

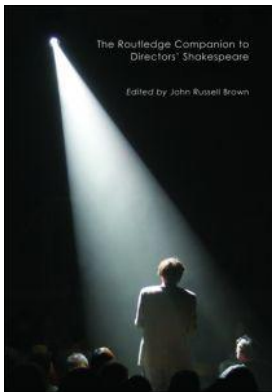
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GLEN BYAM SHAW

Nick Walton

Glen Byam Shaw's direction was commonly perceived as being 'assured and unobtrusive', 'blessedly straightforward', 'a model of sensitive presentation', and above all 'sympathetic to the players and the play'. His direction was also said to possess a 'Mozartian quality', 'a radiance' and an 'unobtrusive charm'. The superlatives 'enchanting', 'splendid', 'subtle', 'vivid', 'astonishing' and 'sublime' often appeared in descriptions of Shaw's work, and perhaps the greatest compliment paid to this director was the frequency with which critics concurred that he 'allowed Shakespeare to speak for himself'. Shaw's notes, letters and character sketches paint a picture of a deeply sensitive reader of Shakespeare's works, a man who had little difficulty in empathising with Shakespeare's characters and who was open to the variety of interpretations that this dramatist's works allow.

Glencairn Alexander Byam Shaw (1904–86) began his career in the theatre as an actor. During the 1920s and 1930s he gained stage experience, acting alongside John Gielgud, Laurence Olivier, Edith Evans and Peggy Ashcroft, all of whom he would direct later in his career. Shaw believed that the very finest actors are needed to do justice to Shakespeare's works; in his own words, 'Shakespeare calls for stars that sound the trumpets and make the air vibrate' (Addenbrooke 1974: 19). Biographical accounts suggest that he never much enjoyed being on stage, but his experience as a performer certainly contributed to his success as a director. Shaw's formative experiences heightened his awareness of the craftsmanship involved in a performance. Due to his early experience, and later his work as an actor-trainer, theatre administrator and producer, Shaw came to be regarded as a 'actor's director'. He privileged actors' performances above any theoretical ideas of his own, and his sensitivity to their craft allowed them the freedom to experiment.

Shaw's acting career ended when he became an officer in the Royal Scots in 1940. He served his country in Burma from 1942, suffering a terrible wound to his leg for which he had to spend eight months recovering in an army

hospital. Shaw's brother was admitted to the same hospital, and during their convalescence he suggested that Glen plan a production of one of Shakespeare's plays. He began to prepare notes towards a production of *Antony and Cleopatra*, making detailed observations about characters, settings and timings of scenes. In conceiving this production, he outlined some of the tenets of his approach to Shakespeare that remained fundamental to his directorial vision. Among his notes, he wrote that, 'It seems difficult to cut any scene without interrupting the flow of the play', and added that 'the chief point which arises from my study is that one does not want a BIG production' (Shaw 1946). Throughout his career, Shaw presented Shakespeare's works free from structural emendation or directorial exhibitionism. His aim was to be faithful to Shakespeare's text and to create an environment in which the play's spirit could be conveyed most clearly.

In preparation for this production, Shaw wrote detailed character sketches for all of the roles. He continued this practice over time, building an archive of insightful character criticism, which served as a starting point for rehearsals. He was familiar with the character criticism of both Harley Granville Barker and A.C. Bradley, and their combined influence is evident in these notes, which he prepared for the role of Antony:

The man is great. That is the first and foremost thing that must be got over to the audience. If this is not achieved by the actor, then the whole characterisation falls to the ground and probably the play with it. Of course it is easy enough to say 'You must be great' to an actor, but how is it done? I'm sure this is a case where the 'star' is essential [. . .] Antony is a great leader. A dashing cavalry officer. A tremendous personality. A sensualist. He has a wonderful physique. He can drink all night and fight all the next day and win the battle! He is simple minded, easily influenced: quick tempered but kind and honest. The sort of officer who is enormously popular with his troops but not so popular with his Generals. He is in his early 40s, but past his best, and definitely on the decline. He has become slightly Egyptian looking. When he gets back to Rome he looks unusual, almost like a foreigner, and feels out of place.

(Shaw 1946)

Shaw's military experience influenced his reading of Shakespeare's soldiers, and it also helped fashion his approach to direction; like a general he brought a sense of discipline to the rehearsal room; he had a strategy and led his company by example, from the front.

On his return to England, Shaw was able to put his theories into practice

when he produced *Antony and Cleopatra* at the Piccadilly Theatre in 1946, with the pre-war film stars Edith Evans and Godfrey Tearle in the principal roles. Consistent with Shaw's desire to avoid a 'big' production, his design team 'Motley' favoured a permanent set, which in theory would allow the action to proceed uninterrupted and at great speed. However, despite Shaw's desire to imitate the conventions of the Elizabethan playhouse and present Shakespeare's scenes in unbroken succession, his production proved ponderous. George Rylands complained that:

The setting of *Antony and Cleopatra* was so pretentious and uncomfortable that the tragedy never had a chance, from the great processional opening which was muddled away to nothing until the hauling up of the hero with pulleys and a fishing net on to the platform surrounding what appeared to be an air-raid shelter or an elevator with sliding doors. The stage was so cluttered with permanent solids that the essential contrast of the juxtaposed scenes in Rome and Alexandria was quite lost.

(Rylands 1948: 105)

Shaw's development as a director is marked by his desire to address the criticisms levelled at this production. He worked to create practical sets that freed the stage from clutter, and, ultimately, Motley's delicate designs brought distinction to his productions.

The 1946 production was hampered by the mannered acting style of Shaw's principal performers, which was in conflict with his desire for speed and fluidity of performance. Over time, Shaw began to establish a modern acting style, which, though observed from life, could adapt to the speed and rhythms of Shakespeare's texts. From 1947 until 1951, Shaw joined Michel Saint-Denis and George Devine to run the Old Vic Centre in London, which housed The Old Vic Dramatic School, and the Young Vic Company. The aim behind the Dramatic School was to train actors, directors and designers who would create productions for new audiences and whose work could feed into the main stage work of the Old Vic Company. Shaw helped to shape and influence the next generation of theatre practitioners, some of whom he would work with again when he moved to the Stratford Memorial Theatre in 1952. Notable graduates include Keith Mitchell, Derek Godfrey, Joan Plowright, Patrick Wymark and Denis Quilley.

The actor-training at the theatre school covered three broad categories of style: Shakespearian, Restoration and Modern. As Audrey Williamson records:

The training included much that is usual in serious schools, especially

schools with elements of group outlook sympathetic to the Russian Arts theatre and the French Vieux Colombier and Compagnie des Quinze [. . .]. There was an emphasis on improvisation, classes in mime and make-up, some use of comic masks, fencing lessons, voice production, and in addition lectures on the history of Literature, drama and design.

(Williamson 1957: 71)

A concentration upon individual characterisation became a defining feature of Shaw's approach to actor-training. He would begin each new course by casting students in a Shakespeare play and proceeded to direct them as if they were fully developed actors.

Having prepared his detailed notes, he would work out the actor's movements using a collection of model soldiers. To clarify the three-dimensional image of his vision, he worked in a model box using figures made from pipe-cleaners, which could sit, kneel and walk upstairs. He arrived in the rehearsal room with the play's moves mapped in his mind, and as he rehearsed, he would gradually withdraw, leaving the actors the freedom to explore a scene's dynamics for themselves.

Shaw approached direction as a business undertaking, and actors valued the meticulous preparation that he put into his productions. At the beginning of rehearsals for the first of the Young Vic's productions in 1948, Shaw expressed his philosophy to his young company:

Our strength should be in the fact that we are determined to do this play better than it has ever been done, and we can only achieve that if we work on every aspect of the production as well as we possibly can. It must be 'alive' from the beginning.

(Shaw 1948)

Fundamental to Shaw's directorial approach was his desire to encourage actors and audiences to engage more directly with the text itself.

Shaw's growing desire to bring a contemporary relevance to his productions was reflected in his decision to stage *Henry V* at The Old Vic in 1951. His own wartime experience and his sensitivity to London's post-war sensibility helped fashion this production, which differed markedly in its presentation of patriotism from Laurence Olivier's popular 1944 film. Aware that audiences had become disillusioned with the supposed glories of war, Shaw explored the play from the perspective of a quiet, saintly king who fights only because he is convinced of the justice of his cause, not out of a desire for the glories of battle. The battle at Agincourt became one stage in a protracted

campaign rather than the climax of patriotic warmongering, an unfortunate necessity. Alec Clunes's King Henry, like the audiences of 1951, had few illusions about the nature of a prolonged military campaign.

Despite Shaw's original contention that, 'it seems difficult to cut any scene without interrupting the flow of the play' (1946), the text of *Henry V* was cut dramatically, encouraging a more sympathetic understanding of Henry's plight and character. A high proportion of the 857 lines omitted made reference to Henry's youthful unruliness and to his ambitions in France. Breaking with tradition, Shaw shortened Henry's reply to the Dauphin's insult; he omitted the King's admission of the 'barbarous licence' he had enjoyed as a young man (Act I, Scene 2, lines 269–72), and he silenced his bloody desire to 'dazzle all the eyes of France, / Yea strike the Dauphin blind to look on us' (Act I, Scene 2, lines 278–80). Henry's reputation was also enhanced significantly by the omission of his command 'Then every soldier kill his prisoners' (Act IV, Scene 6, line 37). Shaw removed some prominent references to the fatalities of war, softening Shakespeare's raw remembrance of the dead; he cut Henry's poignant speech 'A many of our bodies shall no doubt / Find native graves' (Act IV, Scene 3, lines 96–108) and erased the names of the fallen French (Act IV, Scene 8, lines 91–101).

Shaw's textual alterations gave Clunes the freedom to foreground Henry's benevolence in his performance. At first, he appeared remote as if feeling his way into kingship behind a façade of regality. He attained full stature when he rose with dignity to the Dauphin's insult and continued to convey the King's sense of responsibility throughout the production. Shaw's concentration on subtle characterisation can be appreciated from Richard David's description of Clunes's delivery of Henry's lines:

Just because it began so quietly, so informally, "We few, we happy few, we band of brothers" gathered irresistible power as it proceeded, so that the climax was overwhelming; and in the speech on Commodity Clunes carried us with him through each turn of the King's thought. We were thus brought close to a Harry who was very much more than a heroic figure in a painted cloth.

(David 1952: 126)

Further sympathy for Henry was evoked through Shaw's depiction of the French court. For this post-war audience, Paul Rogers's Dauphin evoked Hitler through the vicious and hysterical delivery of his lines. This vocal intemperance was matched with physical violence; as Exeter departed in Act II, Scene 4, the Dauphin spun round in fury and struck a tray of metal goblets from the hands of an attendant. Later, before his entrance in Act III,

Scene 7, the screams of a peasant girl could be heard offstage implying a cruel lecherous side to the Dauphin's character. Shaw's interpretation of the drama anticipated Ian Holm's portrayal of Henry in John Barton and Peter Hall's 1964 RSC production, which also presented a king with no relish for war.

Great emphasis was placed upon the role of the Chorus played by Roger Livesey; his casual delivery of the Chorus's lines endeared him to the audience, winning him both sympathy and loyalty. Dressed in an open-collared white shirt and black trousers, the Chorus contrasted effectively with the other players, costumed in rich but subdued historical splendour. There was a bareness to Shaw's stage. The Chorus spoke his opening lines in front of six tall flagpoles arranged symmetrically on either side of the stage. Flags and banners were unfurled to indicate movement between the English and French courts; the mastheads of two ships (positioned upstage) towered over the actors before Henry's embarkation for France, and a couple of cannons and provision wagons represented the battlefield as Henry motivated his troops before Agincourt. Shaw successfully blended the bare-stage conventions of Shakespeare's Globe with the new stagecraft's emphasis upon suggestive lighting, and his approach was praised for the demands it put upon the audiences' 'imaginary forces'.

Running the Old Vic Centre developed Shaw's organisational and managerial skills while exploring Shakespeare's works on stage and in the rehearsal room. His administrative and diplomatic skills were of importance when he joined Antony Quayle at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre in 1952, eventually becoming Head of the Company himself in 1957. Quayle and Shaw shared a vision for Shakespeare at Stratford; they looked to assemble a large company, led by distinguished actors, who could present a small repertoire of plays performed to West End standards. Shaw helped transform the Memorial Theatre from a small provincial theatre into an international showcase for some of the best of British talent. In eight years, he arranged four London seasons, sent tours overseas to thirteen countries and produced twelve plays himself.

Shaw's approach to staging Shakespeare satisfied the diverse expectations of Stratford's post-war audiences. Ivor Brown notes that:

The producer of Shakespeare at Stratford has always to face one dilemma. His public is a double one. Small, but vocal, is that section which, knowing Shakespeare and theatrical practice intimately, wants novelty of approach and favours experiment even to the verge of the fantastic. The much larger public, with no pretensions to special knowledge, wants to see the play. If there are stars in the sky, so much the better.

(Brown 1959: 11)

In 1953, Shaw chose to return to *Antony and Cleopatra*, which had not been performed in Stratford for eight years. His production boasted West End stars in Michael Redgrave and Peggy Ashcroft, investing the principal roles with instant ‘star quality’. Shaw’s opening address to his company reveals his approach to directing works for the second time:

I want to tell you at once that I have produced this play before. It would be silly if I didn’t confess it [. . .] I say ‘confess it’ because I think that if someone has done a thing before there is always a fear that they will want to do it again in exactly the same way or will be led into doing it differently just for the sake of being different. Personally I am always slightly worried when I know an actor has played a part in another production if he is going to play the same part in a production of mine. I can only ask you to believe me when I say that I have tried to eliminate from my mind the memories of that other production and aim to do it fresh. On the other hand I have refused to change my feeling about the play in order to try and be different.

(Shaw 1953)

Shaw stressed at the beginning of rehearsals that ‘one of the most important things in the production will be to make a clear differentiation between the atmosphere in Egypt and the atmosphere in Rome’ (1953). He associated Egypt with warmth, luxury, colour, disorder and passion, while he perceived Rome as being cold and hard and characterised by ruthless determination. Motley’s sparse design attracted praise for its minimalist quality:

The play is not hampered by unnecessary décor. Both scenery and costumes have been designed by Motley, and yet in the strict sense there is no set scenery. The stage, save for a couple of slender pillars, is as bare as possible. Almost all the rest is ‘props’. A simple sail let down from above, with the addition of some sparse ship’s furniture, suffices for Pompey’s galley. One set for Cleopatra’s monument is a simple piece of cracked masonry with gigantic Egyptian wall figures, released hydraulically from below. But during most of these tense three hours the stage is bare except for a flight of shallow steps, and sometimes a simple figure or two figures at parley are sharply etched against the sky. Though it was long before we had the deep unclouded blaze of Egyptian noonday, the lighting was never without its significance in the mood of the play.

(*Scotsman*, 30 April 1953)

Shaw's father John had been a painter and illustrator, and his son evidently inherited his father's scenic eye, varying lighting to suggest changes in space, time and atmosphere. The sultry warmth of the Mediterranean sun faded from the cyclorama upstage whenever action moved to Rome; the lighting changed from balmy, brilliant yellows into cold blue-greys.

By varying the pacing and momentum of the opening scenes, Shaw associated Egypt with heightened and turbulent emotions. The production opened with great energy as Antony and Cleopatra 'whirled in a flurry of passion unsatisfied down the long steps bathed in a hot, sandy light' (Fleming, *Spectator*, 8 May 1953). This opening vigour soon subsided into languor with Antony's departure for Rome. In contrast with her first entrance, Cleopatra was carried onto the stage for Act I, Scene 5 on a litter by four slaves, who, having lowered their queen to the floor, adopted slothful poses: some stretched out on the floor; others leaned against the pillars. Throughout, Cleopatra moved effortlessly about the stage: 'Here is a woman who is all woman with a natural grace and effortless dignity and no need for seductive art' (Ellis, *Stratford-on-Avon Herald*, 1 May 1953).

The atmosphere in Caesar's camp was crisper than in Egypt; Caesar's guards stood before a drape depicting an eagle, flanking their leader, always alert. Scenes in Rome were largely static, and it was not until Caesar's army marched across the forestage in Act III, Scene 6, that action came to be associated with this camp. Shaw introduced two intervals. The first interval came after Act III, Scene 3 with Cleopatra awaiting Antony's return after his marriage to Octavia, and the second after Act IV, Scene 9, concluding with Enobarbus' death. Reviewers praised the production's 'admirable rhythm, the flow of small scenes into the full tide' (Ellis, *Stratford-upon-Avon Herald*, 1 May 1953), and it was commonly asserted that Shaw's 'magnificence consists in avoiding magnificence for the sake of allowing the 42 scenes to follow each other in rapid sequence' (*The Times*, 29 April 1953).

At 6 foot 2 inches, Redgrave towered above Ashcroft, and his powerful physique matched Shakespeare's description of 'the triple pillar of the world' (Act I, Scene 1, line 12). His richly textured voice captured both Antony's nobility and ruin:

Although he could boom with rage and defiance ("when I cried, Ho! . . . kings would start forth" [Act III; Scene 13, lines 90–1]), there was exquisite music in his voice, and the effect of "unarm, Eros" [Act IV, Scene 15, line 35] was all the more memorable for its delivery by a man who had been, so credibly, "the greatest soldier in the world" [Act I, Scene 3, line 38], the figure in Cleopatra's dream.

(Findlater 1956: 129)

A subtle development in Shaw's reading of Antony can be seen in the differences between the notes that he prepared for Michael Redgrave and those that he wrote while in Burma in 1942. When Shaw approached the play for the first time, he was eager to convey Antony's greatness, yet in 1953 he looked to reveal Antony's failings from the start of the drama. He described Antony as still having 'a dash and courage but his judgement is dangerously affected by his relationship with Cleopatra and her influence over him'. He noted that, 'To him she is like a drug. He knows she is destroying him, but the excitement of being with her is impossible to give up' (Shaw 1953). In line with Shaw's reading, Redgrave's Antony gradually acquired nobility during the course of the play; his swaggering soldier of the opening scenes transformed into a commanding general. Shaw steered Antony's portrayal towards greatness rather than plotting Antony's progressive decline through the drama.

The casting of Ashcroft was controversial. Audiences had come to expect voluptuous performances of the role, yet Ashcroft subtly emphasised Cleopatra's intelligence and innate dignity above her sexual allure. Cleopatra's tigress quality emerged through Ashcroft's appearance; she sported a flame-red wig and wore vibrant orange and purple robes: 'The clash of colours was blinding, but strongly effective. Wilfulness and witchery were in her clothes as much as in her tantrums' (Dick, *Daily Herald*, 27 April 1953). Ashcroft's speed of movement across the bare stage reflected her alternating frenzies of passion and frustration. During the course of the play, she competed with Antony for ascendancy on the upstage steps, which served quite literally as a platform upon which the highs and lows of their relationship were played out. Ashcroft punctuated Cleopatra's early speeches with soft laughter, but this lightness gradually disappeared. Cleopatra's fury was accentuated by her attendants' horror at her actions; it took a scream from Charmian to prevent this Cleopatra from murdering the messenger in Act II, Scene 5. The presentation of Cleopatra's final moments was calm and dignified, in sharp contrast with the energy and passion that characterised the rest of the production: 'In the Monument scene and especially when taking the asp to her bosom, Miss Ashcroft rode the tragedy to a superb climax, calm and lofty, with what might be called a classic detachment' (T.C.K., *Birmingham Post*, 30 April 1953).

Shaw's casting of star actors became a feature of his directorial policy during his time at Stratford. While he looked to nurture young performers such as Diana Rigg, Ian Holm, Vanessa Redgrave and Ian Bannen, the polished quality of his productions was due in part to the remarkable talents of the star actors he employed; stars of the Stratford stage during the 1950s included John Gielgud, Antony Quayle, Charles Laughton, Harry Andrews, Peggy Ashcroft, Michael Redgrave, Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh. In 1955,

Shaw cast Olivier and Leigh in *Macbeth*, producing what has become a landmark in that play's stage history. Kenneth Tynan championed the pacing of Olivier's performance:

[Olivier] begins in a perilously low key, the reason for which is soon revealed. This Macbeth is paralysed with guilt before the curtain rises, having already killed Duncan time and again in his mind. Far from recoiling and popping his eyes, he greets the air-drawn dagger with sad familiarity; it is a fixture in the crooked furniture of his brain. Uxoriousness leads him to the act, which unexpectedly purges him of remorse. Now the portrait swells; seeking security, he is seized with fits of desperate bewilderment as the prize is snatched out of reach. There was true agony in "I had else been perfect"; Banquo's ghost was received with horrific torment as if Macbeth should shriek "I've been robbed!", and the phrase about the dead rising to "push us from our stools" was accompanied with a convulsive shoving gesture which few other actors would have risked.

(Tynan, *Sunday Observer*, 12 June 1955)

Olivier's depiction of Macbeth's psychology was universally acclaimed, and Shaw's concentration upon the inherent rhythms within the drama brought distinction to this production.

Shaw returned three times to *As You Like It*. His sensitivity to its structure became a defining quality of his productions. In 1949, with the Young Vic Company, the theatrical experience was light and romantic. Shaw saw the drama as a 'fairy story' that could be told in three parts. The first would contain, 'drama, action, and description', the second 'freedom, open air, and love', and the third would be concerned with 'the winding up of the story, the pairing off of the couples, and the happy ending' (Shaw 1948). He drew up a list of ten things he felt that audiences needed to be made to believe:

- 1 That Oliver intends to kill his brother.
- 2 That Charles is a superb wrestler.
- 3 That Rosalind is banished.
- 4 That the forest is a forest.
- 5 That Adam is dying for want of food and shelter.
- 6 That it is the sort of forest where one may meet a lion or a snake or a goat.
- 7 That Orlando is not sure Rosalind is Ganymede or not.
- 8 That Oliver can marry Celia and that they will both be happy for ever after.
- 9 That the same can apply to Silvius and Phebe.

10 That Jacques de Boys can bring such extraordinary news just at the right moment.

(Shaw 1948)

While Shaw's first production was not judged a success, his initial impressions were influential for his approach in future years. By 1952, he had come to interpret the play, and the musicality of its characters as follows:

The theme of this play is love, and there are four main variations on the theme – first Rosalind and Orlando, second Celia and Oliver, third Touchstone and Audrey, fourth Silvius and Phebe. It is of course essential that the true and right balance should be found between these four pairs of lovers for it is on that that the construction of the play hangs. It is like a piece of music, and I, personally think of Mozart because to me it has something of the same charm, gaiety, freshness, youth and vitality of Mozart's music. To explain how I imagine the differences between the four pairs of lovers I shall put it like this: to me Rosalind and Orlando are like the violins. Exciting, exquisite, brilliant and emotional. The top of poetic feeling. Celia and Oliver are the violas. Calmer, warmer and with a certain dramatic feeling which of course comes from Oliver. Not so brilliant as the violins, but with a beauty of their own, and full of heart. Touchstone and Audrey are like the bassoons. Fantastic, humorous, earthy, crude and unexpected. Also with a lush, succulent feeling about them. Silvius and Phebe are the flutes. Light, gay, saucy, and very young and fresh but intermittently touching.

(Shaw 1952)

Experience had taught him that 'if the play becomes heavy handed or middle aged then it is hopeless' (Shaw 1952). For Shaw the lightness of tone was connected to the play's French setting. For his Stratford production he broke with the tradition of giving the play an English setting and worked with his designers to create a stage world reminiscent of the reign of Louis XIII and of the paintings of Van Dyke. The design contrasted exquisite courtly costumes with more romantic rustic attire worn in the forest. Shaw's intentions at the beginning of the rehearsal period were clear; he aimed to produce a theatrical experience that would make 'every old and middle aged person in the audience long to be young again, and every young person in the audience feel how good it is not to be old' (Shaw 1952).

The key to Shaw's staging, and his greatest innovation, was to present the action as unfolding in time with the changing of the seasons. The winter

setting of the opening scenes gave way to spring with the awakening of Orlando and Rosalind's love. Audiences were accustomed to seeing this romantic comedy set in high summer, but Shaw's decision to open the play in winter heightened audience awareness to the lack of warmth and fruitfulness in the opening scenes. Some reviewers expressed shock at seeing snow in Arden, yet as Robert Smallwood notes, 'a few productions later, and an Arden that did not progress from winter to summer would be hard to find' (Smallwood 2003: 47).

With Rosalind's entrance into Arden, the lighting warmed to reflect the budding relationships in the forest. By the time that Orlando arrived to hang his verses, the lighting reflected a clear spring morning, and the dull, dreary, low-spirited atmosphere of the opening scenes was banished. As the winter lighting disappeared so too did the sound of whistling wind that underscored the opening scenes. The pastoral sound of bells and bleating goats offstage underscored the second and third movements, bringing a vivid, but knowingly comical sense of location.

Shaw's production was energised by Margaret Leighton's spirited portrayal of Rosalind. On her first entrance, she appeared isolated and lonely; as a courtly procession passed across the stage she appeared at its tail and stood staring dejectedly at the throne. Rosalind's spirit appeared crushed in these opening scenes; her words of remonstrance to the Duke against her banishment (Act I, Scene 3, lines 45–50 and Act I, Scene 2, lines 59–63) were cut, allowing the Duke to dominate the action. On entering Arden, Rosalind acquired a tomboyish quality, and Shaw conveyed the fragility of her posturing through inserting some contrived business at the close of her first interview with Orlando in Act III, Scene 2. Here, Rosalind as Ganymede crossed in front of her companions to leave the stage, but Laurence Harvey's Orlando caught her by the seat of her trousers and pulled her back to allow Celia to go first. As he left the stage, Harvey's Orlando good-humouredly pulled Rosalind's cap over her eyes. Through this gesture, Shaw invited a range of alternative interpretations, centring on whether Ganymede's true identity had been revealed at this point.

While life in the Duke's court was presented as spirit stifling, life in Shaw's Arden was evidently more relaxed and free, if not somewhat fantastical. Motley's greenwood design consisted of a spread of scaffold thin leafless trees, giving the forest both austerity and charm. With the arrival of spring, the forest adopted a tropical exuberance, boasting cacti and a prominent palm tree set between less exotic flora and fauna. Despite the snow on the ground, Shaw's foresters lay around the stage eating fruit; their relaxed poses were in sharp contrast to the formal procession witnessed in Duke Frederick's court in Act I, Scene 2.

Alongside the tender revelations shared between Orlando and Rosalind, Shaw staged moments of vaudevillian slapstick and provided colour to the characterisations of the play's supporting cast. To the audience's delight, Sir Oliver Martext, startled by the sound of a goat, fell backwards into the pond having married Touchstone and Audrey, and later two pageboys sat sniggering as Touchstone and Audrey kissed at the beginning of Act V, Scene 3. Shaw had a gift for eliciting well-conceived portraits from his small-part actors. Barry Warren, who played the goat in this production, received the following detailed directorial note:

The goat is a very fierce animal that terrifies Sir Oliver Martext. In the forest there are birds, sheep and goats. I want the sounds of all these to be made by the company and not by recordings which are never any good. But they must be done very well. This theatre is in the country, not in London, and audiences here really do know how birds sing and sheep and goats baa and bleat.

(Shaw 1952)

Shaw altered Shakespeare's stagecraft in the final scene by cutting the appearance of Hymen. As in a fairy tale, Rosalind appeared upstage, dressed in her woman's weeds, and the onstage audience turned to watch in disbelief as Rosalind, followed by Celia made their way to the front of the stage. In stark contrast to the low-spirited beginning of this production, the closing dance ended the production in a festive mood.

Shaw directed *As You Like It* at Stratford for the final time five years later in 1957. Since his first production in 1949, he had developed a deep understanding of the play's potential to charm audiences, concluding that 'psychology is not important in this play, compared with the expression of human emotion and relationships' (Shaw 1957). He looked to make his final production 'lighter, fresher and more French in feeling' (Shaw 1957). He achieved this ambition through a combination of inspired casting, redesign and reformulation of some key moments in the play.

The freshness of the production owed much to the casting of Peggy Ashcroft as Rosalind; as J.C. Trewin stated, 'we have to like Rosalind the moment she appears; if we have so much as a shadow of doubt, the play can waver. Dame Peggy can inspire more immediate affection than any actress on the stage' (Trewin, *Illustrated London News*, 13 April 1957). Though at 48 years of age, Ashcroft was more mature than Shakespeare's Rosalind, the actress was able to convey the character's disarming charm. Ashcroft brought a sense of spontaneity to Rosalind's words and actions; the stillness of movement in the court scenes gave way to a fluidity of motion once in the forest; 'Dame Peggy,

in her crimson jacket, is essential Ganymede–Rosalind; she is fathoms deep in love, and when she spins round in sudden ecstasy at “But what talk we of fathers when there is such a man as Orlando?”, there is no more to add’ (Trewin, *Illustrated London News*, 13 April 1957). In Peggy Ashcroft, Shaw cast an actress who ‘can be very sad or very gay, and can switch from one mood to another in a surprisingly short space of time. She has enormous energy and vitality and is highly temperamental. She is restless and full of imaginative feeling’ (Shaw 1957).

Shaw retained his notion of the play’s seasonality for this production and Motley’s design duly reflected a progression in the play’s action from March to April, though the severity of the winter setting for the opening was moderated somewhat. Shaw’s continuing desire to approach the play as a fairy tale was reflected in Motley’s new abstract design for Arden which was presented as ‘a never-never land where people with real emotions play hide and seek in dappled vistas of unreality’ (Fleming, *Spectator*, 26 April 1957). The delicate designs for the forest locations brought a spaciousness to the stage that had been lacking for the production in 1952. Motley’s sparse stylised design of tall spindly trees against a clear sky focused attention upon striking stage tableaux. As Jaques concluded his speech on the seven ages of man, he offered his stool to the ailing Adam, who, in his weary condition, personified Shakespeare’s description of the seventh age; Shaw’s marrying of word with movement brought touches of visual poetry to his production and highlighted the sensual craftsmanship underlying Shakespeare’s shaping of this and other moments in the drama.

Shaw respected Shakespeare’s structuring of the final scene for this production and included the appearance of Hymen having omitted it five years earlier. He had concluded that, ‘whether he is really a God or someone impersonating the God we don’t have to worry about. He is accepted as a Deity by everyone including the Duke, and as it is an enchanted Forest I, personally, think that he is the real Hymen’ (Shaw 1957). Hymen took to the stage on a rustic wagon pulled by the two pageboys; he shared the wagon with Corin and William who accompanied him on fiddle and pipe as he sang. Shaw avoided ostentatious display at this moment and focused attention upon the heightened emotions provoked by Hymen’s words. Muriel St Clare Byrne wrote that, ‘a trust in his author and his actors, in straight playing and in a direct and uncomplicated approach to character seems to me the fundamental virtue in Mr Glen Byam Shaw’s work as a producer’ (Byrne 1957: 481).

Shaw became sole Director of the Memorial Theatre following Antony Quayle’s resignation in 1956. Between 1957 and 1959, Shaw oversaw sixteen productions. In his first season, he directed *As You Like It* and *Julius Caesar*, while Douglas Searle, Peter Hall and Peter Brook respectively directed

productions of *King John*, *Cymbeline* and *The Tempest*. The range of plays encouraged challenging cross-casting; Alec Clunes, for example, was cast in the roles of Philip Falconbridge, Brutus and Caliban, while Richard Johnson moved between Orlando and Marc Antony. Shaw's final year at Stratford coincided with the theatre's 100th season, for which he designed a star-studded programme. Tony Richardson's *Othello*, starring Paul Robeson and Sam Wanamaker opened the season and was followed by Tyrone Guthrie's Victorian-costumed *All's Well that Ends Well*. Star-casting in the shape of Charles Laughton and Laurence Olivier contributed to the success of Peter Hall's productions of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Coriolanus*, yet Laughton's portrayal of King Lear for Shaw's farewell production proved a disappointment. Failing health limited Laughton's performance, and his lack of authority robbed the play of stature: 'At his best, he sounds like the wind in the willows rather than the brass section of the music of the spheres. At his worst, he mumbles and groans with the thread-bare moan of an old violin' (Brien 1959: 223).

Until his own departure in 1959, to pursue a career as an opera director, Shaw continued to promote a clear approach to presentation. His championing of fresh talent and his commitment to bringing a contemporary edge to his productions became the bedrock of Peter Hall's vision for the RSC. Shaw's influence upon Peter Hall and upon many of the actors who helped create the face of the new company can be seen behind the RSC's founding principle, which was to present Shakespeare in a contemporary fashion and to emphasise the relevance of his plays to the modern world.

For Shaw, it was the potential that an actor has to hold an audience entranced with his or her voice, body and presence, combined with Shakespeare's words, that represented the magic and mystery of theatre. It was his role as director to focus audience attention onto the craftsmanship of the performers on stage and not to distract eyes, ears or minds with anything superfluous to the experience of the performance as it unfolded in time. It is unlikely that Shaw would have labelled himself a theatrical innovator; he regarded Peter Brook and Tyrone Guthrie as innovative and judged his own work to be steeped in traditionalism. However, for audiences of the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s, Shaw's productions appeared innovative because they privileged Shakespeare's texts above any directorial intervention or conception. One reviewer spoke for many when he wrote in 1956 that, 'the supreme virtue of a Byam Shaw production is that Shakespeare is its hero' (Findlater 1956: 127).

Chronology

- 1946 *Antony and Cleopatra*, Piccadilly Theatre, London
- 1947 Appointed Director of Old Vic Centre
- 1949 *As You Like It*, Old Vic Theatre, London
- 1950 *Merchant of Venice*, Old Vic Theatre, London
- 1951 *Henry V*, Old Vic Theatre, London
- 1952 *As You Like It*, Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon
Appointed Co-Director of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre
Coriolanus, Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon
- 1953 *Richard III*, Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon
Antony and Cleopatra, Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon
- 1954 *Troilus and Cressida*, Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon
- 1955 *Macbeth*, Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon
- 1956 *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon
Othello, Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon
- 1957 Appointed Director of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre
As You Like It, Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon
Julius Caesar, Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon
- 1958 *Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon
Hamlet, Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon
- 1959 *King Lear*, Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon
- 1962 Appointed Director of Productions at Sadler's Wells Theatre

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The Shakespeare Centre Library in Stratford-upon-Avon holds an archive of the promptbooks and notebooks that Glen Byam Shaw used for his work at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre. The archive also includes recorded interviews with Shaw and photographs of his Stratford productions. The notebooks referred to in this chapter are housed in this archive.

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