

Shakespeare in Performance: Brief Reviews

by David Cope

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Ben Jonson's *Volpone* at The RSC Swan, Stratford, U.K., 19 May 1999

This is a lovely venue, really intimate with its thrust stage only a few feet above the audience, the galleries even close enough to feel real contact with the actors. The play itself was a spirited, fast-paced production featuring actors perfectly cast in the roles of Volpone (Malcom Storry) and Mosca (Guy Henry)—I was immensely pleased to see that a vigorously performed Jonson play could not only compete with, but in some ways top Shakespeare himself, a point I'd long recognized in my studies of Ben. The zanies (Nick Cavaliere, Nicholas Trigg, Colin Mace) are particularly fine—first discovered under the sheets almost naked and heavily made up, with Volpone's hands curving around their buttocks—they at once captured the sense of the *unnatural* that is the undercurrent of this play, while at the same time being attractive, exotic, spectacular: the attractive vice that at once unsettles and which is welcome for his playing out of one's own dark & in some cases unacknowledged fantasies. The zanies performed with great energy both when commanded and as antic chorus to Volpone in the mountebank scene, which was carnival inversion as its absolute best. The gulls were adequate, as was Celia (Claire Price): Voltore (Christopher Good), Corvino (Richard Cordery), and Corbaccio (John Rogan) need to be little more than personifications of varieties of greed, excited and maneuvered by Mosca's astute maneuverings of their own psychological weaknesses. The two English travellers, Pol (David Collings) and Lady Pol (Susannah Elliott-Knight), were also well played (especially she—a real florid Lady Would-be whose courtesan heart is both obnoxious and easily led, *taking* the stage as her own center in her more assertive moments). Peregrine (Mark Bonnar) is given a Scottish burr (why, I'm not sure, except that perhaps it might indicate that he's not as close to the doddering Englishman as the latter might like to think). Court scene: seating the three judges far above the action creates an interesting vertical staging where claims are accentuated as *pleas*. Finally, I should touch on Mosca—young, lithe, and attractive, he is the slippery center of this production, played not as ingratiating but as choreographing everyone else's responses with an astuteness that is at once devilishly unsettling, charming, and sexually provocative.

***Othello* at the RSC Main Stage, Stratford U.K. 20 May 1999**

Othello began rather flatly—static on-stage dynamics and Iago capturing less a sense of concentrated menace than the performance of "dramatic" presentation—unnecessary elongation of syllables emphasizing poetic artifice rather than real emotion (though he got better later), and characters who turn to speak into the audience and away from each other when the text calls for them to speak to each other—an artificial stage device which, if overdone, can reduce a performance to mere cleverness. The play did pick up, however, after the "canakin clink" scene, ending in a moving fashion—Iago finally emoting the inner rage and crushing sorrow of his wife's supposed affair with Othello, his real motivation beneath the apparent anger at Cassio's promotion. Othello was played competently by a tall and energetic black actor (thank god, no Oliviers in blackface), Emilia adequate to her role though sometimes without the concentrated passion that she too *could* contain, her defense of women delivered almost matter-of-factly. Desdemona's the real center, I think, of this production, played as a woman at first horrified by Othello's change to jealousy, later as one who's alternately enraged and assertive of her honor and as one confused, still a girl, almost pleading with Emilia for advice about what she's experiencing. The ending was full of pathos, quite moving, and as the scene darkened on the foregrounded dead, the blackened backstage lit up on Iago and two guards, backs to us, Iago turning to look back directly over the carnage, facing the audience with an implacable stare, defiant.

Julius Caesar at The Globe Theatre, London, U.K., 22 May 1999

In some ways, the show was a bundle of contradictions and questions about performance possibilities. The all-male cast was costumed in Elizabethan dress, though there were some hints of the toga, yet in some scenes the actors shouting from the audience (as in the Forum scene where Anthony whips the crowds into a frenzy) were dressed as, for example, a proper early-20th century English gentleman or a black kid with backwards-baseball cap—the incongruity really destroyed the dramatic illusion & forced the audience to work its way back into the show. The venue with its thrust stage really expands the possibilities of playing to (and in) the crowd, but there's also a limit to the visuals one can develop via prop restrictions employed to keep the sense of "authenticity." All in all, the show was a fair performance with some real highlights: the opening scene, in which the actors address us as the Romans making holiday; the Lupercal scene, where Antony instantly changes the mood by racing around the stage in wolf costume, charging spiritedly across stage front (bare cheeks) to whip the audience into a frenzy—all of which set us up for Caesar's pomposity & later melancholic anger—the mood shifts were well done; and Antony's "honourable men" speech. Brutus was played strongly by a black actor (though he could have projected a bit more, his voice a bit soft); Cassius was adequate, though not particularly distinctive. Portia was done well by a terrific boy actor who later doubled as Octavius Caesar, but Calphurnia was less successful—"her" voice too obviously *male*. Per notable scenes, the ghost scene was played too perfunctorily, the battle scenes too much offstage, as though the actors were hurrying to get to their conclusion. Music was outstanding throughout, both before the play, during interims between acts, and when called for in the play. Finally, the all-male dance that finished the show was terrific & spirited.

A Midsummer Night's Dream
at the RSC Main Stage, Stratford U.K., 24 May 1999

This is a spirited, bare-stage performance with lots of gags, erotic dance sequences (fairies) and bumbling dance sequences (mechanicals). Fast-paced fun, usually on target—more openly erotic in the liminal space of the green wood than I've seen—Titania (Josette Simon) and Peaseblossom (Sirine Saba) are played as supercharged horny women out for a grope, others doing yeowoman supporting roles as secondary gropers. Bottom (Daniel Ryan) and the mechanicals are generally very good, played with terrific panache, and of the lovers, Demetrius (Henry Ian Cusick) and particularly Helena (Hermione Gulliford) shine brightly—she's tops! Catherine Kanter's Hermia is sometimes a bit too hysterical, one-dimensional, though she does some terrific physical knock-about routines with the two male lovers; Fergus O'Donnell's Lysander is OK but not particularly distinctive, as is true of Puck (Aidan McArdle). Lastly, Josette Simon as Hippolyta-Titania is a breathtaking actress—a lithe black woman who delivers her lines with appropriate intensities and whose physical movements recall the grace of dance even when she's merely walking, playing her part with enthusiasm and near-abandon. The tight stage work does break down a bit in the last part—too much loose grass on the stage.

King Lear
at the Stratford Festival Theatre, Ontario, 10 October 2002

This production of *King Lear* featured the most sustained energy by an actor that I have ever seen on a stage. Witnessing Christopher Plummer's Lear was, to put it plainly, a signal moment in my life as a playgoer; he left me in tears as the play ended. Plummer developed a character as complex and contradictory as the text itself demands: by turns absent-minded, puzzled, quick, enraged, maddened, senile, regretful and, as the play progresses, gradually stripped of himself until at last he does not know who he is, humbled and yet defiant. A high point: the storm scene requires that the character seem out of control and yet wonderfully articulate, and yet performance after performance has shown a character who is merely hysterical; this is one of those scenes in which the limitations of the actor can become painfully apparent. Happily, Plummer played the scene as well as I have ever seen: madness not merely the rage of senility but a defiance which also "directs" the storm itself. The fool, too, is played wonderfully by Barry MacGregor, and the part of Edmund (Maurice Godin) is superbly nuanced. Other parts are largely played adequately, though Regan and Goneril (Lucy Peacock and Domini Blythe) are too narrowly played as mere black-hearted daughters grinding out their lines. These characters have a past history of exclusion within the family, and could be shaded quite a bit more subtly.

Gripes: first, the blinding of Gloucester involved turning the chair away from the audience so that all we could observe was the arm movements and head postures of Cornwall and Regan. This was complicated by the fact that the action takes place almost within the center entrance—far from the audience. The result was that we could not observe the agony as closely and, indeed, kept us from seeing Gloucester's own agony at all (other than his shouts), at least until he was released to "smell his way to Dover." We do not fully grasp the nature of their cruelty, which is rendered most horrifying when we see its fullest extent in the *viewed* actions upon and reactions of the victim. Secondly, I found *dragging* the corpse of Cordelia onstage a lame choice. Lear should have carried her on, as would be proper for any father who has lost his daughter in such an awful way; his final physical gestures to her should be as tender as his rage at her loss is palpable.

Romeo and Juliet
at the Stratford Festival Theatre, Ontario, 11 October 2002

This was an energetic, declamatory performance of *Romeo and Juliet*. The ensemble work and blocking were superb, and the swordfighting scenes were played with truly astounding expertness and panache. The declamatory style is quite suitable for a comedy of reparté, wit combat, etc. with broadly drawn characters, as is typical of Ben Jonson, and it may work well with the preponderance of such things in the first three acts of *Romeo and Juliet*, particularly in the mouths of Mercutio, the Nurse, and in the ensemble jests of the Montague boys. Yet two aspects of this play render it difficult for such a style: first, even comic characters such as the Nurse or Mercutio are at times highly nuanced, demanding more subtle interpretation than is possible with declamation; and second, the play turns from its almost-comic first three acts to the much more nuanced tragic development of its last two. In this performance, the declamatory style imposed on the actors is not particularly suitable for passages which transcend ensemble humor and demand shading and nuance. The problem shows up most clearly in several individual performances:

Juliet, played by Jodi-Lynn McFadden, never transcended the bouncy, hysterical arm-waving stereotype of the spoiled teenage child developed in her initial dialogue with the nurse—and even in those early scenes her demeanor was problematic, as she could be developed as a much more carefully shaded character even there—cautious to the point of fear with her mother, for example. In the later scene where she should undergo a sea-change—when even the nurse deserts her and she realizes just how *alone* she is, followed by her soliloquy in which she calculates the motives of the friar, the possible outcomes of her taking the potion, deciding at last to chance it because of her love for Romeo—this Juliet was merely an extension of the bouncy brat we saw at the beginning, a point at which she became *annoying*.

Similarly, this Mercutio (Wayne Best) was hampered by the declamatory style: energetic, witty as ever, he floundered in the Mab speech, where he must at last be horrified and exhausted by his own limitless and mad imagination. Instead, he was declaiming in the same way he was elsewhere, oblivious to the heightening cues within the speech and to the contextualizing weariness implied by Romeo's response to him and his own agreement with Romeo's assessment. Graham Abbey's Romeo, on the other hand, was played more quietly than I've usually seen him, often reflective in contrast to other performances, where he is in the main an hyperbolic character, always reactive. I found the change sometimes refreshing, sometimes lacking the energy that the lines demand.

The other failure in this performance was Tybalt, played by Nicolas Van Burek. Tybalt should *dominate* the stage in ways that this Tybalt never approached. A recent Civic/Heritage Theatre performance in Grand Rapids, by comparison, featured a dancer's Tybalt, automatically taking the front and center, driving other characters before him and doing it with a devilish panache that bespoke his delight in dominating others. He *is* a broad character in the mode of the angry boy, and should be so played. The Stratford Festival Tybalt, by comparison, was less assertive, competent but hardly dominating.

The Tempest
Actors from the London Stage, Knickerbocker Theatre, Holland, Mi.
Friday, February 28, 2003

Actors from the London Stage, a company composed of four men and one woman, advertise themselves as a group that collectively works out of the script, without director, to discover how to play the text; they are all veterans of the RSC, Royal National, and Globe Theatres, among others. They are a seasoned group which performs with minimal props, including nine chairs placed in a semi-circle, a reversible black/red robe for Prospero (black for magician's robes, red for ducal cape, the robe also serving as a sail in the opening scene), a 4' dowel (the ship's mast, Prospero's wand, and a clothesline), a bodhran, masks for Prospero's interlude with Juno et al, and a sheet to cover Caliban. Each actor played three-four separate characters, the characters "changing" into other characters through a quick turn of the body onstage. For example, when Miranda sleeps in 1.2, as Prospero summons Ariel, actress Caroline Devlin rose as from a dream and spun around, instantly "becoming" Ariel. Their performance was a fast-paced exercise in metadrama, perhaps demanding the audience's foreknowledge of the text itself, but well-acted. Guy Burgess's performance of Ferdinand/Sebastian/Trinculo particularly stood out, as did Caroline Devlin's Miranda/Ariel; Devlin's accapella renditions of Ariel's songs, performed with the plaintive light melancholy of Celtic border ballads, were haunting moments that underscored the tonality of the entire performance. Terence Wilson's Prospero handled the difficult speeches of 1.2 with aplomb, and both he and Edward Peel's Alonso were effective in the handling of their characters' turns toward forgiveness, mercy, and compassion.

The Merry Wives of Windsor
The Royal Shakespeare Company, The Power Center, Ann Arbor, Mi.
Saturday, March 1, 2003 opening performance

The Merry Wives of Windsor was set in post-World War Two Windsor, with costumes to match; the performance also featured three textual cuts: the obscure jokes in the opening scene and the "German" theft of the host's horses (4.3, 4.5) were eliminated, while William's Latin lesson (4.1) was trimmed to a matter of Mrs. Page bringing the boy to school. Though the set featured a simple design (four tall poles with three wooden shutters and woodwork to suggest the top-story and roofs of three houses), there were extensive prop changes between scenes. Caius's office was suggested by a desk with radio and lamp, a doctor's standing skeleton, and folding screens with a prominent red cross (which also served as the closet in which to hide Simple); the Garter Inn featured two small tables with chairs and a dartboard; and in Ford's washroom we found a wringer and bucket, a clothesline with sheets, and the infamous buckbasket loaded with filthy clothes. The famous "dishorning the spirit" scene (5.5) presented a hallowe'en motif complete with trick-or-treating fairies led by the green-clad Evans in a dunce-cap; the "pinching" segment of the scene gave us two circles of "fairies" moving quickly about the prostrate Falstaff, wailing beneath his enormous horns. In the performance I saw, there was no clear movement of Caius and Slender (with boys) or Anne and Fenton away from the moving circles, yet the action was fast enough and the earlier dialogue clear enough that I did not particularly miss this.

Performances worthy of kudos included (besides those noted above) Richard Cordery's likeable, blustery Falstaff, the wives (Lucy Tregear and Claire Carrie), and Tom Mannion's Frank Ford, whose histrionics delighted the audience. Shallow (David Killick), Page (Simon Coates), Evans (Michael Gardiner), and the Host (Patrick Romer) were played ably, while Pistol (Kieron Jecchinis), Nym (Richard Copestake), and Bardolph (Ciaran McIntyre), were adequate. Evans's "Welsh" accent and Pistol's infamous braggadocio were not as prominent in the portrayals of these humour characters as I have seen in the past.

Coriolanus
The Royal Shakespeare Company, The Power Center, Ann Arbor, Mi.
Sunday, March 2, 2003 opening performance

This performance of *Coriolanus* was so expertly and intensely played that, even after three and a half hours, the audience was visibly moved and enthusiastically rose to shout its approval. The cast, headed by Greg Hicks and Alison Fiske, gave a stunning and curiously sympathetic enactment of a play that has often been criticized for its unlikeable characters; most interestingly, it skirted both the current notion of Volumnia as a suffocating mother and the older idea that the play shows Shakespeare's lack of sympathy for the plebians, instead leaving us a sense of the enormous pity that none of these characters could bend enough to avoid tragedy. With all his faults, Caius Martius emerged as a martyr, Volumnia as a woman who had given all for her nation and who was left with tears; even Aufidius (Chuck Iwuji), despite his perfidy, seemed to awaken at last to regret that he had taken the life of such a man. All of the principals were superb: besides those already named, Richard Cordery's quiet, almost melancholy Menenius, Tom Mannion's and Simon Coates' tribunes—demagogues so despicable that the audience awaited and enjoyed their comeuppance—and Hannah Young's Virgilia, a weeping shadow of her husband's mother who learns at last to stand for her own, were all poignantly represented in an enactment whose bywords were professional commitment and perfect timing.

The performance was also invigorated by its presentation of a Samurai style Rome, giving one pause to muse on the similarities between these two honor-bound, stratified societies with their rigid codes of conduct. The music featured the haunted and compelling Japanese flutes, drums, and percussion familiar to *Ran* aficionados, and the costumes and actors' movements enhanced this cross-cultural transition. Generally, Coriolanus and the patricians were outfitted in elaborate kimono, while the tribunes appeared in simpler olive/black. Commoners wore plain clothes, except in the scene where Aufidius's servants discover the banished Roman hero; these men wore simple red-trimmed turquoise uniforms with round caps. Aufidius and the Volsces were distinguished similarly by class, Tullus given a kimono whose metallic colors made him almost a man of steel, while his soldiers appeared in uniforms reminiscent of both the common soldiers in Kurosawa and the imperial storm troopers of *Star Wars*.

Perhaps the key to this portrayal, though, was the ritualistic handling of movement and blocking, the ferocious clarity of gestures (especially in the case of Coriolanus and Aufidius). The blocking of the initial battle scene, with massed ranks of Volscian storm troopers driving forward to engage the Romans in a circular counter-clockwise motion—with each paired opposites moving in their own individual circles as they hack at each other in the larger circle—was impressive. At the end of that scene, Caius's charge into the massed ranks at the back of the stage and the ensuing dismay among the Romans became prologue to his reappearance as a true war hero, naked from the waist up and covered with blood—resolute, victorious, and enraged.

Similarly, just as Martius's sacrificial character is established through the initial battle scene, Aufidius's turn to pity and remorse comes after a ritualized blood-letting wherein, after initial pauses, Martius is shot down and the Volsces rush upon him, tearing and beating like a pack of wild dogs. Out of this melee rises Aufidius with Martius's heart in his hand, raising it with the bravado of a Lakota warrior raising a bison heart after the hunt. It is only then, in his moment of triumph, that he is prepared to experience remorse—to recall that this man was he who gave them victory.

Troilus and Cressida
at the Tom Patterson Theatre, Stratford, Ontario
Tuesday, 29 July 2003

Richard Monette's bare-stage production of Shakespeare's Trojan play features an interesting approach to the crux of Cressida's identity, spirited ensemble work with several intensely affective performances, and eye-popping metadramatic choices. The daughter of the traitor Calchas, Cressida has been presented with an enormous catalogue of personae and motivations, ranging from Chaucer's complicated, deliberate and tragic heroine to Henryson's ruined beauty, chastised by the gods. Shakespeare creates an ambiguous character who can be played variously as a brazen and knowing beguiler of Troilus or as a tender yet sophisticated young woman who knows that she is likely to be used by whichever males possess her—and who takes a chance on love despite her misgivings. Claire Jullien's Cressida is spirited and sophisticated, tender and uncertain on the night of her assignation, defensive when the Greeks kiss and fondle her, and both brazen and full of regret when she gives herself to Diomedes—but perhaps most interesting is that Monette emphasizes Helen (Linda Prystawska) as Cressida's important and affective opposite—a woman committing adultery as though it were a lark, an aggressive, posturing and giggling sexual adventurer whose coital acrobatics in 3.1 are breathtaking for the quick variety of positions she and Paris assume. The strong contrast developed by Prystawska makes Cressida's fall all the more poignant and cements a foundation for her tragedy which, albeit undercut by her uncle's antics and Thersites' railing, gives this production a foundation for the multiple resonances the play requires.

Given the play's exploration of the ethical, personal, and sexual dysfunction typical of warring societies, the characters of Pandarus, Thersites, Achilles and Patroclus are also important keys to its resonances. Bernard Hopkins' Pandarus—the cynical syphilitic procurer of Troy—and the mastic choral slave of Greece, the ever-railing Thersites (Stephen Ouimette), in many ways enable both plots, also providing commentary which both shapes and undercuts the actions of other characters. The actors here fulfill their charges with gusto. As with the binary contrasts between Cressida and Helen, so too Monette properly contrasts Achilles (Jamie Robinson) and Hector, as well as Achilles and Ajax, but the crowning touch is the relationship of Achilles with Patroclus (David Shelley)—an aggressively physical love-pairing that thoroughly prepares us for the Myrmidon's rage when his "male varlet" is finally struck down, while simultaneously highlighting the disordered attitudes that mark the decay of "degree" infecting the Greeks.

Scenes: the two debate scenes (1.3 and 2.2) are notorious for their long-winded speeches, yet this production sidesteps the problem through excellent blocking and animated presentation. The production is also notable for several fine metadramatic touches: the aforementioned sexual acrobatics of 3.1, the ritualistic spearing of Hector by Achilles' myrmidons (5.9)—robotic antmen whose mechanistic precision belies the heroic illusion—and the final freeze-frame moments where the victims of love—Paris and Helen, Achilles and Patroclus, Troilus and Cressida—are frozen in red light as Pandarus bequeaths his diseases to the audience. Yet peculiarly, after a play underlined by an excellent selection of Keith Thomas's Turkish-influenced music, the brilliant final freeze-frame is punctuated by a jarring Nine-Inch Nails ditty that clashes dully with the tenor of the production: one wonders why the zurna more in keeping with the represented ethos could not have contained the strangeness of this moment.

Antony and Cleopatra.
The Royal Shakespeare Company.
Dir. Gregory Doran. Perf. Patrick Stewart (Antony), Harriet Walter (Cleopatra),
and John Hopkins (Octavius Caesar).
Ann Arbor: The Power Center, 9 November 2006, 1:30 p.m.

Despite its marvelously complex heroine and cast of thoroughly individualized and often loveable characters, *Antony and Cleopatra* has a built-in flaw when it comes to performance: insisting on following the battles of all three days at Actium, the play drags the rising action out through the fights by sea and then land and again sea, Cleopatra's wavering and Antony's threats, Enobarbus's and the god Hercules' desertions, etc., and as a result it risks losing its audience through Acts 3.7 to 4.12. The pattern of seemingly endless stab-and-slash *is* regrettable, especially given that the action up to the beginning of Act 3 is marvelously engaging, and that Cleopatra's final speeches in Act 5 are as intense and fiery a set of lines as may be found in the entire canon of Shakespeare's plays.

That said, I found much to love in the Royal Shakespeare Company's production of the play. For once, I had a first class seat and thus was able to absorb the immense variety of facial gestures and dancer-like precision of movement layering Patrick Stewart's delivery of Antony's lines. The dance duet he shared with Ken Bones (Enobarbus) was an orgasm of precision, the two of them taking center stage in a frenetically fast dance while singing "Come thou Monarch of the vine," the other soldiers counterpointing them in a half-circle of contrary movements. Harriet Walter's Cleopatra was even more amazing, given that the role requires an actress who is an older woman retaining the beauty and energy of one much younger than herself, a personality characterized by "her infinite variety"—at once glib, pensive, lonely, thoughtful, stern, cruel, trapped and carefully plotting her course as a master politician weighing the power of those with whom she deals. She, like Antony, is also a person accustomed to living on the stage of world fame and political decision, and as such both of them have spent their lives without ever knowing the simple flirtations of a love unburdened by one's public role. In Walter's portrayal of the queen, she revels in her discovery of a real amour, yet is always aware that she is the "other woman" to Antony's first wife and later to Octavia. She can jest and emote her own sorrow and frustration even in her smile, and this is entirely to Walter's credit as an actress. Her performance was so poignant in the finale that I choked up and found myself nearly reduced to tears: "My resolution's plac'd, and I have nothing of woman in me; now, from head to foot I am marble-constant, now the fleeting moon no planet is of mine. . . . Husband, I come! Now to that name my courage prove my title! I am fire and air, my other elements I give to baser life."

Other characters were notable as follows: Chris Jarman's soothsayer was played as a Nubian sorcerer—an entirely fitting portrayal, given that we are in an Egypt so exotic that Romans find the land itself a mystery. Lepidus (James Hayes) was wonderfully comic in the drunken soldiers' dance scene, while Octavius (John Hopkins) was far too whiny, puerile, and self-pitying: he should be played as an efficient Machiavel, a murderous killing machine who moves armies with unheard-of speed and is quick to do whatever it takes to dominate, divide and conquer. He must be the antithesis to Antony in every way: youthful, decisive, and coldly ambitious.

Julius Caesar.

**Dir. Sean Holmes. Perf. James Hayes (Julius Caesar), Ariyon Bakare (Antony),
John Light (Brutus), Finbar Lynch (Cassius),
Golda Roshuevel (Calphurnia), and Mariah Gale (Portia).
Ann Arbor: The Power Center, 9 November 2006, 7:30 p.m.**

Julius Caesar is famous for its precise plotting and for its obvious rhetorical character: none of the characters is particularly likeable, as critics have noted, and far too often their speech is *performance* for a public audience rather than introspective struggle with themselves. Still, there are subtle openings for intimacy if the director will take note of them: in the scene where Portia confronts Brutus about his refusal to share his plans with her, in Caesar's private talk with Calphurnia, and in the lines spoken by both Brutus and Antony, revealing the son-like love each of them has for Julius—with the fact that one converts his love to murder for the sake of his political beliefs, while the other's love must convert to rage as a result of Brutus's actions.

Director Sean Holmes skirted all of those possibilities, and in playing up the obvious rhetorical qualities of the play, ignored the nuances that could establish what intimacy is possible in this script. This production thus gave us a Brutus and Portia verbally and physically abusing each other, and a Caesar more given to mock his wife than to tenderly accede to her wishes before

Decius Brutus arrives to persuade him otherwise. Indeed, the whole performance was too starkly efficient in its handling of the text; Cassius was quick with his lines, but did not shade them; Brutus was commanding, rarely pausing to consider his position. Beyond this, after the murder of Caesar, director Holmes had his ghost wandering aimlessly on stage in his bloody shroud whenever Brutus called him to mind—not exactly a distraction, but certainly without a clear point other than to act as a visual prop for the language. Also, there was far too much reliance on thunderous aural effects—booming and smashing that too often overwhelmed the action on stage.

Ariyon Bakare's interpretation of Antony's "let slip the dogs of war" and "friends, Romans, countrymen" (in this script, citizens rather than countrymen) were the high points, as they often are when this play is performed. In this version, a Roman chorus was lined up behind Antony onstage, and while he harangued us, they responded behind him in a way that created a convoluted effect—who's addressing whom, and why aren't they facing each other? This audience member could not help but recall by way of contrast the 1999 400-year performances at the Globe Theatre in London, where *we* in the audience became the Roman crowd to whom Antony appealed, actors having scattered themselves among us and shouting back individually—so that the fellow next to you might suddenly jump up and shout a rabble-rousing line from the script. Sadly, that kind of contact was missing here, even though the speeches were delivered with obvious panache.