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The Privileged Playgoers of Shakespeare's London,
Modernizing Shakespeare's Spelling
(by Stanley Wells), With Three Studies in the Text of Henry V (by Gary Taylor)
The Tudor Play of Mind: Rhetorical Inquiry and the Development of Elizabethan Drama
(by Joel B. Altman)
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Cover illustration: Woodcut of a scene from Much Ado About Nothing (Act II, scene i) by Hugo Käseberg (1847–1893). From an extra illustrated edition of Shakespear's plays in the Folger collection.

SHAKESPEARE QUARTERLY Published by the Folger Shakespeare Library

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Commentary

Television Shakespeare

STANLEY WELLS

CHARGE MESSION, TILLS US, IN A PREFICE to the editions accompanying the BBC series, "The Shakespear Play," that the first-ever performance of Shakespeare on television was given by the Bittish Broadcasting Corporation to the first regalar television service in the world, in 1937, and that it was a "full-length" production of Julius Caesars. Between then and the start of the carried series, he says, "30 of the plays have been presented, the more public current series, he says, "30 of the plays have been presented, the more public current series, he says, "30 of the plays have been presented, the more public publ

And they have been done in many different ways. Some have come direct from the stage of a theatre, in performance before an analone. I remember to the control of the contr

binoculars. We should perhaps recall, too, that the current BBC ¹ The BBC-TV Shakespeare (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1978).

STANLEY WELLS, Editor of Shakespeare Survey and General Editor of the Oxford Shakespeare, delivered these remarks as the annual Shakespeare's Birthday Lecturer at the Folger on April 12, 1982.

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SHAKESPEARE QUARTERLY

Indeed, the current BBC series would not have come into being were this not so. Until a few years gav, see could rear a elections production only when the powers that be devided to series it, and it might well be shown only outer and the power that be devided by series it, and it might well be shown only outer are not able to give up an entire evening to the electronic set after time one of the plays is screened, then we may never see if. But the videotipes can be together, and, in Artistica particularly, see part part of the potential importance which can be constantly reshown to students and others who might otherwise to speak of mattern when the constantly reshown to students and others who might otherwise to speak of matterns when it is provided to the production of the p

the company of a class of thirty than when watched at home with the cat."

This suggests once of the options open to planners, and points to the distribution of the option of the company of the company

1

One distinctive feature of the present series is its completeness. It is a grand, perhaps grandiose scheme: to present all the plays at the rate of about six a

² "Shakespeare and Television." University of Toronto Quarterly, 51 (Fall 1981), 11.

TELEVISION SHAKESPEAR

year, over a period of six years. What, I wonder, are the supposed merits of this plan? It is said to have an educational purpose, olioh Andrews, interviewing this plan? It is said to have a note an interview production with the plan of the plan

of various, lester-known plays to full the gaps in a collection.

of various, lester-known plays to full the gaps in a collection can be a superior of the control of the collection. The cannot be controlled to the collection of the collection of

You will have observed that somehow the concept of completeness is felt to be used to be considered to the control of the cont

³ Shakespeare Quarterly, 30 (Spring 1979), 13

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SHAKESPEARE QUARTERLY

history. In the meantime the television production, also excellent, will be available for showing all over the world, can be taken out of the "bank" and slippe, all of the world will be a solid production as the silvening machine at any time of the day or night, can be supplied with the solid production of the silvening machine at any time of the day or night, can be supplied with canble in the silvening the silvening

Is there one, perhaps, more than a little wishful thinking in such a scenario What tampened to the BPU tague of the Nors; and The Spread and The Spread What tampened to the BPU tague of the Nors; and The Spread Lear. Why is Miller at present directing a new production of King Lear—with the same actor in the time love a last time. "In the might have sevel lundreds between the same actor in the time love as last time." In the might have sevel lundreds between the same actor in the same actor in the same actor in the contract of the vanita and contract of the same actor in the same actor. The same actor is the same actor in the same actor is the same actor in the same actor in the same actor is the same actor is the same actor in the same actor is the same actor in the same actor is the same actor in the same actor is the same acto

⁴ All statements by Jonathan Miller cited in this text are from Quarto, 10 (September 1980),

12. 5 SQ, 31 (Summer 1980), 292. TELEVISION SHAPESHEAD

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Needless to say, excessive claims or hoges for the lifespan of the BBC series on invalidate it in the shorter term, and it is evident that the planners has do not invalidate it in the shorter term, and it is evident that the planners has attitude towards the text, though tensions are apparent in various statement that have been made about policy. Educational aims appear to argue for fullness John Wilders, Literary Adviser to the series since it started, writes that

There were good reasons why we should produce every play complete and intent.

On the other hand,

on the other hand,

reason why we were enhantiating on this venture
was to encourage people to enjoy Shakespeare, to win for his plays viewers who
might approach them with relocatance, even hostility. What, for example, would
the Australian in the outback or the Mexican in his hacienda make of the opening
dialogue of ... Romeo and Julie of the production.

Samson Gregory, on my word, we'll not carry coals.

Gregory No, for then we should be colliers.

Samson I mean, an we be in choler, we'll draw.

At that point, the very people in whom we hoped to arouse an enthusiasm for Shakespeare which they would pass on to their grandchildren would probably switch

Here, the argument for cutting is to remove obscurity. But length has also seen a consideration, Alan Shallerows, designated series (under for Romow and them naximum length for a felevision play to hold the viewer's attention is about the maximum length for a felevision play to hold the viewer's attention is about the cond at half howers. "And during the two years in which Messian was preven a plan, happilly abundoned, to perform plays referred to, in what may be accounted a new Shakespearean sub-genera. as "the sligger (Mander, Length et al., 1997) and the state of the condition of the play to the condition of the play to the condition of the

of compromise has the serious continued and the serious continued to the true—certain things you cannot make sense of and they should be cut."

For example, the serious continued to the serious co

6 "Adjusting the Set," Times Higher Education Supplement, 10 July 1981, p. 13. The script as printed shows that the first two lines were spoken, the second two omitted.

King Lear: The Space of Tragedy (London: Heinemann, 1977), p. 53.
 (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1977), p. 244.

The problem of authenticity rears in head, moreover, in relation to setting and continues. The plays were written to be performed on more or less bare stages with, we believe, little attempt at naturalism. In the theater, naturalism cames increasingly to be sought until about a hundred year, ago, since where the continues of the problem of the probl

The television equivalent of Shakespeare's stage would be an empty studio and that. I originally thought, was what we should use I am now certain, however, that we were tight set us shough this yet for all the plays. Neady Modely Menter that we were the set to shop this try, the off all the plays and the plays the production would have looked Menore, an empty solids would have made avey different impositions would have looked Menore, an empty solids would have made avey different impositions. The production would have looked Menore, and the production would read to be a solid to the production of the production of the production of the solid have made avey different impositions to the production of the contract of the delivers of the production of the production of the delivers of the production of the producti

The other factor inhibiting the directors' imaginations appears to be an initial decision that updating of setting as well as textual tampering was to be avoided. Jonathan Miller is quoted as saying that his main problem in taking over other series, was "the original contract with the American co-producers—it had to be so-called traditional, in the costume of the period (whatever that means).

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There was no chance of shifting period —showed in the modern dense. "For Millies himself, this seems not to these been a sections obtacle," The better loss Millies himself, this seems not to these been a sections obtacle. "The better loss modes/refisched and flink modes/refische is at least 50 per cort of what interesting direction is about ... But it so happens that the requirement that interesting direction is about ... But it so happens that the requirement that called the state of the section of the condition of

The flexions correct measurements the stage in the art depends characters who move and speak. In the olderments and service an

the pictual state of the pictual p

Although Jonathan Miller has declared that the limitation to "period" cos-

tume is not one that cramps his own style, he has also said that it represented an insuperable obstacle to the engagement of directors whom he would have wished on work from in. This is not of the incubally problem of a house style, which was not from this in the contract of a proceed, helping to create a recognizable style for the stress. It may have the advantage of stundarding directors by creating an intitude of artists who find the guidelines unsympathetic. Reviewing one of the production. I work at "the medium has reduced the message," A distinguished intend and colleague argued that the intuitions were not as as of making the play work on the screen by using the medium more creatively. He suggested that largum Bergman would be the right man for the job —perhaps thinking of Place. Why, he added to the contract of the contract of

someone like Frank Firstly as well." In the event neither actor was involved. Franket, loo, is bound to be a problem, however generous the sponsorship. The problem of the

v

My concern to far has been mainly with the conception, rationale, and design of the series, and with some of the consequent problems. In the space last to me, I should like to speak rather more directly about some of the problems of street, and with some of the consequence of the problems of street.

When we finish about the performance of a play in the thearte, one of the window of the consequence of the series of the series of the consequence of the series o

troducing the BBC edition). This may be apt enough as a symbol of "the importance of maintaining order," but it seemed to me a sad anticinars. Croys the properties of maintaining order," but it seemed to me a sad anticinars. Croys for the properties of the propert

thrill of rinal participation as the stone is made flesh. But—as I hope to ilinstitute later—the production of AIP, Well-showed is that insignative direction.

The omission from Fa Tauning of the AIP of Well-showed is that insignative direction.

The omission from Fa Tauning of the AIP of Well-showed is that insignative direction.

The omission from Fa Tauning of the AIP of Well of Mellow of the Style of the option of decreased the play's complexity but also increased its solving—or decreased

the difficulty of Airchivaga rathly via middle more precal profuse, that is,

the difficulty of Airchivaga rathly via middle with the comic approach; it can be done by individuals. The comody of eccentric character can be well conveyed, Aint Cleave, who played Prenachs, is of course

the way in which fountain Cevil endowed Horenton with a weetly naive uni
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concerned conic secres seem to be able to the source of the third of development

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of pancer. I have seen this happen with the first appearance of the Walch in the control of the control of the control of the control of the control of

TELEVISION SHAKESPEARE

any connecly originally written for the theatre and later presented on television. But it is particularly scute in relation to Shake; peare in that many viewers have had expectations of concelly answer by obstacled expectations of concelly answer by obstacled expectations of a formation of the state of

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SIGNASPIGATE (CARTERIY
more of a director's success was broadined with first handling of the first part of
Timos of Atheria, a difficult became partially seneralized play. Dr. Allite shall
fully dilide in the criecises of the text, sering the opening secret at a lawish
reception which made an appropriate background to lonnthan Pryce's postrays
of Timost's stockingly observed personally. A realistic, and venciously dean essential part of Shakespear's exploratement of tool and eating which is
an essential part of Shakespear's exploratement of the stocking of the s

In looking for examples of interesting direction I find that I have unintentionally taken all of them from productions directed by Dr. Miller himself, and the production of responsibility upon the action. Description of the production, speed about this interest of the productions, speed about this interest of the production, speed about this interest of the production of th

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ratherese those around bar, why should only we learn that the Emperor of Runsia is her father?

The fact that one is conscious of such problems stresses the intimacy of television as a modin. Both this and the emphasis great by the series to the sections of the modine of the series to the section of the series of the section has been considered in the series to the section of the series of the section of the section of the series of the section of the series of the section of

12 The BBC-TV Shakespeare cited in note 11.

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That is expected but oddly supporting a land of companions for the victims of his security. It was a during piece of casting which succeeded as a result of a strengt his control of the sacre and the no leaves the strenge interaction between the strong personality of the state and the no leave strange appects of the role as Suksciepare wrote it.

On the whole, I thank the best moments in these productions have come when the active special new threat the strength of the strength of

He that knows better how to tame a shrew
Now let him speak.—'Tis charity to show.
(IV. i. 210–11)

John Cleese spoke them in quiet closeup, a mount of exhausted self-communion as Petraschio yaward over a caudic, serious and purposeful even in his futiges, articularing his strategy before satulfage his caudie and going to bed, or self-investigation, as Trolles, played by Auton Lesser, mediatard in anguish on Cressida's indicklip;

da's infidelity:

Instance, O instance, strong as Pluto's gates,
Cressid is mine, tied with the bonds of heaven.

Instance, O instance, strong as heaven itself,
The bonds of heaven are slipp 'd, dissolv' d, and loos' d.

(V. ii. 153–56)

Inevitably, the series is uneven in its achievement. Inevitably, too, it has

THEVISION MAKERFAME

TOWNs of write deactions. Thus, S. Schoenbaum, reviewing Julius Carur, found it "first class television—and excellent Shakespage too," whereas Jack Jurgens thought it "as mediocre piece of television," with performances that were "stilly, affected, askward, woods, or misgoled." It is grathly that comparatively intik-known plays have not it is grathly that comparatively intik-known plays have not it is grathly that comparatively intik-known plays have not to complete with in our memories of past performances, and the great trapelies (the "bigges") respecially, had enough to encounses on the stage, our secretly would drint our memories of past performances, and the great trapelies (the "bigges") respecially, had enough to encounses on the stage, our secretly would drint our memories of past performances, and the great trapelies (the "bigges") especially, had enough to exceed the still that the stage of the control of the stage of the

Washington Post, 25 March 1979.
 SO, 30 (Summer 1979), 411–12.