THE DRAMATIC MEDIUM

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Recycling Shakespeare

THE DRAMATIC MEDIUM

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Recycling Shakespeare
by Charles Marowitz

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For Peter Brook

who first made me aware of the
buried treasure

And Jan Kott

who drew the map that led me to it

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General editor's preface

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The aim of the series is to analyse and redefine the nature of the dramatic medium. The work of structuralists and semiologists in recent years has considerably altered the implication of the term 'text' in the area of theatre studies. But in considering works in performance as well as the interrelationship of the contrasted elements of the medium an extension of this approach is demanded.

By examining the dramatic aspects of film, ballet and music-theatre along with the work of pioneer twentieth-century practitioners, the series aims to promote a richer understanding of the features and potential of theatrical language.

Basic to the series is an examination of the relationship between new developments in Europe and America, apparent in all areas of drama, from music-theatre and dance through to modern conventions of acting and directing.

David Hirst

• *Preface*

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This book is directed at two enemies – the academics and the traditionalists. Often they can be found together in an unholy alliance and, where they are, the works of Shakespeare are embalmed or rigidified, diminished or despoiled.

The assumption behind the book is that ‘Shakespeare’ is matter and matter can be reduced, expanded, transformed or reconstituted. To those who believe that ‘a classic’ is an entity fixed in time and bounded by text, this may be a rough ride.

Throughout the book, despite a tone which may seem arrogant and arbitrary, I am propounding views which are personal to myself and which I do not for a moment expect others to adopt. I am not proselytising ‘a view of Shakespeare’ with an eye towards effecting conversions. Unlike the views of scholars or critics, mine have evolved from hands-on experiences with several of Shakespeare’s plays and it was not until reflecting on these experiences that I found I held these opinions.

In some ways, one’s view of Shakespeare is analagous to one’s view of art in general. The way in which one experiences a Shakespearian play is related to the way in which one comprehends life. Some people contend that Shakespearian truth is there to be discovered using the tools of the scholar, the critic and the historian. I would contend that Shakespeare is like a prism in which I discern innumerable reflections of myself and my society and, like a prism, it refracts many pinpoints of colour, rather than transmitting one unbroken light.

What I love best in Shakespeare are the facets of myself and my world that I find there. What I like least are the ‘commercials’ he has inspired over four centuries. What I abominate are the friends he has made over the past one hundred years. I have yet to reconcile myself to the paradox that I can love the

Preface

work of a writer whose champions and stalwarts are so detestable.

Charles Marowitz

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