

# MSAN: MARLOWE SOCIETY OF AMERICA NEWSLETTER

Vol. IV , Fall Issue, 1984

## ANNUAL MEETING OF THE MARLOWE SOCIETY OF AMERICA

December 29, 1984. Marshall Room, Sheraton, Washington, DC.  
7:15 to 9:15 PM

Presiding, Matthew N. Proser, University of Connecticut

1. Greetings by the President. Announcements.
2. Report on MSA Reviews, Edward Rocklin, (Review editor), Clarion University.
3. Plans for a second MSA International Conference, Jean Jofen, Baruch College, CUNY.
4. "Roma Gill and Christopher Marlowe," Sara Deats (Secretary), University of South Florida.
5. "Tamburlaine and Titus Andronicus," Maurice Charney, Rutgers University, New Brunswick.
6. "The Problem of Influence: The Responses of Shakespeare and Jonson to Marlowe," James Shapiro, Goucher College.
7. "Marlowe and Sub-text," Michael Goldman, Princeton University.

A coffee hour will conclude the meeting.

Maurice Charney is well-known for his work on Shakespeare, Elizabethan drama, and dramatic theory. Some of his books are Shakespeare's Roman Plays, Harvard, 1961; Style in Hamlet, Princeton University, 1969; The Language of Madwomen in Shakespeare and His Fellow Dramatists, Signs, 1977; and Comedy High and Low, Oxford, 1978.

James Shapiro has written forthcoming pieces on style in Marlowe's Lucan and on the decay of ceremony in Edward II (this latter in collaboration with David Bevington). He received his Ph.D at the University of Chicago with departmental honors. His dissertation was on the the subject of Marlowe's Metrical Style.

Michael Goldman is a respected teacher and lecturer on drama. Two of his widely read written works are Shakespeare and the Energies of Drama, Princeton, 1972, and The Actor's Freedom: Toward a Theory of Drama, Viking, 1975.

## MARLOWE SOCIETY OF AMERICA

Matthew N. Proser, President  
Constance B. Kuriyama, Vice President  
Sara M. Deats, Secretary  
Robert A. Logan, Treasurer  
Bruce E. Brandt, Membership Chairman and  
MSA Newsletter Editor  
Edward L. Rocklin, Reviews Editor

All business and organizational correspondence should be addressed to the President:

Professor Matthew N. Proser  
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**NOTE:** Since Professor Proser will be on sabbatical for the next eight months, all organizational correspondence from January to September, 1985, should be sent to the Acting President:

Professor Constance B. Kuriyama  
Acting President  
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**MSA BOOK REVIEWS** publishes reviews of books on Marlowe and his period. Reviews, suggestions for reviews, and inquiries should be sent to the Review Editor:

Professor Edward L. Rocklin, Editor  
MSA Book Reviews  
Department of English  
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Clarion, PA 16214

**MSA NEWSLETTER** publishes play reviews, notices of recent or forthcoming publications, and notices of events or items 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 thinks appropriate. The deadline for receipt of material for the next issue of MSAN is April 1, 1985. Send inquiries, announcements, and submissions to the Editor:

Professor Bruce E. Brandt, Editor  
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## RECENT AND FORTHCOMING

In May of 1984, Kenneth Friedenreich, Roma Gill, and Constance Kuriyama completed their editing of a new collection of essays on Marlowe, including selected papers from the first international Marlowe conference, to be published by AMS Press, Inc. The manuscript was delivered to the publisher on June 4, and one of the editors at AMS has completed a highly favorable preliminary reading of the manuscript. Professor Friedenreich expects the book to continue its progress toward publication on the anticipated schedule, with probable release in the Fall of 1985.

Christopher Marlowe's Use of the Bible, by Richard M. Cornelius, considers the various sources of Marlowe's Biblical knowledge, examines 1037 specific references by Marlowe to Scripture, and surveys an additional 500 general references. After classifying Marlowe's Biblical references on four levels of definiteness, Cornelius discusses the following aspects of Marlowe's stylistic use of the Bible: quotations, paraphrases, imitations of Biblical style, individual words, sensory imagery, figures of speech, reversals, and inaccuracies. The relationships of repeated Biblical themes, such as judgment and Christ parallels, to the meaning of Marlowe's works are also explored, and the matter of Marlowe's so-called "atheism" is evaluated in the light of his Biblical references. A lengthy Appendix lists his specific Biblical references alongside their possible sources and gives textual and critical annotations for significant entries. The work contains eight illustrations, two tables, a bibliography, and an index.

This book is part of the series American University Studies: English Language and Literature, published by Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 34 East 39th Street, New York, NY 10016.

"Marlowe's Helen and the Soul-in-the-Kiss Conceit," by Bruce E. Brandt, South Dakota State University, is forthcoming in Philological Quarterly. This brief article points out aspects of Christian and sixteenth-century kiss symbolism that ironically underlie Helen's kiss in Doctor Faustus.

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| Notice: Members of the MSA are invited to |  
| announce recent and forthcoming publications |  
| of interest to the membership. |  
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## PRESIDENTIAL MESSAGE

MSA greets all its members in the United States and abroad, sending everyone warm holiday greetings. This year has been one of deliberate and painstaking progress. The Society's new constitution is now in draft and is being studied by the Executive Committee and the rest of the leadership. A variety of locations, both here and abroad, have been put forward as possibilities for our Second International Conference, and these are being carefully investigated. The plans for the Roma Gill Prize for a significant contribution to Marlowe studies have been formulated and should be ready for announcement at the December meeting.

For the present, let me draw your attention to this year's meeting at the MLA Convention in Washington, DC. It is, I think, an especially good one. The program, date, and time are announced on the cover of this issue of the Newsletter.

We continue to get good suggestions from members. For instance, one member writes that it would be helpful if we published a complete membership list. Another feels that we might publish a list of new books and articles to appear by our members, an idea inaugurated in this issue of MSAN. A list of MSA members participating in conferences, with mention of their papers, might be another interesting possibility, and a very useful one for developing an interconnecting network of scholarly sharing. Let us know how you feel about all of these ideas.

Apropos of this matter of communicating, I will be on a sabbatical leave during the next eight months. In consequence, Vice President Constance Kuriyama will be Acting President of the MSA. From January to September, all correspondence on organizational matters should be addressed to her (See inside front cover). I know that Professor Kuriyama and the rest of the leadership will remain accessible and helpful to you. Meanwhile, a happy and productive New Year to all the membership and our friends.

Matthew Proser  
University of Connecticut, Storrs

## ANNOUNCEMENT

Johannes Birringer is no longer serving as MSA's Second Vice President or as Editor of the MSA Newsletter. Bruce Brandt is the new editor of the Newsletter, and materials or inquiries may be sent to him at the English Department, Box 2275A, South Dakota State University, Brookings, SD 57007. The office of Second Vice President will not be filled pending the completion and ratification of the new constitution.

## VICE-PRESIDENTIAL MESSAGE

I am pleased to add my reflections on Jean Jofen's remarkable accomplishments to the tribute by Roma Gill in the last issue of MSAN.

Since I joined the Marlowe Society in 1980, I have been repeatedly surprised by what Jean has been able to achieve. Starting with nothing but her own interest in Marlowe, and a generous supply of imagination, creativity, and daring, she has built the Marlowe Society into a vital forum for Marlowe scholarship. By holding annual sessions at MLA, and by envisioning an international Marlowe conference, Jean has reminded us how much we still have to learn from each other. She has brought to her task some rare personal qualities which have contributed to her success--among them openness and tolerance, personal warmth and charm, a highly developed sense of fair play, a knack for making things happen, and an infectious enthusiasm for her work. In these respects, as in many others, she has set a high standard of leadership. I hope other members will join me in congratulating Jean on her fine and valuable contribution to Marlowe studies.

Constance Kuriyama  
Texas Tech University

## ROMA GILL RETIRES

Our colleague and one of our Advisory Counselors, the distinguished Marlovian, Roma Gill retired from teaching at the University of Sheffield (Sheffield, England) this past September 28. Professor Gill is well-known for a variety of pieces on Marlowe, including her Oxford Edition of Marlowe's plays. Professor Gill took an active role in helping to organize MSA's First International Conference at Sheffield in the summer of 1983, and gave the plenary address to those attending. Her address, entitled "Marlowe's Art of Translating," concerned the Lucan translation. MSA regrets Professor Gill's retirement, but looks forward to her future production with great anticipation as well as to her continued interest and participation in our organization. Good luck, Roma, in all your future enterprises and activities.

## CONFESSIONS OF A THEATRE TOUR GUIDE

by Sara M. Deats  
University of South Florida

When asked to shepherd a group of thirty-four Floridians of vastly different ages on a fifteen day excursion around Britain in connection with a course on Highlights of the British Drama, I guardedly expected the challenge to be only slightly less perilous than remounting the D-Day invasion. Surprisingly, my apprehension proved unfounded. Despite a roster that spanned the age spectrum from young adults in their twenties to older members in their seventies, our pilgrimage through Arden and across Scottish lowlands in search of drama and history was a rewarding triumph. The British Theatre Highlights study tour, sponsored by the University of South Florida, offered participants a preparatory course conducted prior to departure, in which all the plays on our itinerary were studied together. Thus a shared enthusiasm for British theatre and a communal knowledge of the individual plays sealed all age gaps and congealed us into a cooperative congregation of play-going tourists.

Arriving in London on August 5, the group was feted with a lavish buffet and cocktail party, hosted by STS, the company providing our logistic arrangements. We spent the first two days of our trip "rubber-necking" and "camera-clicking" around London in a motor-coach. Inside the historic halls of Westminster Abbey, we paid homage to England's greatest poets and viewed the tombs of many monarchs, including Elizabeth I and Mary Tudor, united in death as never in life. We explored the vast St. Paul's Cathedral, Christopher Wren's architectural masterpiece. I conducted a strolling seminar around the City of London and the Southbank. Our texts were the sites where Milton was born, where John Donne lived, and where the Bronte sisters lodged during visits to their London publishers; we studied the church-school where Chaucer memorized his conjugations, the house where Samuel Johnson compiled his dictionary, and the nearby Cheshire Cheese pub where the scholar relaxed when weary of lexicography. The high point of our peripatetic seminar was the site of the original Globe Theatre on the Southbank of the Thames, and we took our requisite break at the adjoining two-hundred-year-old Anchor Pub to toast the new Globe Theatre now rising from the soil of the old. We concluded our walking symposium with a browse through Southwark Cathedral where Shakespeare probably worshipped and his brother is buried. That evening, abruptly moving from the sixteenth to the twentieth century, we attended our first theatrical event, a performance of Tom Stoppard's oxymoronic, cynical-sweet comedy, The Real Thing.

On the third day of our tour, we headed west for a two day sojourn in the village of Mickleton, a few miles outside of Stratford-on-Avon. During daytime activities, we wandered

through the house where Shakespeare was born and spent his childhood, admired the picturesque thatched cottage where the playwright wooed his future wife, Anne Hathaway, and paid our respects inside Holy Trinity Church where his remains still lie beneath the gravestone caveat, "And curst be he that moves my bones." A side adventure led to Warwick Castle, a fourteenth-century fortress complete with crenelated turrets and a resident revenant, the ghost of poet-playwright Fulke Greville. We spent a restful afternoon motoring through the Cotswolds and refreshed ourselves with a proper English cream tea of scones and jam, served under a towering chestnut tree in the hamlet of Snowhill.

Each of our two days in Mickelton was climaxed by a theatrical excursion. On the first evening, we bussed to Coventry for a production of the Medieval Mystery Plays performed in the war-scarred shell of Coventry Cathedral. The skillful acting, imaginative staging, and unique setting combined with the powerful material to render this a numinous theatrical experience, one that few on our tour will ever forget.

In contrast to the cathartic response evoked by the Coventry Mystery Cycle, the Royal Shakespeare Company's production of Hamlet, attended in Stratford the following night, offered only frustration. Despite stylish costumes and stately sets, the bizarre production was disjoint and out-of-frame. The packed Stratford audience, including our own group, had completed distant pilgrimages to see history's most famous play performed at the birthplace of the world's most renowned playwright. Regrettably, the director presented his own conjectural Hamlet and not Shakespeare's.

After Stratford, our next major destination was Edinburgh. But since getting there should be half the fun, we arranged a variety of diversions along the lengthy drive. In the city of Chester, we admired the ancient cathedral with its superbly carved, fourteenth-century misericords, and getting and spending we strolled among the

double-decker Tudor style shops in the Rows, the buildings dating back to Medieval merchandising. After Chester, I temporarily parted from the tour. My troop, led by my trustworthy husband and our superb guide, meandered through the Lake Country, viewing the spots where Wordsworth wandered lonely as a cloud, reminisced on daffodils, and produced infinitely rich poetry in the little, cramped rooms of Dove Cottage. Meanwhile, I continued directly to Edinburgh. Only after the trip was completely planned did I discover that Marlowe's Doctor Faustus was playing in Edinburgh and would close the night before we arrived in that city. To attend a performance of Marlowe's great tragedy of damnation is a rare theatrical event, and one I could not afford to forego. The reward was worth the experience.

The day following the closing of Doctor Faustus, my group joined me in Edinburgh. This venerable city, a perfect destination for aficionados of theatre, literature, and history, offers dozens of fascinating attractions within a relatively contained area. Since our brief stay could not accommodate an adequate number of group excursions, we provided descriptions and directions, letting each map a personalized circuit. Our recommendations included the monumental Castle overlooking the city; the Palace of Holyroodhouse, home of monarchs past and present, from the ill-destined Mary Queen of Scots to the reigning sovereign Elizabeth II; Sir Walter Scott's monument, the tallest memorial ever constructed to a man of letters; and many other literary and historical vistas along the Royal Mile. At night, we enjoyed the panoply of massed regimental bagpipes and marching drums and brass parade the stirring Tattoo on the grounds of Edinburgh Castle.

The tenth morning of our pilgrimage found us pressing toward York with stops at Hadrian's wall and the awesomely massive, Romanesque cathedral at Durham. Our final day on the British highways began in the city of York. Here we joined other pilgrims to mourn the damage inflicted upon the great York Minster.

We spent the last three days of our journey in London, satiating ourselves on theatre, museums, and monuments. Our crew had by now competently mastered the navigation of the London tube system, so we loosed them on the town for independent trips to the British Museum, the Victoria and Albert Museum, the National Gallery, the Tate Gallery, and some solo theatre going.

On the twelfth evening of our twelfth day in Britain, we gathered at the Barbican Theatre to relish Shakespeare's Twelfth Night. The Barbican, a huge, new culture-mall built near the ruins of the antique Roman wall, houses concert halls, theatres, movie houses, art galleries, restaurants, and bars. The nucleus of the center is the Barbican Theatre, London home of the Royal Shakespeare Company. After our disappointing Stratford experience, we were delighted with the RSC's beautifully mounted, evocative version of one of Shakespeare's most enchanting comedies.

For the final theatrical experience of the trip, our group attended a stirring, vibrant performance of Cats, the smash hit of both New York and London.

On the last night of the two-week holiday, we celebrated our survival with a grand banquet, served at a lodge near Windsor Castle. During the drive to dinner, I distributed index cards and requested each pilgrim to list the three most memorable experiences of the trip. Unfortunately, since only I attended Doctor Faustus, Marlowe could not compete in the popularity contest. Rather surprisingly, the event most often praised was the performance of the Mystery Play Cycle in the ruins of Coventry Cathedral; the second favorite was Twelfth Night; tied for third were Cats and the lovely cream tea served under the spreading chestnut tree in the Cotswolds.

## THREE PLAYS FROM THE TOUR

### HAMLET

So many scholars have written about Hamlet and so many actors (and even actresses) have brooded through his resonant lines that, quote naturally, ambitious Thespians seek novel ways to pluck out the heart of his mystery. Unfortunately, Shakespeare's enigmatic Prince is frequently camouflaged rather than revealed by directorial and histrionic attempts at innovative interpretations. In the Royal Shakespeare Company's new production of Hamlet, Roger Rees, familiar to American audiences as a doughty, appealing Nicholas Nickleby, essayed a highly original portrayal, but his reach exceeded his grasp and he failed to create a memorable Hamlet. A noticeably psychotic young man, Rees' Prince vacillated between catatonic stupor and frenetic antics, with no sane, "Southerly" respites modulating his eccentric polarities. Bizarre gestures and postures--pratfalls in the cellerage scene, slapstick with the players, immobilized soliloquies--accented Hamlet's aberrant behavior, inhibiting tragic empathy. Oedipal innuendoes further intruded, punctuated by inappropriate kisses bestowed on his mother and maternal surrogates: Gertrude in the "closet" scene, the Player Queen, even his "uncle-father-mother" Claudius. In at least one instance, indecorous costume exacerbated the incongruity. The director, perhaps taking literally Hamlet's vow to return "naked" to Denmark, delivered his debarking Prince wrapped in a sail over cut-off dungarees, a skimpy costume more appropriate to Poor Tom on the heath than to the "sea-changed" Hamlet musing over the skull of Yorick.

Contrasting with these vagaries and making them appear more egregious by contrast were the production's fine, professional cast and impressive sets and costumes. Virginia McKenna portrayed a passionate, solicitous Gertrude; Brian Blessed, a convincing, stout but urbane Claudius; Kenneth Branagh, a forceful, refreshingly normal Laertes; Donald McKillop, a cunning yet jejune Polonius; and Frances Barber, an engaging Ophelia. The set, a simple but effective ordering of encroaching and receding stairs, lowering and lifting candelabras, provided a stately but unobtrusive backdrop for the tragedy. The costumes--rich silvers, grays, charcoals, blacks, whites--created a shimmering, muted chiaroscuro.

In his speech to the players, Hamlet cautions the actors against both overacting and underacting, against "tearing a passion to tatters" and excessive tameness. Roger Rees, the star, and Ron Daniels, the director, ignore this caveat, failing to suit the action of the play to the words of Shakespeare's text. Thus the RSC's production misinterprets Shakespeare's great tragedy, holding up to nature not a mirror but the distorting glass of a funhouse.

## COVENTRY MYSTERY PLAYS

Just as Coventry's dramatic new Cathedral, rebuilt by contributions from many nations, emblemizes the cooperative potentialities in humanity, so the war-scraped ruins of the old Cathedral still stand to remind us of man's ineradicable inhumanity to man. Within the irregular, serrated walls of the maimed church, a company of professional actors from Coventry's Belgrade Theatre each summer performs a much abridged version of the Medieval Mystery Plays, with selections from all extant cycles-- Towneley, York, Chester, and Coventry--while appropriately highlighting the contribution from the Ludus Coventriae. In the contemporary Coventry version, the Old Testament cycle plays have been omitted and the three-day epic conflated into a three-hour (no intermission) dramatization of Christ's life from conception to resurrection. Eschewing elaborate pageant wagons, the Coventry troop employed five separate stages, barren of set but festooned with emblematic banners. No chairs were provided. Actors threatened, harangued, beat, bled, died, keened, promised, and prophesied--pursuing the action among the fluid, standing audience. We hissed the blustering Herod, chuckled over the benign infant Jesus, giggled at crotchety Joseph's anti-feminist admonitions, hailed Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem, and stood among the mob, part actors, part audience, as it bellowed, "Crucify Him!" We edged from scene to scene like a crowd of enraptured Nazarenes, stretching to gain a better view of each unfolding episode. Many sequences were memorable and shocking: the poignant Slaughter of the Innocents, a medley of lullabies, grisly violence, and bright swords flowing with blood-red streamers; Lazarus' surreal, luminous resurrection; Christ's cruel scourging, thirty-three lashes, accented by drum beats and mob chanting; and a grotesquely realistic crucifixion. One of the most stirring moments was Christ's elegy from the cross, lamenting man's brutality; the cry of the martyred God echoed from the shell of the martyred church.

The acting throughout was professional and affecting. The Belgrade Company followed the Medieval practice of multiple doubling (some players performed as many as five roles), but the various portrayals were so deftly particularized that without resort to the program the individual actors could not be identified.

The ruins of Coventry Cathedral surrounded actors and audience with fifteenth-century architecture while the promenade staging captured the ambience of a Medieval dramatic festival. Furthermore, in the past decades, the ruins of Coventry Cathedral have become both a symbol of man's senseless destructiveness and an emblem of peace and unity: thus they provide an incomparable setting for this fine contemporary version of the ancient folk festival dramatizing the ruthless killing of the Prince of Peace.

## DOCTOR FAUSTUS

Few plays have evoked such violent critical controversy as Marlowe's Doctor Faustus. Every element of the drama has been vociferously debated: authorship, date, text, meaning. Every director of the tragedy confronts multiple decisions concerning setting, mood, treatment of the supernatural figures, and interpretation of Faustus. The production at the Royal Lyceum Theatre made an unequivocal choice, dramatizing an orthodox Christian parable, a terrifying homily on good and evil.

The play, staged in a spacious, ornate, domed theatre, achieved spectacular visual effects. Before a Medieval backdrop of gigantic candlesticks, countless sputtering wicks, massive staircases, gliding black-robed figures, and haunting organ chorales, Faustus rationalized, conjured, bargained, and fell. Before this Romanesque facade, Mephistophilis materialized, first as a macabre gargoyle, later as a somber friar, and through this cabalistic ambience roiled a particularly disgusting, cacophonous rout of Boschian sins. Many of Faustus' peregrinations were staged with magnificent panoply: the banquet and exorcism at St. Peter's, the Masque of Alexander in the Emperor's palace, the revenge and metamorphosis of Benvolio. Shifting emblems of Faustus' sin dominated center stage, clarifying the moral issues: a sculptured golden calf in the contract scene, the Pope's golden chair, a golden Helen of Troy. At the denouement, an iron chair of execution descended through the haze, into which the condemned conjuror was strapped and in a blinding blaze of light electrocuted before a shocked, gasping audience, while an offstage voice intoned the play's gnomic epilogue. Unfortunately, despite the earlier splendid spectacle, the catastrophe jarred, sacrificing pity for terror, achieving grand quignol sensationalism, not tragedy.

Costume, like setting, functioned emblematically. Faustus first appeared incongruously attired in a three-piece business suit, an apparent attempt to universalize the drama's conflicts. However, after Faustus' self-seduction and fall, the magician was ceremoniously stripped naked by his human tempters, Valdes and Cornelius, and liveried in the black gown of a necromancer, a surprisingly effective parody of the ritual "arming of the knight," which provided a visual equivalent for the inversion of values dramatized throughout the play. Subsequent

costumes--Pope, Emperor, friars, students--were all black, except for the shimmering white of the spirits, Alexander and his paramour, and the gilded glisten of the succubus Helen. Thus, the dark reality foiled the shining glitter of illusion.

The characters of the play frequently seemed overwhelmed by the extravagant effects. Mephistophilis declaimed all his lines in a subdued, measured monotone; the Old Man delivered his hortatory sermon on one strident key; the Good and Bad Angels were disembodied, reverberating voices, until they unexpectedly appeared on stage at the catastrophe. Although Wagner and the Clown were engagingly funny, on the whole, the supporting characters were flattened out, like abstract figures in a Morality Play.

But the drama belongs to Faustus, and on his portrayal depends the success of any production. Don Crerar, as the doomed magician, was tall and impressive with a rich, sonorous voice that vibrated and soared with Marlowe's mighty lines, yet he lacked the variety in delivery, the subtle nuances necessary to capture the contradictions of a character at once so learned and so blind, so confident and so insecure, so eloquent and so fatuous. His performance alternated between arrogant hubris and abject groveling; his end evoked a detached pity and an eerie terror, but not the identification essential to tragedy.

The Royal Lyceum Theatre should be congratulated for staging Marlowe's dramatic masterpiece with such spectacle and verve. The cheering audience at the performance I attended demonstrated that Doctor Faustus is still magnificent, engrossing entertainment. Nevertheless, although the Edinburgh version of the drama achieved rousing comedy, ominous horror, and dazzling pyrotechnics, this Marlowe scholar regrets that the production failed to realize the play's tragic woe and wonder.

## SWAN THEATRE

The Royal Shakespeare Company announces a new theatre for Stratford-upon-Avon; the new auditorium will enable the RSC to perform a large repertoire of neglected plays by Shakespeare's contemporaries and those dramatists he influenced in the period 1570-1750; it will also bridge the gap in size between the 1500 seat Royal Shakespeare Theatre and the 150 seat Other Place.

The new 430 seat Swan Theatre is to be built in the auditorium shell of the original Memorial Theatre, destroyed by fire in 1926. This is presently used for rehearsals and called the Conference Hall. The conversion, by Stratford architect Michael Reardon, will follow the design of Jacobean theatres with a large apron stage surrounded by three tiers of seats on three sides. Work will begin early next year with a target opening date of Spring 1986. The whole project has been made possible by the generosity of an anonymous benefactor.

From an RSC press release dated Sept. 5, 1984, which was furnished to MSAN by Mark Thornton Burnett, Wolfson College, Oxford.

## CONFERENCES

**December 14-15:** Theatre History: Conference on Shakespeare's Theatres," University of California, Los Angeles. Contact: Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, University of California, 405 Hilgard Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90024; (213) 825-1880.

**December 27-30:** Annual Convention: Modern Language Association, Washington, DC. Contact: MLA, 62 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10011; (212) 741-5588.

**February 22-23:** Medieval and Renaissance Studies: "Popular Religious Culture in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance," Conference, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio. Contact: Ohio State University, 322 Dulles Hall, 230 W. 17th Avenue, Columbus, OH 43210; (614) 422-0798.

**March 14-16:** Citadel Conference on Literature: The Prose, Drama, and Poetry of the Renaissance and Middle Ages, Charleston, SC. Address: Robert A. White or David G. Allen, Department of English, The Citadel, Charleston, SC 29409.

**March 21-23:** Shakespeare Association of America, Nashville. Address: Ann Jennalie Cook, 6328 Vanderbilt Sta. B, Nashville, TN 37235.

**March 22-23:** Renaissance Society of America with the Renaissance Conference of Southern California, Huntington Library and Occidental College. Address: Maryanne Horowitz, History Department, Occidental College, Los Angeles, CA 90041.

**March 28-30:** Northeast Modern Language Association. Address: Calvin Lane, Department of English, University of Hartford, West Hartford, CT 06117.

**March 28-30:** Renaissance Studies: Meeting, South Central Renaissance Conference, Texas A & M University, College Station, TX. Contact: Donald R. Dickson, Department of English, Texas A & M University, College Station, TX 77843-4227; (409) 845-3452.

**April 12-13:** West Virginia Shakespeare and Renaissance Association, Huntington. Address: B. Brown, 448 Corbly Hall, Marshall University, Huntington, WV 25701.

**October 24-26 (1985):** Sixteenth-Century Studies Conference, Columbus, OH. Address: R. B. Waddington, Department of English, University of California, Davis, CA 95616.

These events were culled from The Chronicle of Higher Education, "Events in Academe" (Fall-Winter, 1984-85), and from the September and October issues of PMLA, courtesy of Robert A. Logan, University of Hartford.

## PLAY REVIEWS

### HENRY V

Presented at the Folger Theatre, Washington, D.C. May 8-July 1, 1984. Directed by Philip Kerr.

For Philip Kerr, director of the Folger Theater's current production of Henry V, the play's "major dramatic theme" concerns Henry's "rehearsal and performance of his life's work." His Henry is therefore "a young man aware of the power of theatre: to hide, to reveal, to create."

Edward Gero, in the title role, plays a Henry of emerging confidence and resolve. Successive confrontations are followed by deep sighs of relief as Henry passes yet another test of manhood and of kingship. For example, after deciding to invade France, return the Dauphin's dare, punish the conspirators, and execute Bardolph, Gero walks to the front of the stage, breathes deeply, and is reassured by his uncle Exeter and brother Gloucester of the rightness of his actions. As his confidence and self-assurance increase, the sighs diminish and the reassuring pats on the back are fewer and further between. By the closing scene we observe the young king on his own at last, engaged in what Kerr describes as Henry's "final battle: the presentation of his complete self to win the hand of Katherine." We are presented, in short, with the education of a Christian prince.

The emphasis on the right kind of education and guidance is increased by Henry's relationship to the young boy who accompanies Pistol, Nym, and Bardolph to the wars. Scene after scene pointedly ends with Henry directing his speech at, reassuring, or mourning over the young boy. We are meant to see Henry guiding as he is guided in turn.

This focus works well, though at the expense of other aspects of the play. The rich humor of the play is not well handled; much of it is savage, often desperate, and hedges in uncomfortably on Henry's otherwise stunning series of victories. The same can be said for the many squabbles between the minor characters--Pistol and Nym, Fluellen and MacMorris. Kerr's interpretation of Henry V downplays Shakespeare's ironic treatment of war; as a result, the production does not quite know what to do with those parts of the play which convey a sense of war's horror and senselessness. This darker and ironic side of Henry V coexists uncomfortably with Kerr's emphasis upon Henry's maturation. We are left with a sense of conflicts unresolved, of meaningless loss of life (the list includes the Boy, Bardolph, Nym, the captured French soldier, even the report of Mistress Quickly), of restlessness and anger just below the surface. Nor does this Henry's theatrical self-consciousness include an ironic recognition of the limitations of conquest. The concluding Chorus, explaining that Henry VI will lose all that his father has won, seems lifeless, almost contradicting the spirit of the play.

These criticisms aside, the play is energetically performed, the familiar speeches stirring, the costumes simple and stage action forceful. The wooing scene was especially effective: Henry pursues Katherine around a small rectangular pool onstage, symbolic of the English Channel. In breaking down the barriers--cultural, linguistic, nationalistic--which separate them, Henry wades through the water and emerges to kiss her. Had the gap between the exuberant and darker sides of the play been similarly bridged, the production would have been more coherent and more satisfying.

James Shapiro  
Goucher College

### RICHARD III

Presented at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, by the Royal Shakespeare Company, June 14-January 24. Directed by Bill Alexander.

The RSC's production of Richard III was dominated by Antony Sher's magnificent performance in the title role. Sher resisted the danger of caricature and suggested in his portrayal of Richard a curious blend of self-pity, romantic longing, cynicism, and Machiavellian guile. Dressed in black and gold to recall the vice figures of the morality drama, Sher's Richard leapt agilely about the stage on a pair of crutches, and quickly won over the audience by exploiting asides, exciting laughter, and demanding involvement in his unscrupulous schemes. Sher played Richard as the comic entertainer, and even at the end of the first scene was rewarded with a burst of applause. An ironic complicity between Richard and the audience developed. We recognized that limping badly indicated Richard's dissembling outrageously, and that his embrace was an ominous portent, the object of his affection being his next victim--to die in the following scene. Richard's waning power towards the end of the play was well conveyed by Sher, especially in the scene where he is harangued by the Queens, Elizabeth and Margaret. Seated on a throne carried by servants, Richard twisted from side to side; cringing, indecisive, and afraid. At Bosworth, Richard verged on hysteria, mistaking Ratcliffe for one of the ghosts, and having been killed by Henry of Richmond, remained on stage, rocking back and forth on his knees, a sword lodged in the hump on his back.

Sher brought the right amount of tragic depth to the part, as did Brian Blessed to the part of Hastings. Blessed's Hastings was uncomplicated--loud, genial, and womanizing--thus making doubly shocking his death at the king's hands. In contrast, Malcolm Storry, playing Buckingham, suggested a character of far more ambiguity. Quiet, but ruthlessly ambitious for personal gain, Buckingham posed a genuine threat to Richard's power.

Much stress was placed on the role of the supernatural in the play. Queen Margaret made her sinister prophecies in a spotlight, while Roger Allam, playing Clarence, brought a stark and ghastly realism to his delivery of the nightmare.



The set, with its monolithic sarcophagi and remains of a ruined abbey, was particularly eerie, and evoked decay, futility, and the transcendence of human achievement.

Visually, the production was spectacular. A completely invented grand coronation scene showed Richard being crowned by the ruffians he hired to murder Clarence--a presage of his own death if there ever was one! Richmond was presented as a golden savior, a color chosen, surely, to dramatize the imagery of sunshine with which he is invested. Ever since Olivier's film version of Hamlet, we have become rather tired of swords being used as crucifixes, and there was no exception here; Richmond predictably held his sword aloft to suggest the divine enemy of Richard, the power of evil.

The production emphasized the prominence of oath-taking and breaking in the play. Each time Queen Elizabeth's camp invoked God's name, they crossed themselves. The sanction suggested hypocrisy and the use of religion to cloak political expediency, and Elizabeth's virtue was thereby called into doubt. Richmond's camp was notably free of such gestures. E. M. W. Tillyard, in Shakespeare's History Plays, argues that the Elizabethan audience would have taken Richmond's final words "with a transport of affirmation." Let us recall them again. Richmond prays that peace will last: "That she may long live here, God say amen!" But, the tense is conditional, and another oath is sworn. For the audience at the RSC production, this suggested that political power-struggles and monarchical instability do not only end with Richard III.

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### THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

Presented at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, by the Royal Shakespeare Company, April 5-January 26. Directed by John Caird.

In the theatre, The Merchant of Venice all too often proves a frustrating and a confusing experience. Where, exactly, is the play's center of attention? Why, upon revealing the contents of the correct casket, does Bassanio address Portia's "counterfeit" rather than Portia herself? And why does the trial scene seem to flout all concepts of a traditional justice? The RSC production made no attempt to smooth over such difficulties, and in so doing, presented The Merchant of Venice as a play that is enjoyable because it is consistently stimulating and provocative. Ian McDiarmid's Shylock, for example, was both villain and martyr. Shylock began as the jovial but efficient business man, contracting the "merry bond" somewhat unthinkingly, and only realizing its gravity when hesitating to shake hands with Antonio. Considerable sympathy for Shylock was aroused when he lamented the loss of Jessica, although his celebrated defense speech was interpreted as a railing at hardship and inequality rather than as an opportunity for sentimentalism.

McDiarmid's Shylock was a creature of wildly fluctuating emotions, from tears for Jessica to glee at Antonio's commercial disasters. At the trial, he was awesome and impressive. The audience laughed uncomfortably at the knife-sharpening, and was moved and appalled by his determination to have his bond. Grovelling before the Duke at the end of the trial, Shylock seemed defeated, but he departed with his head held high, a proud figure who had earned our pity and respect.

I was both excited and disappointed by the rest of the cast. Frances Tomelty brought an interesting argumentativeness and contempt to the part of Portia, but her transformation from an idle and weary young girl into an energetic and successful lawyer was unconvincing. Antonio, played by Christopher Ravenscroft, was bitter, misogynistic, and particularly suicidal, and dressed in brown to distinguish him from the other, more gaily-costumed characters. Ravenscroft cleverly left open Antonio's real motives. Does he wish to convert Shylock out of revenge or genuine religious scruple? Adam Bareham, as a sober and under-stated Bassanio, and James Simmons, as an impatient and insensitive Gratiano, also put in fine performances. Unfortunately, Brain Parr as Launcelot Gobbo, simply wasn't funny, but this may have been because of the dullness of the text rather than the actor's inadequacies. Nor did the "On such a night" scene work; the tone of comic one-upmanship was lost, and the audience was blank and uncomprehending.

In its two plots, The Merchant of Venice contrasts different prejudices and "bonds." The set, with organs playing portentous music and a uniform red suggesting the high Baroque and Italianate decadence, provided insufficient contrast between a corrupt Venice and the idyllic world of Belmont. The caskets, which descended on gigantic electric lamp arms each time they were needed, made me particularly uncomfortable. However, the fairy-tale mood of Belmont was suggested by the disembodied voice of Portia's father's ghost reading out the caskets' messages.

The denouement of the play came across as too quick and pat, and we were left asking, as is not uncommon in a production of The Merchant of Venice, "What about Shylock?" After the tragic weight of what had gone before, the sexual taunting of their husbands by Portia and Nerissa seemed unnecessary, if not offensive. At the very end, Antonio walked off hand-in-hand with Portia and Bassanio, a gesture of reconciliation, but too many loose ends remained for it to strike us as satisfying. Shylock and Portia were clearly considered the stars, as they bowed together at the curtain call, but my overriding impression was not of the integrity of their performances, but of the singular unattractiveness of all the characters. The Merchant of Venice is a grim comedy that shows a world of lonely individuals--Shylock, Antonio, and Gobbo--and a society infected at every level by prejudice. The RSC production raised questions and chose wisely not to answer them, thus revealing the open-ended and complicated nature of this intriguing play.

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## DOCTOR FAUSTUS

Presented at the Arts Theatre, Cambridge, by the Marlowe Society of Cambridge University, March 6-10, 1984. Directed by David Parry.

David Parry has rich experience of medieval drama, of the York and Wakefield cycle of mystery plays in particular, and very evidently drew on that experience. Reminding us that this tradition of popular culture was very much alive in Marlowe's youth, he gave us a Faustus which powerfully employed that tradition's strengths: the rich intertwining of rough humor and high seriousness; the vivid images of the forces of heaven and hell; the directness of the approach to the audience; and the assumption that the divine, the supernatural, was embodied, reflected, evidenced, in every mundane act. We didn't actually have a Hell's Mouth, but its presence was implied throughout.

This Faustus was unafraid to translate medieval directness into very modern terms. Not only was the audience directly and confidently addressed, but we had Groucho Marx-like eyebrow wagging and a good deal of thumbs-up signing by Faustus himself. We had, too, chases around the auditorium and a Gary Glitter Lucifer. And the Seven Deadly Sins were bravura solo acts, with Gluttony spittle-spraying the front seats and a splendid, roaring Pride. For once, the comedy rarely dragged, and in this very full realization of the text, the director's appeal to the medieval, together with the talents of his cast, combined to overcome that tediousness that horse-courers, Robin Ostlers, Benvolios, and Popes all too often provoke. But only briefly, at the end, was the tragic in any way felt. Why was this? Curiously, three very strengths of this production conspired against that sense pervading the play: the set, and two very different traditions on which the company drew.

The set, an Elizabethan triumph, was neither well-used nor sufficiently integrated into the total conception. Its complex presence brooded enigmatically over the production. At its simplest, the spectator was faced with the problem: if they've provided all those doors and that marvellous gallery, why don't they use them? And having to think about such puzzles inevitably detracts from full engagement.

Then there was the Cambridge tradition. The actors' youth, high talent, and doubling (well, quadrupling for most) must be taken for granted in any Marlowe Society production. But, oddly, the high quality of speaking, always audible, always seeking to clarify meaning, paradoxically undermined this production, for the qualities it drew on were restraint, control, classicism. The academic heritage of the University of Cambridge worked its own quiet subversion of subversion. Even the devils were somehow decorous. Red-bloodedness, roughness, and popular speech were tempered and civilized, unwittingly, by that very tradition which keeps Marlowe alive, published, and celebrated. The tragic effect is attenuated as the analytic saps rather than reinforces the visceral. Divining for the deep springs of emotionality, the intellectual motives and methods of that search were very evident. It's difficult for it to be otherwise in Cambridge.

Third, Tim Pemberton's Faustus, although convincingly played (especially in the scenes with

a sardonically understated, Franciscan-habited, Mephistophilis) evidenced Derridean traces of the actor's provenance which countered both his and the audience's full engagement with the tragic theme of the play. Différence was made flesh before us. It made for a distanced Faustus, uneasily inhabiting both the production's world of medieval spectacle, action, and symbol, and the modern world that the play (and these players) anticipate and enact. Dreamlike, Pemberton gave us, even at his most comic moments, a serious and reserved Faustus which contrasted sharply but richly with the production's spectacular effects.

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## TWELFTH NIGHT

Presented at the Guthrie Theatre, Minneapolis, MN. October 11-November 18. Directed by Liviu Ciulei.

The Guthrie's new Twelfth Night is very stylish theatre. A wonderfully languid Duke Orsino, played by Nicholas Wyman, is a good foil to Gordana Rasovich's intense Olivia. Peter Francis-James and Pamela Nyberg as brother and sister Sebastian and Viola-Cesario make a handsome pair, and Katherine Leask is a delightfully daffy Sir Andrew Aguecheek. Outstanding are Larry Block's faunish Sir Toby Belch, Rocco Sisto's amusingly pedantic Malvolio, and Richard Frank's Feste, a bittersweet fool who is no fool. The most interesting feature of the production, however, is the staging. The sets by Radu Boruzescu, which include a luminous stylized cobweb as backdrop, a golden divan, and a large circular rug made of four tiger skins--each with menacing head--sound a fin-de-siècle note underscored by Miruna Borezescu's striking costumes, right out of Aubrey Beardsley's illustrations. The music, composed by David Bishop and competently played by Mike Blasius (flute, clarinet, saxophone) and Ed Goltz, is a charming and appropriate combination of old and new.

Ciulei's version of Shakespeare's comedy is a rarity inasmuch as it is both coherent and playful. It is, however, no romp through a kaleidoscopic fun house. Instead, Ciulei gives his audience an encounter with ambiguities, sexual and otherwise, which are unsettling and a trifle sinister. His Illyria is a somewhat decadent, world-weary place where a holiday has gone on too long, where indulged emotions and appetites have gotten a bit out of control, and where young and old have been more than usually mistaken and foolish. This Illyria is a wonderful place to visit for a holiday, but one really wouldn't want to live there.

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