

influence those around her, why should only we learn that the Emperor of Russia is her father?

The fact that one is conscious of such problems stresses the intimacy of television as a medium. Both this and the emphasis given by the series to the actors have encouraged a focus on individual character. I was made particularly conscious of this by reading the introductions to the BBC editions, where there is much talk about the characters as individuals. Of course, most actors need to believe in the reality of the character they are portraying, but Dr. Miller did not rebut Anne Pasternak-Slater's comparison of him with "Bradley, with his painful detailing of character." To her remark "You're very interested in the fullness of character, too," Dr. Miller responded with an admission that he is "extremely interested in minute naturalistic detail" while stressing too that he has "a classifying streak . . . which sees things as abstracted, reduced, and formalised." The interest in detail can lead to successes such as the vivid portrayal of so minor a character as Calchas. It can result in a kind of fragmentation which perhaps is particularly likely to occur with groups of actors who are brought together to act in a single production over a short period of time. There can be little opportunity in these circumstances to achieve stylistic cohesion. So in *The Taming of the Shrew* I felt at times too much of a sense that each actor was "doing his own thing" in a style that had not been tightly enough controlled. Anthony Peckley, as Tranio, deployed the full armory of the farce actor, with exaggerated facial expression and grotesque speech characteristics, while others—such as Frank Thornton in his unusually dignified and sympathetic presentation of Gremlino—underplayed their comedy. A new departure for the series which we have not yet been able to assess is the use for the three parts of *Henry VI* and *Richard III* of a company of about forty actors, working under a single director, with a full-time fight director and choreographer, for all four plays. It will be interesting to see if this worthwhile experiment pays off in stylistic unity.

Tendency to underplay combined with an emphasis on individual character can result in excessive cutting down. Anthony Hopkins gave us an Othello which successfully avoided rhetorical overplaying but lacked elemental passion. Describing the play as "a domestic tragedy," he said "I think television is the ideal medium for these sort of plays. What television does is to make you play it intimately and then you discover something else about the plays—they're very intimate plays."¹⁷ That may be a tribute to Shakespeare's infinite adaptability, but it tells us more about the actor's need to work on a reduced scale than about the scale of the play itself. And even the naturalism that comes from an emphasis on individual character played within a real setting can be taken to excess: I think of the performance of Pandarus, which employed every cliché in the actor's book—minimising smirks, affected intonation, exaggerated gestures, bodily posturing, rolling eyes, giggles, flapping jaws—for the portrayal of a lubricious voyeur. I found it all too broad and, literally, too loud, actorishly surreal except at the end when the actor suggested a grim dignity in despair.

On the other hand, one of the more successful aspects of *Troilus and Cressida* arose from a no less bizarre performance from a blind actor known as The Incredible Orlando in the role of Therites. Like Pandarus, he was outrageously camp, a bald transvestite (Ajax does after all call him "Mistress Therites"); we saw him doing Achilles' washing while chattering criticism to himself,

¹⁷ *The BBC-TV Shakespeare* cited in note 11.

sharp-tongued but oddly suggesting a kind of compassion for the victims of his scurrility. It was a daring piece of casting which succeeded as a result of a strange interaction between the strong personality of the actor and the no less strange aspects of the role as Shakespeare wrote it.

On the whole, I think the best moments in these productions have come when the actor's eyes have encountered ours through the television screen and have enabled him to let the character speak directly to us, when he was, as Michael Hordern said, "playing to himself," when he was "seen to be thinking." Kozintsev, in his book on *King Lear*, writes: "The advantage of the cinema over the theatre is not that you can even have horses, but that you can stare closer into a man's eyes" (p. 55); at another point, he writes, "a close-up of the expression of the eyes is often more powerful than a whole soliloquy" (p. 184). So I thought that the finest moments of John Cleese's performance as Petruchio came in the soliloquy beginning "Thus have I politely begun my reign . . ." lines which in the theatre are often addressed in a mood of somewhat aggressive self-defensiveness directly to the audience, a kind of challenge:

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 close-up, a moment of exhausted self-communion as Petruchio yawned over a candle, serious and purposeful even in his fatigue, articulating his strategy before snuffing his candle and going to bed. In *Troilus and Cressida* the best moments for me came likewise in moments of self-investigation, as Troilus, played by Anton Lesser, meditated in anguish on Cressida's infidelity:

Instance, O instance, strong as Pluto's gates,
Cressid is mine, seal'd with the bonds of heaven.
Instance, O instance, strong as heaven itself,
The bonds of heaven are slip'd, dissolv'd, and loos'd.
(IV, ii, 153-56)

Best of all was the entry of Helen in the last scene of *All's Well That Ends Well*, described by G. K. Hunter in a way that I will not attempt to better. In a seminar paper for the International Shakespeare Congress, 1981, he wrote:

On the stage, as the tension builds up through the intrigue, the observation of Helena for a miraculously knee-cutting entry places an intolerable burden on that entry: can one simply step through the door, come all this? We see her as she is and not as she is received. The television production solved the problem, brilliantly I thought, by concealing the entry. The family and its supporters have lined up imperceptibly, facing the door through which Diana is being taken to prison. As the door she stops and pleads her final stay of execution. . . . As the cast looks through the door music begins to play. "Behold the meaning." . . . The camera does not show us a set of mouths and eyes. As it tracks along the line we are made witness to a series of finer images, as face after face responds to the miracle and lights up with understanding and relief. I confess to finding it a very moving experience.

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

provoked varied reactions. Thus, S. Schoenbaum, reviewing *Julius Caesar*, found it "first-class television—and excellent Shakespeare too."¹⁸ whereas Jack Jorgensen thought it "a mediocre piece of television," with performances that were "silly, affected, awkward, wooden, or mangled."¹⁹ It is gratifying that comparatively little-known plays have been largely successful. I think particularly of *Henry VIII*, *Timon of Athens*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, and perhaps *Troilus and Cressida*. The better-known plays have more to compete with in our memories of past performances, and the great tragedies (the "biggies") especially, hard enough to encompass on the stage, can scarcely avoid diminution on the small screen. But the series is keeping Shakespeare more or less constantly before us, and I suppose that it is fulfilling some, at least, of its educational aims.

In a better world than this, we should not be obliged to set up a grandiose scheme for "doing" the complete works within a limited period of time and with exaggerated claims for their value as teaching aids in order to acquire financial backing. In that better world the plays—any of the plays—would be performed on television from time to time by directors keen to interpret them through the television medium, given casts of actors who were high on their lists of priorities, permitted ample rehearsal time, and allowed, too, to formulate their own textual policy and interpretive methods. In the meantime, although there have been disappointments, we can be grateful for an ambitious enterprise which at least is not demeaning Shakespeare, and which has had some real successes.

¹⁸ *Washington Post*, 25 March 1979.
¹⁹ *SQ*, 30 (Summer 1979), 411-12.