The Routledge Companion to Directors' Shakespeare, and : *Shakespeare's Globe: A Theatrical Experiment* (review)

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Shakespeare Quarterly

Johns Hopkins University Press

Volume 60, Number 4, Winter 2009

pp. 518-523

10.1353/shq.0.0101

REVIEW

In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Reviewed by:

Paul Menzer (bio)

***The Routledge Companion to Directors' Shakespeare*. Edited by John Russell Brown. London and New York: Routledge, 2008. Pp. xiv + 594. $153.00 cloth.**

***Shakespeare's Globe: A Theatrical Experiment*. Edited by Christie Carson and Farah Karim-Cooper. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008. Illus. Pp. xxii + 268. $81.00 cloth, $24.99 paper.**

John Russell Brown's *Routledge Companion to Directors' Shakespeare* pulls off the rare double act of being as well executed as it was conceived. Given the high number of contributors, thirty-one in all, the collection is impressively consistent in focus and tone. That tone—gently laudatory, thickly descriptive—makes the *Companion* of equal use to the reader who just wants to tell his Hall from his Hands and to the specialist interested in Peter Zadek's production of *Hamlet* for the 1999 Wiener Festwochen. The result is a much-needed reference work that presents brief biographies of the "long" twentieth century's most influential directors of Shakespeare and critical accounts of some of their most important productions.

In the *Companion*'s brief preliminaries, Brown writes that "besides being a work of reference, this book is also a collection of theatre stories that can be read either from cover to cover or starting wherever interest is caught" (ix–x). Arranged alphabetically, the *Companion* may seem more interested in encyclopedic scope than narrative thrust, but a cover-to-cover reading allows a number of stories to emerge from directors' memoirs and memories, interviews and reviews. As it turns out, a handful of "stories" repeat themselves so consistently that they produce an anthology of theatrical folklore. This is not to accuse the collection's authors of cliché, but rather to point out how conventional are the plot points around which **[End Page 518]** directors of Shakespeare—and their chroniclers—shape the history of twentieth-century performance.

Major motifs include the repeated rejection of declamatory Shakespeare, the ever-narrowing but never-quite-connecting concerns

of scholarly and theatrical Shakespeare, a constantly invoked fidelity to text, England's suspicion toward but appropriation of continental theatrical trends, "insider" versus "outsider" Shakespeare, a story called "Brecht," one called " jazz," another called "*commedia dell'arte*," and a growing sense that Shakespeare in the twentieth century was controlled by about five men named Peter. It is the repetition of these stories that makes them so telling. Each time a director retails the notion that his actors work like "great jazz players" (395), one suspects that " jazz" is a word for something else (spontaneity, improvisation, racial authenticity, modernity, "cool"). With each time the "the traditional declamatory style" (376) is rejected, one suspects that it never really existed. And each time a quoted review condemns a production for privileging "concept" and "staging" over "the verse," one surmises that, since those terms are never reversed, the criticism is essentially empty. Working independently from one another, the contributors to the *Companion* have collectively fashioned a fascinating compendium of theatrical lore. In doing so, they have produced a document that enables an anthropological reading of the theater industry and how it accounts for itself.

The aggregate effect of these repeated tales is to highlight those essays that subject these orthodoxies to critique. The best example is Peter Holland's thoughtful but troubled account of Peter Hall's career. First playfully and then seriously, Holland challenges the religious language of "sanctity," "faith," and "fidelity" that Hall uses when he speaks about verse. Holland is clearly skeptical of Hall's dogmatism (the director has been labeled an "'iambic fundamentalist'" [149]), posing rational objections to his claims about verse. But Holland is just as clearly a fan of Hall's work, which lends the essay a fascinating contrapuntal dynamic as he toggles between admiration and interrogation. The entry offers both narrative and counternarrative, allowing the subject to speak for himself while subjecting that speech to critique.

Worthy of special mention, too, is Franklin J. Hildy's comprehensive recap of B. Iden Payne's long career, which sets out to correct the

received narrative of twentieth-century Shakespeare and performance, in which Payne has not figured very highly. In Hildy's account, Payne emerges as a seminal…

If this insightful book completes Weimann's and Bruster's long-term engagement with the power of Elizabethan performance, their study provides a compelling methodology and terminology for others, laying the groundwork for further historically informed explorations of dramatic character, the Vice, clowns, theatrical cross-dressing and disguise, and more careful work with print culture and its relation to performance, particularly in what we might call the "humanist performative" overlooked here. It is, then, essential reading for anyone teaching or studying Shakespeare, as well as those working in the theater. To understand Shakespeare more deeply, one could do no better than to appreciate his "bifold" achievement on stage and page by engaging with the constitutive power of embodied performance in his works while remaining amenable to the play of scripted language and character. In Shakespeare, these different modes and media were inalienable in creating the "scene individable" (10).

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