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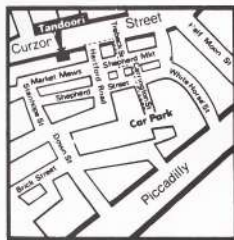
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Directors In Whose Service?

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 on? The scholars have been gnawing at the bone of the play since Shakespearean scholarship discovered its possibilities for intellectual chewing.

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

The play is so well known to many playgoers that the least twist of a line, the teeniest distortion of character, the mildest embellishment of the text, puts us on our mettle and sets our minds a-whirring. What is meant? What's the allusion? Does that costume imply gangsters? Are those soldiers from the Balkans? Why should a fond old father 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 am-

biguous overtures, — why should such a nice old buffer suddenly start fondling her right breast?

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

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 inside out and if he does therefore pull the text this way and that, sticking to the lines of course while illustrating the wealth of possible meanings, he is understandably refurbishing the thing, or (to put it more grandly) re-defining it.

This approach is amusing. It is bound to be amusing. Perversity always amuses, 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 "resting") performs on a classical text are the consequence of what he sees as a natural challenge.

Here is something musty — familiar to most of us. How to give it novelty? A posher way of putting it would be to

1983 No.30

Programme by
Stilwell Darby & Co. Ltd.

Published weekly by Stilwell Darby & Co. Ltd.
Editorial and advertisement offices
8 Headfort Place London SW1X 2DH (01 235 3547).
The views expressed do not necessarily reflect the
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DIRECTORS IN WHOSE SERVICE?

claim that in addition to redefining a masterpiece (which could sound pompous or egoistic) you were trying to make it relevant. The word should be topical, but relevant sounds grander. 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 playgoer 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 fanciful updating or curious costumes 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 playgoer seldom gets. It is supposed that he is looking for a new allusion, a new point which will hoist the hoary 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, misfired), this *Hamlet* seemed to suffer from that condescending tone

which decrees that you and I won't perceive what great old plays are about unless we view them through a special directorial lens which brims 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 Voltemand 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. Those slouch-hats 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 doting of fathers, Polonius, a widower with one treasured child, be made to seem incestuous by fondling his daughter without protest? Or Hamlet humiliate his prospective father-in-law by a lewd gesture which must have alarmed old Polonius into ordering a cod-piece?

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

It is a play which gives us enough to think about without unprincely princes, courtiers in crooks' clothing, and unseemly extra-textual eruptions 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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Bill Kenwright

by arrangement with Julian Courtenay for the May Fair Theatre

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**

First public performance at the May Fair Theatre 10th May 1981.



RICHARD TODD

Richard Todd's distinguished film and theatrical career started in the 1930's 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 Them That Trespass*. This was followed by the memorable *The Hasty Heart* in which his performance as the young Scot dying of a kidney wound brought him countless honours, including an Oscar nomination and the British National Film Award. Amongst the many films to follow this were *Robin Hood*, *Rob Roy*, *Yangtze Incident* and *The Dam Busters*, all of which rank as classics

of the cinema. In 1965 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 *Dear Octopus*, another great success. In 1970 he founded Triumph Theatre Productions in partnership with Duncan Weldon 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 1976 starred with the Australian National Theatre Company in *Equus*. Since then he has continued his busy theatrical career, interspersing it with some television, the most recent including Bulman in *The Boy Dominic*, 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*.

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 Gielgud 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 Manson 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. Anxious not 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*, *Hadleigh*, *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 Dysart in *Equus*, *The Doctor's Dilemma* and as Sir Robert Morton in *The Winslow Boy* at Edinburgh, and as Sir Thomas Moore in *A Man For All Seasons* at Basingstoke. Eric also spent two seasons at George Murcell's St. Georges Shakespeare Theatre Company. Eric can also frequently be heard on radio, and seen on television re-runs of such classic films as *The Colditz Story*, *Danger Within* and *Sink the Bismarck*.





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 that 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 Stoppard's *Travesties*, and, uniquely, Gwendolyn in *The Importance of Being Ernest* at the Calgary Theatre, and Anya in *The Cherry Orchard* and Hortensia 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 *Flint*, *Peer Gynt* and *Vile Bodies* for C.B.C. (Radio). Since returning to this country, Brigid has played Viola in *Twelfth Night* at Leicester and toured 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.

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

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 Ten? I Am*, *You Must Be Virginia*, *Saving It For Albie*, *When The Boys Come Out To Play*, *Sunday In Perspective*, *Occupier's Rish*, *Time and Mr. Madingley*, *A Slight Formality*, *I Can See Your Lips Move*, *Jack's Trade*. Adaptations for television include *Murder Most English*, *The Prince and the Pauper* and *Plain*

Murder. He also contributes regularly to television series and co-created the BBC film series *Shoestring*. His radio Play *Was It Something I Said?* was a winner of the 1978 Giles Cooper Radio Award. His stage plays include *The Maintenance Man*, *The Dog It Was*, *Conscience Be Damned*, *Albert and Virginia* and *Outside Edge* which won the Evening Standard Award for 1979. His latest play *Local Affairs* – which starred Irene Handl – was premiered in November 1980 at The Haymarket Theatre, Leicester.



HUGH GOLDIE (Director)

Hugh Goldie began his career in 1938 as an A.S.M. with Sheffield Repertory Company, after service with the RAF 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 1953 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 *Mrs. Gibbons' Boys*, *Signpost to Murder*, *Busybody*, *Alibi For A Judge*, *According to the Evidence*, *The Queen's Highland Servant*, *Lady Be Good*, *Arsenic and Old Lace*, *Laburnham Grove* 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*, *Conduct Unbecoming*, *Abelard and Heloise*, *Forget Me Not Lane*, *How the Other Half Loves*, *Ten Times Table*, *Filumena*, *Night and Day*, *Dirty Linen*, *Once a Catholic*, *Make and Break*, *Fallen Angels*, *Bud 'n' Ches* with Bernie Winters and Leslie Crowther. His production of *Gaslight* with Patricia Phoenix 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*, *Deja Revue* with Sheila Hancock, *Touch of Purple* with Ray Barrett, *Frontiers of Farce* with Leonard Rossiter, *Birds of Paradise* with Moira Lister, the record breaking *Emu in Pantoland*, *Who 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 Gilmour, 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 Ray. 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 New 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.



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General Manager
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Assistant to Mr. Kenwright
Company Stage Manager
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May Fair Theatre

The May Fair is unique among London's West End theatres in that it is contained within the walls of an hotel. The May Fair Hotel has stood in Stratton and Berkeley Streets since 1927. 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 1962 work began to convert The Candlelight Room into the Intimate Theatre that is now the May Fair. The 26-ft. wide stage and 310 seats were provided for, and above, parts of two floors of bedrooms were converted to allow for the flying and hanging of scenery plus, of course, the usual theatre backstage facilities and dressing rooms.

The Theatre was opened on 17th June 1963 by Sir Ralph Richardson who starred in the opening production of Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. The Theatre, which is controlled by Grand Metropolitan Hotels, was only the fourth to be opened in London since 1940 and was designed to make it totally adaptable and capable of being used outside the three or so hours a day for the usual evening's play. The only possibility overlooked in the design of the Theatre was that of turning 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 with, of course, the full facilities of the Hotel being available to delegates. Many familiar faces have appeared in these shows, among them: Michael Aspel, Jimmy Edwards, Gerry Marsden, Georgie Fame and Bruce Forsyth.

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

Two even more unusual shows staged here have been a bridge competition relayed to the audience on a scoreboard resembling a bingo card with commentary by Omar Sharif and a 15-minute show launching a new shoe fabric at a cost of £5,000.

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 Author*, 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 on 7th September 1970 Christopher Hampton's *The Philanthropist* starring Alec McCowen opened having had a season

at the Royal Court Theatre. Alec McCowen was succeeded by George Cole and then Nigel Hawthorne and in all the play ran for over three years, closing finally on 27th October 1973. In between these long runs have been a number of matinee presentations of *Sooty* which played to capacity audiences for 15 years running.

Since *The Philanthropist* productions have included seasons of *The Farm* from the Royal Court, *The Ride Across Lake Constance* from Hampstead Theatre Club and Roy Dotrice's remarkable tour de force as John Aubrey in *Brief Lives*. More recent successes have included *Hinge and Bracket* and Michael Frayn's *Alphabetical Order* (again from Hampstead Theatre Club) and James Bolam, Jane Asher, Stephen Moore in Christopher Hampton's *Treats*. In January 1977 Michael Codron presented yet another successful transfer from the Hampstead Theatre Club *Dusa, Fish, Stas & Vi* which ran for 9 months, and earned Alison Fiske the award of 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 *Are you now or have you ever been...?* a dramatic reconstruction of the McCarthy Hollywood witch hunt. Gordon Chater opened in February 1978 in the Australian award winning one-man play by Steve Spears *The Elocution 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 Rawlings starred in Jason Lindsay's one character play *Empress Eugenie* followed by two transfers from the Theatre at New End in Hampstead, *Flashpoint* by Tom Kempinski and *A Day in Hollywood, A Night in the Ukraine*, which won the Evening Standard Drama Award for the Best Musical of 1979 and was joint-winner of the Plays and Players Critics Award for the Best Comedy of 1979. In February 1980, Susannah York and Daniel Massey starred in *Appearances*, an adaptation of the Henry James short story *A Private Life* by Simone Benmussa of the Compagnie Renaud-Barrault in Paris, who also directed, designed and lit the play.

After a brief closure in June '80 the theatre reopened with Beatrice Reading's one woman show *Pack Up All Your Cares and Woe*. This was followed by *The Flying Karamazov Bros* who received the critics acclaim for their unusual show of juggling and theatrics. A short season of Quentin Crisp's celebrated one-man show followed and most recently a successful and extended run of *Three Men in A Boat*, with Jeremy Nicholas.

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MEMORIES OF OLD BROADWAY

by Patrick Ludlow

In 1919 the BARRYMORES were on Broadway. And so was I – but not for long. They (meaning our impresario Morris Gest) had shoved us down town in a moribund mausoleum called The Manhattan Opera House. To our audience, in that vast emporium, we were like specks on an horizon.

But the Barrymores were everywhere. Ethel was playing Lady Helen Haden in *Declassé* at the Lyceum. Lionel was at the Criterion in *The Jest*, 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 flickers by day and acted on stage at night. They were coining it in. 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 *Raffles* and *Doctor Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. Still it was Lionel who was the stayer, one of the first to be a noise in pictures he outlived the silents, dominated the hey-day of the talkies, and even succumbed 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 'Luck 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 vagabonds slink in through the stage door, were masses of irate Irish – banners aloft and drums beating – shouting: '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 Nieuwe Amsterdam shimmering in the sunlight off Plymouth Sound, the dawn approach to the fabulous cubic city from the fo'c'sle head.

Manhattan, more than sixty summers ago, retained the whiff of a pioneer city. No man got out of a taxi; they leapt out, and while paying the

MEMORIES OF OLD BROADWAY

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 hooting 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 thunderous moan – but 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 its grand apartments and automobiles running five abreast, the roar was more refined. But Eighth had its attraction too with those gigantic trucks laden with produce. And Lexicon definitely had its fascination with the coal black Mamas and red hot jazz. Then there was the grandeur of Riverside Drive, the curious but seductive smell in China Town, the dazzle of the Great White Way – and for me the glorious reek of grease paint in Times Square.

There, at the Palace of Varieties, was Ted Lewis with his battered top hat leading his band with his piccolo, pausing to enquire: 'Everybody happy?'

But it was the Barrymores who were the royals of Broadway, so much

so that a play was written mocking their regal state. It was a furore in New York, but when produced later in the West End, Londoners couldn't understand how so much fuss could be made of mummies.

Larry Olivier played the thinly disguised portrait of the debauched, dissolute, Lothario John Barrymore with his retinue of wives and paramours. Those who remember Dolores 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 supping in the small hours at Sardi's and meeting all the stars was super. But in that gossipy 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 astute 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 flopped everyone had been kind and the press had given me rave notices. Never mind, even if the Barrymores held Broadway, we were royals in Canada. I was even likened to our then adored Prince of Wales!



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