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Cover illustration: Robin Phillips' 1977 production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the Festival Stage of Stratford Festival Canada. Photograph by Zoë Dominic.

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Ecumenical Shakespeare

AT A RECENT SYMPOSIUM ON Shakespeare in Performance, organized by Michael Mullin of the University of Illinois and funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, keynote speaker John Russell Brown observed that the Shakespearean corpus—that tremendous body of dramatic literature transmitted, however imperfectly, from Shakespeare's pages to our own—is little more than an inert corpus unless animated by the participatory imaginations of readers secure in the conviction that Shakespeare is as much alive in the 1970s as he was in the 1590s. Professor Brown went on to note—seconded by Bernard Beckerman, whose address to the symposium appears as the lead article of this issue—that there is basis for optimism that the years immediately ahead will be good years for Shakespeare enthusiasts, years in which the poet's dramatic scripts will be explored and revitalized in performance and critical interpretation as never before.

If this is so—and much of the material in this issue testifies to the likelihood that it may be—the reason, in large measure, is that a good deal has been happening in the recent past to prepare the way.

For one thing, as several of the articles, theatre reviews, and book reviews here included will make clear, a new consciousness has developed among academic Shakespeareans: a consciousness that Shakespeare's plays cannot properly be understood in isolation from the conditions of performance that were their original *raison d'être*. This new consciousness has several consequences, not the least salutary of which has been a burgeoning academic interest in the Shakespearean theatre of our own day. Meanwhile, and with consequences just as significant and potentially beneficial, something of a new consciousness has been emerging in the theatre. Sensitive Shakespearean directors and actors are coming to recognize that a truly resonant, illuminating performance requires insight of a kind that can be brought to the dramatic text only after the scholar has reconstructed something approximating the contexts that conditioned and, at times, defined the world depicted in Shakespearean drama.

From the Editor

New bridges are being built, then, new lines of communication opened up, with the happy result that the best scholarship and criticism today—and the most successful Shakespearean productions—are more deeply informed, more fully matured than a good deal of similar work in the past. This is not to suggest, of course, that all of our present labors are bearing perfect fruit. On the contrary, most professional Shakespeareans now seem to approach their work with a healthy skepticism that anything perfect or "definitive" is, or ever was, possible. Aware of inescapable limitations, many are now willing to approach Shakespeare's texts with a degree of openness, even humility, that would have been quite unfashionable as recently as a decade ago. Rather than imposing their own designs on Shakespeare from above in an effort to render him and his work contemporaneous with the 1970s, accordingly, some of the most influential Shakespeareans in the current theatre (witness 1977's Director of the Year, Terry Hands, and Actor of the Year, Alan Howard, as they outline their thinking to Homer Swander in this issue) now seem more inclined to attempt the harder task of making themselves, to the extent now possible, contemporaneous with Shakespeare—approaching him, as it were, from below.

This, in my view, is as it should be, and it offers the possibility of even more productive interchange between the theatre and the academy in the future. It is valuable to have different kinds of practicing Shakespeareans, each bringing his own special orientation and method to bear on the text. But it is also valuable, indeed crucial, to share as widely as possible the insights those different approaches make available. As we make our various pilgrimages to the shrine, it may not be inappropriate to remind ourselves now and then that we are members of a great and ever-growing worldwide fellowship—members (to offer a Pauline perspective on John Russell Brown's metaphor) of the living body of Shakespeare—dependent upon each other for our fullest development, both individually and collectively. It pleases me to think that something of this ecumenical spirit unifies the pages that follow.

JOHN F. ANDREWS