

about close reading of verbal texts, dealing with material which is historically different, and having clever thoughts in unpretentious prose. I'd like students to read DiGangi and then do a production. It might be wild.

SIMON SHEPHERD

*Pauline Kiernan*

**Staging Shakespeare**

at the New Globe, London

Macmillan, 1999. 175 p. £12.99.

ISBN: 0-333-66273-3.

There are two views of Shakespeare's Globe in academic drama circles: as an exercise in Disneyfication, and as a rigorous laboratory experiment. Pauline Kiernan presents here the fruits of three years' work as a Leverhulme Research Fellow charged with studying the actors' use of the theatre, and this is the first systematic attempt to demonstrate what has been learned from the use of the building, as distinct from its construction. The focus is the successful all-male production of *Henry V* in the 1997 season, directed by Richard Olivier. Kiernan writes as an enthusiastic participant, who fed historical research into the production process.

The first part of the book, subtitled 'The Shock of the Old', is the most valuable. The shock was created by the participatory audience who forced users of the theatre onto a steep learning curve, changing habits of a lifetime. There are fascinating practical observations about the way use of the corner engenders audience sympathy, and how a sense of physical intimacy is created not by physical proximity but by using distance along the diagonal. The question of the yard remains unresolved: actors have found use of the yard essential, but Kiernan is doubtful that there was any such use of the space in the Shakespearean period.

Chapter Two is concerned with illusion, and relates to Kiernan's recent *Shakespeare's Theory of Drama*. The idea that Shakespeare's metatheatrical references 'break the illusion' is discarded in favour of a more fluid understanding of the actor-audience relationship. John Styan is placed as the prophet who understood how the Elizabethan playhouse worked, and I would have welcomed some picking apart of Styan's assumptions.

Part Two is headed 'Staging History: *Henry V* in Preparation and Performance', and the documentation seems rather piecemeal. Part Three is effectively an appendix; headed 'New Voices from the Playhouse', it transcribes comments by actors and others involved in the early productions. Much fascinating raw material is here, and I found myself wanting a similar array of comments from disparate spectators. This reads like an in-house publication in which nothing too

aggressive can be said, and it feels like work in progress, with the most digested material coming at the beginning. But it does demonstrate the value of the experiment, with much more to be discovered as time goes on. I hope for a sequel.

DAVID WILES

*Elizabeth Schafer*

**Ms-Directing Shakespeare:**

**Women Direct Shakespeare**

London: Women's Press, 1998. 277 p. £14.99.

ISBN: 0-7043-4544-7.

Working in a refreshingly accessible style, Schafer sets out to demythologize the idea that women do not direct Shakespeare. Her introduction argues that women have indeed been directing Shakespeare for centuries, but that their directing contributions have been largely ignored in past and present accounts of theatre history. To bring this work out of the margins, Schafer presents her study in three parts: 'The Directors', 'The Plays', and 'Women Directors: a Herstory'.

Part One includes interview-style presentations from a selection of contemporary women directors who work on Shakespeare in a variety of production contexts (one of the points the book stresses is the way in which women tend to direct in less prestigious contexts, accounting in turn for the way in which their work receives relatively little notice). The contemporary directors Schafer selects are Joan Littlewood, Jane Howell, Yvonne Brewster, Di Trevis, Jules Wright, Helena Kaut-Howson, Deborah Page, Jude Kelly, and Gale Edwards. Schafer states at the outset that she was not aiming for an exhaustive list – and, for those who might be wondering, she explains that Deborah Warner declined to be interviewed on account of the way in which such a study might prove a 'regressive and reductive' context for her work. Including interview material is a way of allowing the directors to speak for themselves and to give their own explanations of their production work.

While material in Part One 'speaks' in general of the difficult, male-dominated conditions under which these women work, Part Two looks at 'Ms-directed' productions of specific plays. In this section, young women interested in directing theatre professionally or in a university theatre will find invaluable insights into how to revision particular scenes or characters with greater attention to issues of gender, class, and race. Particularly insightful are the various strategies for working towards a feminist critique of *The Taming of the Shrew* and the personal readings which women directors brought to 'the great patriarchal tragedy' *King Lear* (especially Kaut-Howson's account of her mother's death and the impact which this had on her interpretation and direction

of the play, with Kathryn Hunter in the title role). As Schafer sets these feminist voices against the clamour of the male reviewing body, rushing to put down what is perceived as the misdirection of Shakespeare, she underscores the male bias of contemporary Shakespeare reviewing. While on the one hand this makes for a depressingly familiar story, on the other the strategy of counter-pointing allows us to hear the traditionally silenced other side of the story. Take, for example, Littlewood's defence of her accent/class decisions in the universally panned production of *Henry IV*: 'If someone spoke with a Geordie accent it didn't matter. Geordie's better than that muck they speak at Stratford-upon-Avon.'

In Part Three of her study, Schafer sketches a brief history of women directing Shakespeare. Although aware that her 'chronicle of stars' approach risks marginalizing the work of the less famous, Schafer argues this as a necessary first step towards the reclaiming of theatre history.

Even in this brief presentation of past women directors, I began to feel that there were several PhD topics crying out for researchers. I've no doubt that Schafer's volume will upset many traditional Shakespeare scholars – but the extent to which it does will be a measure of the book's success. In the meantime, it underlines the very urgent need for women to continue directing Shakespeare if we are to have anything other than the conventional, misogynist interpretations that keep many of us away from the Shakespearean 'malestream'.

ELAINE ASTON

Michael Robinson

**Studies in Strindberg**

Norwich: Norvik Press, 1998. 244 p. £24.95.  
ISBN: 1-870041-37-2.

Michael Robinson, ed.

**Strindberg: the Moscow Papers**

Stockholm: Strindbergssällskapet, 1998. 224 p.  
ISBN: 0-1870041-43-7.

Over the last dozen or so years, Michael Robinson has done more than anyone to create an understanding of Strindberg in Britain. He has now gathered some of his recent essays into a volume of *Studies in Strindberg*, and also, in *Strindberg: the Moscow Papers*, edited the contributions to the Twelfth International Strindberg Conference. The task, which he has conducted through exemplary translations and critical studies, is both uphill and very necessary, since, unlike Ibsen and Chekhov, Strindberg has never found a lasting home in British theatre. Moments of accommodation – as with Laurence Olivier's *Captain* in the National Theatre's *Dance of Death* in 1965, or with Katie Mitchell's Royal Shakespeare production of *Easter*

in 1995 – have shaken, but never quite removed, a prevailing conception of Strindberg as embarrassingly alien: a super-subjective and misogynistic dramatist mainly remembered as the author of a few 'naturalistic' plays, like *Miss Julie* and *The Father*.

When three young women directors mounted three of the Chamber Plays at the Gate in 1997, members of the audience were heard to comment 'How like Beckett' – a late British discovery of something long taken for granted on the other side of the Channel where, as Michael Robinson reminds us in his essay on *The Dance of Death* and *Endgame*, Beckett saw *The Ghost Sonata* several times, in Roger Blin's production at the Gaité-Montparnasse, before writing *Endgame*.

The importance of *Studies in Strindberg*, where this essay is included, is manifold. As a whole the volume drives home the variety of Strindberg's output – as a painter as well as a writer in every conceivable literary and sub-literary genre, including drama. Through all the essays, if most explicitly those in a section entitled 'Narrative, Plot, and Self', runs a sensitive recognition of the nature of Strindberg's creativity: the interaction of life and art, the multiple self, which made him a dramatist uniquely able to move through naturalism into proto-modernism.

Because Robinson is so knowledgeably aware of the wider European dimension, he is himself uniquely able to demonstrate that Strindberg is, as Michael Billington wrote in 1995, 'the midwife of modern European theatre'. At times these insights are excitingly focused on individual plays – as in the essay on *Creditors*, where surface naturalism is shown to be married to deeper structures anticipating the metatheatrical features of *A Dream Play* and other post-*Inferno* plays: 'In Strindberg, as *Creditors* goes some way to demonstrate, life is always theatre – and theatre, life.'

*The Moscow Papers*, inevitably, are more of a mixed bag, headed by Michael Robinson's own essay (also in *Studies in Strindberg*) on the process of growth and artistic renewal that Strindberg went through during the years from 1892 to 1898, his *Inferno* period. In a section on 'Strindberg and Symbolism', Freddie Rokem writes fascinatingly on Strindberg's paralinguistic studies, while several essays debate the relative influence on the dramatist of French symbolists and Swedenborg; elsewhere, Thomas Bredsdorff finds Strindberg's attitude to symbolism and allegory more radical than Paul de Man's: '*Inferno* is a symbolic narrative that demystifies symbolism.'

A section is devoted to 'Strindberg and Russia', where on the one hand Björn Meidal, the indefatigable Swedish editor of Strindberg's letters, shows how Strindberg appropriated the idea of 'Russia' for his own purposes, and on the other hand a number of Russian scholars and theatre practitioners discuss the reception of Strindberg