibrans; and the skilled, graceful movement work and lavish costuming—an interesting mixture of Renaissance outline with modern detailing—add to the production's visual pleasures.

Sadly, its substance does not match its style. Sean Cranitch's lightweight Faustus has no idea how to speak verse, horribly mangles the Latin, and fails to evoke either sympathy or interest. James Durrell's Mephostopholis, who interestingly couples agility of action with gravitas of speech, is far stronger, and Anni Domingo's doubling of all the various voices of good is also an interesting one, but they cannot carry the production alone; and other casting decisions, such as the use of a female Wagner and a Cornelia, seem too obviously prompted by necessity rather than thought. Ultimately, the impression is of a succession of visually stunning moments with no through line of interpretation or thematisation.

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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 October 1, 1993. Send inquiries, announcements, and submissions to Professor Bruce Brandt 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:

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TAMBURLAINE THE GREAT

The Royal Shakespeare Company, directed by Terry Hands, at the Swan Theatre, 13 August 1992 - 30 January 1993

For this production (the first professional rendering in Britain since Peter Hall's 1976 National Theatre version, and the first ever at Stratford) Terry Hands has, by some remarkably judicious cutting, amalgamated the two parts of the play into one three-hour run. The result is a pacy, dynamic, and spectacular show: the only section of the text which I felt suffered seriously from the compression was the story of Olympia, who has hardly appeared before she has leaped into a pit and been forgotten by the audience, thus robbing the episode of both narrative tension and thematic significance.

The star of the evening is undoubtedly Antony Sher's Tamburlaine, whose performance, as with his celebrated 1984 Richard III, is distinguished by a striking physicality. His meridian line speech is actually delivered from a rope, which he first shins up and then hangs from upside down, mesmerizing the audience by the sheer theatricality and daring of the act. He also uses a rope when he finds himself confronted by Malcolm Storry's striking Bajazeth, who, like his two chief bassoes, walks with remarkable agility on two-feet-high gold stilts and has huge curling elephant's tusks coming out of his helmet: faced with this alarming figure, who bears a passing resemblance to the Imperial Walkers of the Star Wars movies, Sher swings across the auditorium and fells Bajazeth by launching himself Tarzan-like at his chest.

His performance is by no means all gimmicks, however. He has also brought to the role a genuine sense of the magnificence and of the strangeness of Tamburlaine: his Scythian shepherd is a man intoxicated not only with power but also with language, lingering lovingly over the exotic polysyllables which constitute the names of his companions, extracting every ounce of sound from those strange words "Zenocrate" and "Persepolis." For the second half of the play, a huge map adorns the backcloth; when he finally feels himself dying, Sher's Tamburlaine pulls this down and wraps it round his shoulders as he laments for all the territory he must leave "unconquered." This attention to language is especially rewarding as he attempts to define beauty, and is brought up suddenly short by a word which really arrests his attention, "nobility"—a word to which he must recur later when he is forced to accept that his role as Scourge of God must effectively preclude him from true nobility. Sher's interpretation here has enabled him to plumb depths in the character of Tamburlaine that are all too often not suspected.

His task is made easier for him by the costumes designed by Johan Engels. He appears at first scantily clad, chest exposed; but from then on he acquires more armor in each appearance, until immediately before the interval, at what would be the end of Part One, he enters as a man all of steel, even his face hidden in a life-like helmet, so that his transformation into military machine is seen to be complete. By the opening of Part Two, however, matters have changed again; a considerable period of time has passed—Jack Klaff's dashing Theridamus has gone white—and Tamburlaine appears now, in desert coat and copious eye make-up, as a Lawrence of Arabia clone. Such a reference serves to enhance what is already implied by the map and indeed by the language: instead of a European civilization turning curious eyes to newly discovered lands, what we are offered here is the reverse of that process, whereby it is European civilization itself that is presented as alien and strange, as Tamburlaine rolls round his tongue names with which we are familiar and makes them, too, exotic.

The remainder of the cast provide excellent support. Particularly striking is Claire Benedict's beautiful, black Zenocrate, who is fetchingly attired in a series of increasingly see-through outfits in the first half before her transformation into plumpish, well-wrapped-up mother-figure for her one brief scene after the interval. She, too, brings psychological depth to her character, making all the more ironic Zenocrate's posthumous transformation into a huge, monolithic icon which is thereafter carried before Tamburlaine's army. Also deserving of mention is Lloyd Hutchinson's Mycetes (he also doubles as Almeda), whose verve, pathos and comic timing ensures that this fine production gets off to the strong start it deserves.

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RICHARD III

Presented by the Royal National Theatre of Great Britain at the Opera House of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Washington, D.C., June 23-July 19, 1992. Directed by Richard Eyre. Set by Bob Crowley. Lights by Jean Kalman. Music by Dominic Muldowney. Costumes by Anne-Marie Winstanley. With Ian McKellen, Charlotte Cornwall, Terence Rigby, Rosalind Knight, Peter Darling, Richard Bremner, and Richard Simpson.

Usually in a play review there is no mention of where the reviewer sat during the performance. Yet, this is an important consideration because perspective can change one's perceptions. For example, a baseball game viewed from box seats will be different from a

game seen from the bleachers. Similarly, seeing Richard III from the second balcony of the cavernous Opera House at the John F. Kennedy Center strongly influenced my perception and evaluation of the play. As the person next to me complained, the actors looked minuscule and their lines were hard to understand. Primarily, the distant seating obscured the poetic and personal sense of evil conveyed by the scheming Richard and forced me to concentrate on the larger, more abstract political meanings and gestures, which the acting and the production emphasized.

By the end of the current sixteen-week tour of the United States, this production will have been performed over 300 times since its opening at the Littleton Theater on July 25, 1990, more than any play in the history of the Royal National Theater. Given the exigencies of appealing to world-wide audiences, the production has opted for broad political effects. Sir Ian McKellen has commented that it would be inappropriate for him to play Richard as the melodramatic embodiment of evil like the Big Bad Wolf. Rather, his Richard emerges as an unloving and unlovable man and at the same time a charismatic and ambitious military leader able to charm, terrify, and destroy his victims. Director Richard Eyre has said that the beheading of Hastings reminded him of some of the political deaths which occurred during Thatcher's administration and that the production has always elicited shocks of political recognition from its diverse audiences.

The purpose of this production, then, is to present a kind of generic depiction of political takeover and tyranny. It is set in the period between the first two world wars with some of the characters dressed in military greatcoats and other in diplomatic garb reminiscent of Neville Chamberlain in his heyday. The walls and floor of the stage were enveloped totally in black, like a Rothko black canvas; the only light penetrating this black box was through an entry door at the back of the stage and from a series of ominous lights peering down on the action. Otherwise, the stage was a black box peopled with characters with black souls who later donned black fascist uniforms as they rose to power: Life in a black box with political puppets spasmodically acting out their murderous rituals.

The hypocrisy of the political process was represented in scenes concerning peace conferences, ostensibly intended to produce amity, which were followed inevitably by disruption and violence. Lord Hastings, seated in the center place at the peace table after his release from the Tower, was unaware of Richard's designs against him. Richard kept calling for strawberries to be delivered, and then just as suddenly he accused Hastings of treason, and had him arrested and beheaded. Hastings' head arrived in a box, and Richard opened it, dipped his hand into the

mess and then licked his fingers. So much for the strawberries and the accord reached around a table. Similarly, the killing of Queen Elizabeth's brother and son at Pomfret took place in front of the table where the peace between Elizabeth and Richard was being effected. The juxtaposition of the bogus conference and the reality of betrayal and death behind it captured the essence of the play's political process.

As Richard and Buckingham rose to power, their political control was depicted in two key scenes which used the size of the stage and theater to greatest effect. Richard pretended not to want to be king, as Buckingham, the hapless Lord Mayor, and a crowd gathered around to woo him. Richard was mounted on a movable tower stage center between two prelates, as searchlights scanned the audience. Buckingham, facing us, repeated his suit to Richard, who, also facing the theater audience, responded through a microphone. The staging established that this was an engineered political act, in which the theater audience silently participated as the manipulated crowd.

When Richard was crowned, he was seated on a gold throne backed by vivid red in the same place where he was wooed to become king. The prayer tower had now become a royal throne and Richard sat proudly on it, almost slithering in sidelong ecstasy as he posed in a brilliant Book of Hours frame. Behind him on a backdrop was a huge picture of Richard in armor standing heroically in front of a proud horse. This was large-scale poster art depicting political tyranny made heroic and palatable.

The final scene involving the movable centerpiece tower-throne occurred before the climactic battle scene when Richard, in the face of impending defeat, tried to rouse his troops to victory by haranguing them from the tower and providing another image of seemingly heroic words intended to move crowds. Richard intoned the inspiring battlefield rhetoric, but for the wrong cause.

However, there is the inescapable sense created by this production that there is no right cause. Although Richmond certainly appeared to be in the right compared to Richard, whose heinousness we have seen, the way the political process has been presented it would be foolish to say that Richmond will be a moral ruler. The essential equivalence of the two opposing leaders—of all leaders?—was shown by their sharing of the same encampments the night before the last battle. The respective soldiers mingled among themselves without any recognition of antagonism. Richmond had the last words in the play and they were good ones, but so were Richard's. And then Henry VII's name was enrolled on the stage curtain just as the names of his predecessors, Edward IV and Richard III, had been mounted during their reigns.

Sir Ian McKellen played Richard, as far as I could determine, without a strong sense of individualized personality. As some critics noted, McKellen maintained a "frozen self-possession" throughout his rise. Only a few times did his macabre lines and gestures raise a laugh. But he did engage in some deft stage play by using his one good arm to great effect in slithering into and out of his glove and buttoning and unbuttoning his clothes. McKellen engaged in these activities as a key to Richard's character. He overcame the problem of handling life's little chores with one arm just as he slithered and manipulated his way into power. Overall, McKellen's performance fit the political import of the production; he appeared as a spasmodic and malevolent monkey, capable of great evil but in essence not much different from other rulers.

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TWO HAMLETS IN ONE DISTRICT

One of the few productions of Hamlet to feature different actors in the title role was Michael Kahn's production in Washington in late 1992. I was fortunate enough, thanks to Candi Adams of the Shakespeare Theatre to see both Hamlets, Tom Hulce and Gary Sloan. Kahn's production was well articulated, briskly paced, and blessedly free of any tendency towards the "bright idea" for which Kahn has been criticized in the past. With Sloan in the lead role, the production transcended some of the problems that casting and direction inflicted upon it. The production was designed around Hulce, of course, since he would play Hamlet over fifty times, with Sloan alternating once a week during the production's eight week run. Had the production been built around Sloan it might have been better in all ways, since the lucidity and occasional power of his performance tended to focus issues that seemed very murky in the Hulce version.

Something central was missing in Hulce's performance itself, as Roy Procter suggests in recasting the old "Our Gal Sunday question: "Is endearment enough? Can this Hamlet, who might be mistaken for one of the servants in the royal palace of Elsinore, resonate with the tragic stature he needs to get his emotional due from the audience in Shakespeare's most intriguing play? The answer: No." Time suggests that Hulce's "ironic, self-deprecating intelligence . . . ought . . . to provide fresh insight into a few scenes. . . . But in a hokey production all too typical of Washington's Shakespeare Theater, Hulce fails to make the words sound sincere and obscures the political and revenge narratives with muddling about real-or-feigned madness" (83).

In a recent article, Los Angeles Times critic Jan Herman blasts "celebrity theatre," with its "stellar-looking productions with TV stars to match [but] desperately lacking in the one essential that might have made it work: the coherent acting of a unified company" (Herman 4). Her complaint echoes that of Caryn James in The New York Times, who discusses Mel Gibson, Dustin Hoffman, Kevin Kline, Michelle Pfeiffer, Denzel Washington, Morgan Freeman, Burton and Taylor, and others. I liked Kelsey Grammer and the Mark Taper Richard II much more than Herman did—and previously Grammer had worked as Lucio for his director, Robert Egan. Kelly McGillis played a winsome Viola for Kahn in a badly conceived Twelfth Night at the Folger that was not McGillis's fault (cf. my review of the production in MSAN 6.2 (1986): 2 and Shakespearean Interpretations, 30). Dustin Hoffman played an understated and effective Shylock for Peter Hall a few years ago. More recently, Megan Follows was a beguiling if somewhat underspoken Juliet at Stratford, Canada. Film and television are distinct media calling for different qualities from actors, but neither medium is necessarily good "training" for the stage. Film can do much with its camera and its editing. The nearness of a microphone in each medium encourages actors to ignore the specific attention to vowels and consonants that projection in an auditorium demands. Shakespeare's lead characters demand on stage qualities that carefully controlled and meticulously edited media do not—not just the ability to project the voice clearly and conversationally into space but also range and versatility. It may be that Ralph Berry is correct to assert that Hamlet does not demand a great actor, but rather a "star" (24). But the star must be many things within the space of the play—lover, graduate student, crown prince, court jester, impresario, playwright, playactor, murderer, attacker of pirates, skilled duelist, multiple murderer, etc. Of these, the only role not requiring "star" quality is that of graduate student. Furthermore, as Michael Goldman points out, "The play abounds in situations that require the principal actor to shift his mood or mode of action because of a change in audience" (75). It is possible to play "above the role," as Olivier tended to do in his self-directed film version, and "below the role," as Nicol Williamson did in his Round House rendition for Tony Richardson, where he was a snarling, Midland outsider wondering, as we did, what on earth his business at Elsinore could be. What convinced us in Williamson's performance was his hatred of Claudius. Derek Jacobi got inside the role as cynical intellectual and, by that declension, as jester, powerfully illuminating vast patches of the script though the persona that "worked" for Hamlet. Mark Rylance did not try for Jacobi's sophistication, but made his commentary on Elsinore by becoming remarkably vulnerable, probably bonkers by any standards but particularly so as seen from the perspective of Claudius's desperate joviality or Polonius's chilly political game of chess (and I am

thinking of Peter Wight and Patrick Godfrey in the RSC version, as opposed to the much weaker American production that Ron Daniels redesigned for the American Repertory Theatre). Rylance brilliantly swung Elsinore around his "politics of tantrum" and at the same time won us to a Hamlet who was absolutely "impossible" within his scripted world. It looked as if this were the Hamlet that Michael Kahn worked out for Hulce. Hulce could not make it work. He lacked vocal range and, in fact, his voice seemed strained on the evening I attended the production. Typical of the contrast between the two actors was that in the Nunnery Scene, Ophelia tried to comfort Hulce's Hamlet as if he were a little boy who has skinned his knee. The same Ophelia tried to kiss Sloan's Hamlet as woman to man. The "relationship" was slightly more believable with Sloan as Hamlet, a remarkable fact given an Ophelia whose motivation was a) to be taken seriously by her father and b) to get rid of her virginity. Sloan was burdened with a concept that he could make work occasionally, when his approach to the character was permitted to jump brilliantly free of what I took to be Kahn's and Hulce's conception.

The problems here were not those attendant upon having a "star" as Hamlet. The problems were in the concept of the role, a concept born I would guess from a notion of this actor's range and flexibility. Had I not seen Sloan, however, I would have agreed with Jan Herman that, in this instance, the importation of a star from another medium did undercut "the coherent acting of a unified company." As it was, Sloan could only do his best to make Hamlet coherent within an inchoate production. What he could have done with the role had it been his own is moot, although I hope he will get the chance within another production soon.

It may be that the production merely borrowed ideas from other recent productions. Kevin Kline's dull New York production, for example, had Hamlet manipulate Rosencrantz and Guildenstern physically, forcing them, for example, to lie down beside him to gaze upon "this brave, o'er hanging firmament," and so he did here. But several touches convinced me that Kahn was borrowing primarily from Daniels. In the RSC and ART, Hamlet stood with bags packed, waiting for the train to Germany at the beginning of 1.2. Here, he exited the scene rudely, right through the middle of one of Claudius's speeches, went upstairs, and dropped a calfskin bag from the balcony, narrowly missing a lady-in-waiting. He held his books during Claudius's lecture, so that the latter could tap them on the word "unschool'd," though Claudius got the emphasis wrong. (The distinction he may be making will work if he stresses un). Rylance reached out and touched the Ghost in 1.5, the little boy who had disappointed his powerful father. Here, Hamlet knelt, held onto his much taller father, indeed crawled with the Ghost as the latter pulled himself offstage. Hulce did all of this better than Sloan, since vul-

nerability would seem to be one of the few tricks the former has in his bag, while the latter was stuck with all the business, I would guess, without believing it. One result of this over-playing of Hamlet's response to the Ghost was that our sense of Hamlet's mission was reduced, if not erased. For the sake of a single scene, the dramatic pressure of subsequent scenes was lost. One borrowing from Daniels that worked—particularly for Sloan, whose timing was superb—was Hamlet's advice on "the speech." Hamlet's advice on using all gently, and neither sawing the air nor being too tame was interpolated into a Player's effort to memorize the Lucianus speech ("Thoughts black, hands apt. . .") and that gave an amusing pointedness to Hamlet's concern with his own written dialogue. The Ghost's affection for Gertrude here seemed another borrowing from Daniels, although this Ghost did not cradle her. He crossed to her, however (in the only entrance he was permitted from stage left!) and exited sadly, dismissed by her inability to see him. But, all right—the idea of his continuing love for her is supported by the script. After Polonius's murder, Hamlet entered, as Rylance had done, in a bloody white shirt with a bucket and began to wash himself. This approach permitted him to squeeze a sponge as he accused Rosencrantz of being one. Rylance had been covered with blood as he slaughtered Polonius and was then almost drowned by an angry Claudius in the wash bucket. Here, Hamlet dispatched Polonius with a single neat blow (Sloan took two, the first thrust a range finder), spilled no blood, and dragged Polonius off on a blanket, presumably to save Polonius's magnificent Lord Burleigh outfit. Were we to infer that Hamlet then engaged in some cannibalistic orgy where Polonius was eaten? I don't think so, but the borrowing from the Daniels production was otherwise meaningless. In response to another production, Peter Holland says, "it is sad to see a production borrowing jokes and gags and business and not learning how to copy the energy and style" (178). And that is to put it very mildly as far as the Kahn Hamlet is concerned.

If Hamlet is just a little boy who breaks into an occasional adolescent squeak, as Hulce did ("Yet I / A dull and muddymettled rascal. . ."), then we need a powerful cast around him. Rylance gave an intentionally bizarre performance—every syllable thought out—and was supported in the RSC version by a superb troupe. Here, we got a good Ghost (Daniel Southern), although some day a Ghost will say, "I am thy father's spirit," that is not a goblin damn'd. We got a good player (Emery Battis), who was permitted his Pyrrhus speech, complete with a mimed Hecuba by the Boy Actor. We got a good Gravedigger (Eric Hoffman). The Second Gravedigger returned from Vaughan with a stoop of liquor just as Hamlet talked of stopping a beer-barrel. Hofman gave his assistant a dig in the ribs when the Priest said that Ophelia should have been buried in unsanctified ground. We got a Polonius (Ted van

Griethuysen) who had at least thought about his relationship with his children—a son was a way of reliving vicariously a wild youth, but a daughter was a gigantic pain-in-the-neck, unless perhaps she could be used as a political pawn. Ophelia (Francesca Buller) was delighted when Polonius finally listened to her, misinterpreting his response, which was to the seriousness of the Crown Prince's "love," not to her in her own being. Otherwise, one could scarcely wait until she had distributed her damned flowers. She had been to a finishing school where they taught the girls a British accent. It jarred palpably against the suddenly discernible American accents of the rest of the company. If Laertes is played as a young fool, he does not become Hamlet's "foil" (though the word was cut here). Even in a rave review of this production, Hap Erstein says, Laertes gets in some steamy roughhousing with his sister, Ophelia, though it's hard to figure out what Mr. Kahn was implying by it" (E-5). Indeed, Laertes's leave taking was awkwardly acted, as if the actors were trying hard to follow orders but failing. In Richardson's version at the Roundhouse in 1969, Michael Pennington and Marianne Faithful evoked a convincing aura of incest—an inevitable activity spreading out from the central example of Claudius and Gertrude. If Fortinbras is cut, we lose the great "How all occasions . . . soliloquy. Here, since Hulce and particularly Sloan had established some rapport with the audience by way of soliloquy, we felt the absence of that late rumination and the reasons why Shakespeare put it there. Why did this production give us so much of the background information—Horatio in 1.1 and Voltimand in 2.2, including Norway's request that Fortinbras be given "quiet pass" through Denmark on the way to Poland, the lines that set up Hamlet's encounter with Fortinbras's troops later and, at the same end, Fortinbras's arrival at Elsinore? This early material was there, it seemed, to show Claudius's response to the success of his embassy and thus to let us see his defenses relax as the inner threat of Hamlet grows—but better to give us the scenes the lines anticipate than the anticipation without the scenes. This editing told me that the production itself was aimless. The Claudius (Jack Ryland) and Gertrude (Franchelle Stewart Dorn) were unconvincing, perhaps because they had not been directed at all. They acted, unconsciously, against the opulence of their costumes. Ryland roared most of the time—including his non-prayer—blew his cheeks, scratched his head, and mugged at the audience after Gertrude corrected him on the names of Hamlet's fraternity brothers. "It had been so with us . . ." was a line in a play, not a sudden discovery of how dangerous Hamlet really is. Claudius's emotional reactions seemed to follow his lines, rather than be fitted to them and he gave an occasional quick glance at nothing as he finished a line. "Now, out of this . . ." should indicate a pause for thought, I think. Instead, we got the line and Laertes' immediate "What—out of this—my lord?" The actors knew the

lines, but not their sense. We got pace, but no rhythm. Where was the director? The exception was when Claudius commanded Gertrude to "set some watch over your son," revenging himself for her defection from him after her description of Ophelia's death. Dorn sulked and shrugged, made several unmotivated movements up and down stage, totally upstaged the Laertes rebellion as she stood down right, illuminated and staring at Claudius, making some point but draining whatever point the scene was making. She got lines from Q1—"It joys me [at] the soul he is inclined / To any kind of mirth"—for some reason, but otherwise could not have been an "objective correlative" for anyone's positive response. "Did you assay him / To any pastime," she said, as if to say, "For God's sake, what have you been doing all this time?" "What theme?" she demanded of Hamlet at Ophelia's grave, one of those "new readings" that makes nonsense of whatever the line is trying to mean. Again—the exception—she realized as she said "do dead men's fingers call" that the allusion represented a blunder, since she was telling Laertes the story of his sister's death. No chemistry existed between her and Claudius, though they smooched unattractively in public, nor any between her and either of the Hamlets. Gertrude can be a great role, as Gertrudes I have seen on stage—among them Eileen Herlie (opposite Burton), Celia Johnson, Elizabeth Spriggs, Jill Bennett, Barbara Jefford, Judy Parfitt, Virginia McKenna, and Claire Higgins—have proved. To see this Gertrude with no knowledge of any others one would be to conclude that the role represents one of Shakespeare's big mistakes.

The Laertes-Claudius plot was played in a non-space (mid-stage, right-center) with the stage as fully illuminated as this one got. The tensions of the scheme and its ominous adumbrations were drained by placement and lack of any support from the lighting. The plot got a little more potent when its characters made an unmotivated move down center. Polonius crawled across Gertrude's bed towards Hamlet, after getting stabbed, and drew a laugh. The bed itself was unnecessary, dictated by the convention established by the Gielgud production of the late 1930s. Both Hamlets made sure that Gertrude was protected by a comforter before the mild bounce Hamlet inflicted on her. Before Hamlet and Gertrude wrestled, Hamlet had to push Polonius off the bed. He lay almost out of sight and one wished that Hamlet had forgotten him during his discussion with Gertrude and the entrance of the ghost. Hamlet's sudden recall of the murder he has committed would have made sense of this awkward staging. As Claudius died, grotesquely entangled in a spiral staircase, his crown dropped to the floor. Being made of plastic, it compressed, bounced three feet, reshaped itself in midair and drew a laugh. A plastic crown for Claudius? I suppose so, but I'm not convinced that that moment is a good one for a laugh. And the same crown was held up as part

of Hamlet's coronation-dead march. No one, obviously, paid any attention to how the production actually played. It made no sense to have Horatio address his order for Hamlet's body to us, the audience, as we watched actors behind him respond for some reason to his commands.

The new Shakespeare Theatre is comfortable and small (seating about 450). The playing area is deep with a small apron coming out from the proscenium. The acoustics are good, even for speeches delivered from upstage. It is neither a thrust nor a raked stage and thus represents some retreat towards conventional, old-fashioned formats. The stage at the Folger was not very large, had little backstage area, some bad sightlines from the auditorium, and those two notorious posts on either side, downstage left and right. It called for downstage playing to the audience and little else, since inner stage and upper stage were hard to see and hard to listen to. Still, I always found it a good place for Shakespeare as long as directors did not try to impose a set upon it. As soon as they did, of course, the stage would not work and everyone had a lot to complain about. The major problem with the Folger Stage was the inappropriate ways to which directors put it. The latest production at the new theatre incorporated, for some reason, a large, functionless column, against which Hamlet leaned during his first soliloquy. The column would have made sense had Hamlet said, "solid." He said "sullied."

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HOFFMAN PRIZE

Entries are now invited for the Sixth Annual Calvin and Rose Hoffman Prize for Distinguished Publication on Christopher Marlowe. The prize will be not less than £7,500. Full details are available from the Headmaster, The King's School, Canterbury, Kent CT1 2ES, England. The closing date is September 1, 1993.

NOTICE

Items for the fall issue of MSAN should be received by October 1, 1993. Film or drama reviews, announcements, and brief articles or notes on Marlowe are welcome. See MSAN address on page 2.