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**Directors In Whose Service?**
by Eric Shorter

What Hamlet means is always fun to ponder. Is his madness affected? Did he only fancy Ophelia, or love her? Would he have proved most royal had he been put off? The scholars have been guessing at the bone of the play since Shakespearean scholarship discovered its possibilities for intellectual chewing.

And every director graws at it as well. In fact a director has a better chance to graw, since the players have long since learned to regard their director as know-it-all and single out the actual stage to create inevitable opportunities to — what's the phrase? — reinterpret the old tragedy.

The play is so well known to many playwrights that the least twist of a line, the tiniest distortion of character, the mildest embellishment of the text, puts us on our mettle and sets our minds whirring. What is meant? What's the allusion? Does that costume imply a character? Are those soldiers from the Balkans? Why should a grand old man of such repute, at Elsinore as the Lord Chamberlain, Polonius, sexually embrace his troubled daughter Ophelia with her mind and heart on Hamlet and his ambigious overtures — why should such a nice old buffer suddenly start fondling her right breast?

Equally baffling for playwrights who know the play quite well must be the sight of the hero, that royal Dane dashing barefoot about the Court and tantalising his bored or prospective father-in-law by not merely teasing him in the way unpretentious princes, being young and cheeky, might be patiently allowed, but by tweaking his crotch rather than his beard, as if to emphasise something I scarcely remember, after several dozen revivals, to have been suggested — Polonius's fecklessness.

But that (it seems to me every time I see the play) is what the modish director likes to do. He seeks at each revival to leave his mark on the masterpiece. He wants to keep us on our toes. He is addressing an audience which he supposes knows the play backwards as well as upside down. He does therefore pull the text this way and that, sticking to the line of course while illustrating the wealth of possible meanings, he is understandably rephrasing the thing, or (to put it more grandly) redefining it.

This approach is amusing. It is bound to be amusing. Pereverovy always amuse, even if it annoys. The tricks which a director (given acquiescent actors — and almost by definition an actor who doesn't acquiesce is liable to spend a lot of time "redefining") performs on a classical text are the consequences of what he sees as a natural challenge.

Here is something musty — familiar to most of us. How to play it newly? Ausher way of putting it would be to
DIRECTORS IN WHOSE SERVICE?

claim that in addition to reediting a masterpiece (which could sound pompous or egotistical) you are trying to make it relevant. The work should be topical, but relevant sounds graver.

It sounds as if the man putting on the play had discovered how to make the thing matter to young people for whom everyday routine is more important than art and who must therefore be shown how "relevant" Shakespeare always is, even though we might not have known or felt it from the page.

In other words, the director is like a school teacher who has lost faith in both his subject and his pupils. They will yawn, How to stop them? Sensations. Find a sensational "angle", an approach which either shocks or diverts them and which at any rate proves how close to our day in various ways this awesome, solemn classic really is.

The trouble with this attitude is that it overlooks the playwright who chances not to know the play by heart, or even very well. He may not even have seen it before. There is a first time for everyone. What he wants is therefore a straightforward version, not one "made easy" by fancied updating or curious costume or other aids to the reduction of the tragedy as relevant to our times, our own lives, our own culture.

But that is what today's young playwright seldom gets. It is supposed that he is looking for a new allusion, a new point which will hold the heavy tragedy out of its own context and into the twentieth century. Hence, I imagine, the version of Hamlet which lately made a national tour, with the film actor Hilton McRae, in the title role.

Directed by Christopher Fettes whom reviewers praised highly for a very queer but often effective version of Marlowe's Doctor Faustus in a studio at Hammersmith (it transferred to a small West End theatre and, to my mind, much better), this Hamlet seemed to suffer from that descending tone which decrees that you and I won't understand what great old plays are about unless we view them through a special directorial lens which heightens with topicality.

By giving us more of the actual text than usual, the director looks as if he respects it. In this touring production we even got Cornelius and Wolfenden and one of the English ambassadors, a sure sign of a long evening. It lasted for four hours. And if the words were seldom spoken with theatrical magic they were clearly and intelligently spoken. They made sense, not sensuously, but prosaically.

What kept on failing to make sense was the director's arrangements. These starched-kits and long, belted overcoats for courtiers at Elsinore. Were they meant to look like gangsters? Why should we think of the Russian revolution when those soldiers burst in on behalf of Laertes, just back from Paris having heard of something rotten in the state of Denmark?

Why should that most decent of fathers, Polonius, a widower with one untrained child, be made to seem insinuating by hiding his daughter without protest? Or Hamlet humiliate his prospective father-in-law by a loud speech which must have alarmed old Polonius into ordering a cod-piece?

Much more important than such effects to "redefine" or renew the "relevance" of the masterpieces was the idea behind the central performance. If there was indeed an idea, that Hamlet was round the bend from the start.

It was a play which gives us enough to think about without unnecessary proscenium, courtiers in crooks' clothing, and senselessly extra-buckled epauletts like those gropings.

Why, in a word, must so many directors leave their mark on every masterpiece? Are they serving the author or just themselves?
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presents

RICHARD TODD
ERIC LANDER
BRIGID O’HARA

in
THE BUSINESS OF MURDER

by
RICHARD HARRIS

Directed by
Designed by
Lighting by

HUGH GOLDIE
JOHN PAGE
NEIL GOODWIN

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01-235 3547.
ERIC LANDER

Eric Lander is not only one of this country’s most popular leading actors but also one of the most accomplished.

After leaving RADA, where he won an Alexander Korda Scholarship, he joined the Royal Shakespeare Company at Stratford, and played leading parts under such directors as John Girgad and Tyrone Guthrie. He was soon spotted by the television moguls and throughout the late fifties and sixties, he established himself as one of television’s busiest actors. His many starring roles included Dr. Andrew Marnon in A.J. Cronin’s The Citadel, but he is probably best remembered for his four-year association with No Hiding Place in which he co-starred with Raymond Francis. Animos rest to get too closely associated with another long-running series, he varied his television roles over the next decade and featured in such series as Champion House, Nadleigh, Spy Trap, Sexton Blake and Crown Court, until in 1972 he was talked into joining another hugely popular series, and he took on the leading role of Richard Kirby, the Administrator in General Hospital—another association that was to last the best part of four years!

During his extensive varied television acting, Eric has never totally neglected his first love—the theatre. He has starred in many plays both in London and in the provinces, most frequently as Martin Dyer in Equus, The Doctor’s Dilemma and as Sir Robert Morton in The Winslow Boy at Edinburgh, and as Sir Thomas More in A Man for All Seasons at Reading. Eric also spent two seasons at George Morrell’s St. Georges Shakespeare Theatre Company.

Eric can also frequently be heard on radio, and seen on television in runs of such classic films as The Colditz Story, Danger Within and Sink the Bismarck.

RICHARD TODD

Richard Todd’s distinguished film and theatrical career started in the late 1930s when he attended a London drama school, where his natural acting ability made him change his ambition from that of a playwright to actor. After that he worked with various repertory companies, followed by a season at the Open Air Theatre, Regent’s Park. After the war in which he served with the King’s Own Yorkshire Light Infantry and the Parachute Regiment he rejoined the Dundee Repertory Theatre and in 1948 he made his film debut in For Those That Think. This was followed by the memorable The Hasty Heart in which his performance as the young Scot dying of a kidney would brought him countless honours, including an Oscar nomination and the British National Film Award.

Amongst the many films to follow were Robin Hood, Rob Roy, Tangle Ridge and The Dam Busters, all of which rank as classics of the cinema. In 1966 Richard Todd returned to the West End Stage in Oscar Wilde’s An Ideal Husband which ran for over a year. This was followed by Door of Octopus, another great success. In 1970 he founded Triumph Theatre Productions in partnership with Duncan Webb and Paul Elliott. Triumph has since become one of the most active production companies in the world. In 1974 he led the Royal Shakespeare Company in America and Canada in a production of The Hollow Crown and in 1975 starred with the Australian National Theatre Company in Equus. Since then he has continued his busy theatrical career, interweaving it with some television, the most recent including Bulman in The Ray Dominica. Richard Todd’s latest films are the spy comedy Number One of the Secret Service in which he plays the villain, The Big Sleep for Michael Winner, and Home Before Midnight.
THE BUSINESS OF MURDER

by

RICHARD HARRIS

Hallett
Stone
Dee
Helen
Spiros

ERIC LANDER
RICHARD TODD
BRIGID O'HARA
NOLA BAOL
SALVIN STEWART

Directed by HUGH GOLDIE
Designed by John Page
Lighting by Neil Goodwin

The play takes place in the sitting room of a North London flat

ACT I

Scene 1. An autumn afternoon at 3:30 p.m.
Scene 2. Just before 7 p.m. the same evening

INTERVAL OF FIFTEEN MINUTES

ACT II

a few moments later

This production is presented in association with the
Windsor Theatre Company

BRIGID O'HARA
Brigid was born in Malta, educated in England, but spent most of her early acting career in Canada! During her eight year stay there, she established herself as one of her country's most promising young actresses. Her favourite parts included Lydia Languish in John Neville's production of The Rivals at the Citadel Theatre, Gwendolyn in Tom Steppard's Travesties, and, uniquely, Gwendolyn in The Importance of Being Earnest at the Calgary Theatre, and Aria in The Cherry Orchard and Notorius in The Rehearsal, both with the Westcoast Actors Company.

In between her theatre work, Brigid also appeared extensively on television and radio, most notably as Jessica in The Merchant of Venice on C.B.C. Television and in Halt, Peer Gynt and Nine Bodies for C.B.C. (Radio).

Since returning to this country, Brigid has played Viola in Twelfth Night at Letchester and issued in A Murder Has Been Announced and Crown Matrimonial. She will soon be seen in Yorkshire TV's Harry's Game.

The Business of Murder marks Brigid's debut in London's West End.
RICHARD HARRIS (Author)
Richard Harris was born in London in 1934. In 1959 his first play was produced as a television Play Of The Month. Since then, he has contributed regularly to television, his numerous plays including Who's A Good Boy, Tom?; I Must Be Virginia, Saving It For Algie; Where The Boys Came Out To Play; Sunday In Perspective; Occupier's Right, Time and Mr. Muldoon; A Shifty Journalist; I Can See Your Ups Move; Jack's Tale. Adaptations for television include Murder Most English, The Prince and the Pauper and Paul Mander. He also contributes regularly to television series and co-created the BBC film series Sherehart. His radio Play War! Something I Said! was a winner of the 1967 Giles Cooper Radio Award. His stage plays include The Maintenance Man; The Dog It Was, Conscious It's Done; Alfred and Virginia and Outward Edge which won the Evening Standard Award for 1975. His latest play Local Affairs - which starred Irene Handel - was premiered in November 1960 at the Haymarket Theatre, Leicester.

HUGH GOLDIE (Director)
Hugh Goldie began his career in 1938 as an A.S.A. with Sheffield Repertory Company. After service with the R.A.F. he returned to the theatre and studied design at the Old Vic Theatre Centre, and directed his first professional production of Hobson's Choice at Sheffield Playhouse: he went on to be Stage Director at Liverpool Playhouse and then Associate Director at Oxford Playhouse. He designed A Sleep of Prisoners for London and New York and was also assistant director. He made his London debut as an actor in 1961 playing the doctor in The Square Ring at the Lyric Theatre Hammersmith and his first London play as a director was Love's Labour's Lost. He was Director of Productions at Oxford Playhouse and went on to be Resident Director at the Theatre Royal, Windsor. His numerous productions as a Director include Mr. Cobbett's Boys; Signpost to Murder; Busybodies; After The Lographers; The Queer's Highland Servant; Lady Be Good; Aardman and Old Lace; Leander the Cane and most recently the highly successful revival of Sleuth.
BILL KENWRIGHT (Producer)
Over the last decade, Bill Kenwright has established himself as one of this country's leading theatrical producers. Over 300 National tours including Voyage Round My Father, Conundrum, Oh Calcutta, and Holograph, Forget Me Not Lane, How the Other Half Lives, Ten Times Table, Humana, Night and Day, Every Little Thing, Once a Catholic, Unlikely Heroes, Fallen Angels, Bad 'n' Chees with Bernie Winters and Leslie Crowther. His production of Gaslight with Francesca Annis holds the box office record as the most successful production ever to tour New Zealand and he has also produced successfully in Hong Kong, South Africa and Canada. His West End productions include West Side Story, for which he was nominated director of the year, the award-winning musical The Me Nobody Knows, Data Revue with Sheila Hancock, Touch of Purple with Ray Barrett, Frontiers in France with Leonard Rossiter, Birds of Paradise with Moira Lister, the record-breaking Emu in Pursuit, Wozz, Killed Agatha Christie, ... with James Bolam, The Undertaking with Kenneth Williams who also directed Joe Orton's Loot, at the Arts Theatre, The Killing Game with Hannah Gordon and Peter Gilmore, Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber's Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat at the Vaudeville and Sadler's Wells Theatres, Hedda Gabler with Susannah York and Tom Bell, The Jeweller's Shop written by Pope John Paul II starring Hannah Gordon, Gwen Watford and Paul Daneman, and currently The Mikado at the Cambridge Theatre. His production of The Business of Murder starring Richard Todd is the third longest running play in the West End, and currently at the Duke of York's the much acclaimed production of Miss Julie starring Cheryl Campbell and Stephen Bay. As an actor Bill Kenwright started his career with the National Youth Theatre, played leading parts in several West End musicals and was a member of the No W. Shakespeare Company in Regents Park. Amongst many television appearances his favourite was the starring role in Granada TV's D.H. Lawrence series Strike Pay, but he is probably best known for his association with Coronation Street in which he played Gordon Clegg.

For Bill Kenwright Productions
Managing Director BILL KENWRIGHT
General Manager ROD H. COTTON
Accounts Manager BRIAN GREENWOOD
Assistant to the Manager JANET MILLS
Company Stage Manager SABINE STORDY
Deputy Stage Manager CHRISTINE RAMP
Assistant Stage Manager ANGELA DANIELS

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The May Fair Theatre

The May Fair is unique among London's West End theatres in that it is combined within the walls of an hotel. The May Fair Hotel has stood in Stratton and Berkeley Streets since 1937. One of the popular features of the hotel during the 1930s and 40s was the Candlelight Room. Here both Harry Roy and Ambrose with their bands played for patrons.

During the latter part of 1982 work began to convert the Candlelight Room into the intimate theatre that is now the May Fair Theatre. A new stage, seating, dressing room and all ancillary equipment were provided for, and above, parts of two floors of bedrooms were converted to allow for the first time proper staging of scenery etc. of course, the usual theatre back-stage facilities and dressing rooms.

The Theatre was opened on 17th June 1983 by Sir Ralph Richardson who starred in the production of Pinocchio's Six Characters in Search of an Author. The Theatre, which was controlled by Grand Metropolitan Hotels was opened in London since 1660 and was designed to make it totally adaptable and capable of being used for the usual evening play. The only possibility overlooked in the design of the Theatre was that of having it into a cinema. And that was deliberate as the Hotel already contains a Cinema.

During the last ten years the Theatre has played host to commercial presentations for sales conferences and seminars etc. With the full facilities of the Hotel being available to delegates. Many famous faces have appeared in these shows, among them; Michael Angel, Jeremy Edwards, Gerry Marsden, Georgie Fame and Bruce Forsyth.

Other daytime and Sunday activities have included a number of television 'taped shows' among them a series of Eamonn Andrews and several programmes with David Frost and Michael Parkinson.

Two even more unusual shows staged there have been a live cabaret performance by the audience on a scooterboard resembling a bingo card with commentary by Omar Sharif and a 15-minute show launching metal shoes fabric at a cost of £60,000.

Whilst these activities have been taking place the Theatre has firmly established itself in the West End with its stage attractions. Since six characters in search of an audience, two shows have had extremely long runs. Beyond the Fringe transferred from the Fortune Theatre to play for a further two and a half years and now 7th September 1979, Christopher Hampton's The Philanthropist starring Alec McCowan opening having had a season at the Royal Court Theatre, London. Alec McCowan was succeeded by George Cole and then Nigel Hawthorne and in all the show ran for over three years, closing finally on 27th October 1983. In between these long runs have been a number of major presentations of shows which played to capacity audiences for 18 years running.

Since The Philanthropist productions have include The Farm from the Royal Court, The State of Chaos and Constance from Hampstead Theatre Club and Roy Dotrice's remarkable four de forme as John Aubrey by Biff Lives. Major productions have included Ring and Bracket and Michael Frayn's Alphabet. Under our stage, from Hampstead Club and James Bolam, Jane Asher, Stephen Moore in Christopher Hampton's Tartuffe.

On Saturday 20th August 1984, The Theatre presented yet another successful transfer from the Hampstead Theatre Club's latest, Fish, Fish & Fish which was first for London, and earned Alison Fiske the award for Best Actress in a New Play in the West End Theatre Managers Awards. Following this an experiment in documentary theatre was presented in the form of Two Men where you won't know or have you ever been...? a dramatic reconstruction of the McCarthy-Hollywood witch hunt. Gordon Cheriton opened in February 1978 in the Australian award winning one-man play by Steve Spears. The Bicentenary of Benjamin Franklin to be followed by the Welsh National Theatre's production of Under Milk Wood which coincided with the 25th anniversary of the death of Dylan Thomas.

Margaret Rumbold has starred in Jason Linley's one-character play Empress Euphemia followed by two transfers from the Theatre at New End Hampstead Freeport by Tom Servatius and A Day in Hollywood, A Night in Ukraine, which won the Evening Standard Drama Award for the Best Musical of 1978 and was joint winner of the Plays and Players Critics Award for the Best Comedy of 1983. In February 1980, Susan York and David McCallum starred in Appearance, an adaptation of the Henry James' short story "A Private Life" by Simon Brett and the Company's production of in Paris, also directed, designed and in the play.

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But the Barrymores were everywhere. Ethel was playing Lady Helen Hadin in The New at the Alhambra. Lionel was at the Criterion in The Prodigal. And John was doing a film, for Cecil B De Mille, called Male and Female.

In those early days the studios were in New York so the Barrymores did flappers by day and acted on stage at night. They were casting it like Mark you, there were others around doing well in pictures: Charlie Chaplin, Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks, Dorothy and Lillian Gish and Francis X. Bushman with whom later I made a film.

If Mary Pickford was the World’s Sweetheart, John Barrymore was every woman’s ideal lover. He’d already made a huge success with Rifles and Doctor T. J. Eckle and Mr Hyde. Still it was Lionel who was the stayer, one of the first to be a hit in pictures he outlived the others, dominated the hey-day of the talkies, and even succeeded to TV. Although Ethel was the queen of stage stars it’s incredible how many movies she made. She said she was in it for the dough but when asked if she saw her films replied: ‘Let me keep my illusions, please.’

But pity the poor little ‘Lack of the Navy’ company trying to put over an intimate comedy – drama in a theatre which seemed the size of the Albert Hall. Moreover, marching up and down outside the edifice, and at the back too where we waggled our fists through the stage door, were names of Wodehouse – Manners – and drum beating: ‘God damn, England.’

Quite what their protest was I’ve no idea but it didn’t encourage customers to view our patriotic play. Still, New York was exciting. It was all exciting.

After running for a year in London, while still playing to good business, we closed in order to cross the pond and give the Americans a treat. It didn’t quite work out like that but all the time there were thrills: that special train gliding gracefully from London to Devon, that superb liner Nieuw Amsterdam shimmering in the sunlight, and the dawn approach to the fabulous cubic city from the ferry head.

Manhattan, more than sixty summers ago, retained the whiff of a pioneer city. No man got out of a taxi; they lapped out, and while paying the
driver with one hand and slamming the door with the other, were jet propelled through revolving doors which never ceased to rotate.

They wore suits seemingly padded with bricks at the shoulder, silk shirts with broad coloured stripes, collars with stripes descending horizontally, belts with gold buckles, and huge bright brown boots.

The traffic roared with hoisting unabated, the cops never ceased to blow their shrill whistles, and the trams screeched as no other trams have ever screeched before. The subway, only just below the surface, emitted a low thududious moan—bust above all the L. (elevated railway)—reached a crescendo which dwarfed all other sounds to an eerie whisper.

But one didn’t want it quieter, it wouldn’t have been New York. On Fifth Avenue, with it’s grand apartments and automobiles running five abreast, the roar was more refined. But Eighth had it’s attraction too with those gigantic trucks laden with produce. And Lexicon definitely had its fascination with the coal black Mamas and red hot Jules. Then there was the grandeur of Riverside Drive, the curious but seductive smell in Chinatown, the dazzle of the Great White Way—and for me the glorious neck of green paint in Times Square.

There, at the Palace of Varieties, was Ted Lewis with his battered top hat leading his band with his piccolo, pointe to inquire. Everybody happy?

But it was the Barrymores who were the royals of Broadway, so much so that a play was written mocking their royal state. It was a future in New York, but when produced later in the West End, Londoners couldn’t understand how so much fuss could be made of innocents.

Larry Olivier played the thinly disguised portrait of the debauched, dissolute, Lothario John Barrymore with his retinue of wives and paramours. Those who remember Dorothea Costello (wife No. 2) recall A Princess. Nevertheless J B’s saving grace was to give us—at the Haymarket in 1925—a Hamlet that will be remembered for all time as ‘caviare to the general’.

In Manhattan the air is so stimulating that no one wants to sleep, and the thrill of snapping in the small hours at Sardi’s and reeling all the stars was super. But in that gauzy wigwam, before we’d been informed by our management, we learnt that ‘The Luck’ after four weeks, was to close—and be transported to Canada.

Our erstwhile impresario, Morris Gest, had foreseen that with the end of the Kaiser war there was a packet to be made with a patriotic play in our then Dominion. That’s why he’d shoved us into a theatre which nobody else wanted.

It was indeed a sad parting as we steamed out of Grand Central Station for although we’d flapped everyone who had been kind and the press had given us rave notices. Never mind, even if the Barrymores held Broadway, we were royalties in Canada. I was even licensed to our then adored Prince of Wales!