

Strange Performances of Shakespeare's Plays

IF THE MASTER DRAMATIST COULD REVISIT THE THEATER IN OUR DAY, HE WOULD SEE MANY THINGS THAT WOULD SURPRISE HIM, SOME THAT WOULD PLEASE HIM, AND A FEW THAT WOULD OFFEND HIM

By Brander Matthews

IF Shakespeare could return to earth, he would find many things to astonish him, not the least of which would be his own world-wide reputation. As far as we can judge from his works, and from the sparse records that remain, he seems to have been a modest man, with no sense of his own importance, and with no pretension to superiority over his fellow poets. In his lifetime there was scant appreciation for his plays, since the drama was then held to be little better than journalism, and scarcely worthy to be criticised as literature.

That he was popular, or, in other words, that his plays pleased the people, and that he was liked personally by his associates—this seems to be clearly established. But there was no recognition of his supremacy as a poet, as a creator of character, or even as a playwright. As Shakespeare was a singularly healthy person, we can confidently assume that he did not look upon himself as an unappreciated genius.

Therefore, if he came back to us, we cannot doubt that he would stand aghast before the constantly increasing library of books that has been written about him in the past two centuries. Nor can we doubt that it would appeal to his sense of humor. He would probably be interested to look into a few of the commentaries which seek to elucidate him; but he would not pursue this perusal to the bitter end; and he would shut the books with a laugh, or at least with a smile, at the obstinate perversity of the critics who have wearied themselves—and not infrequently their readers also—in the vain attempt to explain what originally

needed no explanation, since it had been plain enough to the unlettered crowds who flocked into the Globe Theater and stood entranced while his stories unrolled themselves on the stage.

If he were permitted to wander from the library, where the immense mass of Shakespeariana fills shelf after shelf, and to enter any of our comfortable playhouses to witness a performance of one of his own plays, as set on the stage by an enterprising and artistic producer, such as Sir Henry Irving, he would again be greatly astonished.

The theater itself would be strange to him, for it would be roofed and lighted, whereas the playhouse he knew was open to the sky, and dependent on the sun for its illumination. The stage would be equally novel, for it would have sumptuous scenery, whereas the stage of his day had no scenery and only a few properties—a throne or a pulpit, a bed or a well-head. The actors would be unlike his fellow players at the Globe, since they would be attired with a strenuous effort for historical accuracy, whereas Burbage, Kemp, Condell, and Heming were accustomed to costume themselves in the elaborate and sumptuous garb of the Elizabethan gallants, glad when they could don the discarded attire of a wealthy courtier. And perhaps what would surprise him as much as anything would be to behold his very feminine heroines impersonated by women, instead of being undertaken by shaven lads, as was the habit in his day.

As he was an artist in construction, an expert in stagecraft as this had been con-

ditioned by the circumstances of the Tudor playhouse, he could not very well fail to be annoyed by the curtailing of his plays to adjust themselves to the circumstances of our superbly equipped theaters. He would also resent the chopping and the changing, the modification and the mangling, to which his plays have been subjected so that their swift succession of situations can each of them be localized by appropriate and complicated scenery.

But because he was a modest man, and because he composed his tragedies and his comedies to please his audiences, he would probably soon be reconciled to all these transmogrifications when he saw that his work has none the less retained its power to attract spectators and to delight their ears and their eyes. If the house was crowded night after night, then he would feel that he had no call to protest, since other times bring other manners.

A SCORE OF FEMALE HAMLETS

If Shakespeare would be surprised to see *Ophelia* performed by a girl, he would be still more surprised, not to say shocked, to see *Hamlet* performed by a woman. And yet this is a spectacle that he might have beheld again and again in the nineteenth century, if he had been permitted to visit the theaters of New York at irregular intervals.

In that hundred years he could have seen not one female *Hamlet*, or two, or three, but at least a score of them. The complete list is given in Laurence Hutton's "Curiosities of the American Stage." It begins with Mrs. Bartley; it includes Clara Fisher, Charlotte Cushman, and Anne Dickinson; and it was drawn up too early to include Mme. Sarah Bernhardt, whose unfortunate experiment belongs to the very last year of the last century.

George Henry Lewes asserted that "Hamlet" itself is so broad in its appeal, so interesting in its story, so moving in its episodes, that no actor has ever made a total failure in the title-rôle. It might be asserted with equal truth that no actress has ever succeeded in it, because *Hamlet* is essentially masculine, and therefore impossible to a woman, however lofty her ambition or however abundant her histrionic faculty. It is not a disparagement of the versatility and dexterity of Mme. Bernhardt to record that the details of her impersonation of the melancholy prince have

wholly faded from the memory of one spectator, who yet retains an unforgettable impression of Coquelin's beautifully humorous embodiment of the *First Gravedigger*.

It was, perhaps, because Charlotte Cushman was more or less lacking in womanly charm, and because she was possessed of more or less masculine characteristics, that her *Hamlet* seems to have been more successful—or, at least, less unsuccessful—than that of any other woman. Nor was *Hamlet* the only one of Shakespeare's male characters that she undertook in the course of her long and honorable career in the United States and in Great Britain. Although she was an incomparable *Katherine* in "Henry VIII," dowering the discarded queen with poignant pathos, she undertook more than once the part of *Cardinal Wolsey*, which does not present itself as the kind of a character likely to be attractive to a woman. From all the accounts that have come down to us, she appears to have impersonated *Romeo* more satisfactorily than either *Wolsey* or *Hamlet*. In fact, one competent critic, who had seen her in all her greatest parts, including *Lady Macbeth* and *Meg Merrilies*, selected as her highest peak of achievement the moment when *Romeo*, inflamed by the death of his kinsman, *Mercutio*, provokes *Tybalt* in a fiery outburst:

Now, Tybalt, take the villain back,
That late thou gav'st me!

Shakespeare would not in all probability be displeased to see *Ophelia* and *Queen Katherine* and *Juliet* impersonated by women, however much he might be annoyed by the vain efforts of any woman to assume the masculinity of *Hamlet* and *Wolsey* and *Romeo*. His tragedies are of imagination all compact, and he might very well wish to have them treated with all possible respect. But perhaps he would not insist on taking his comedies quite so seriously; and therefore he might have been amused rather than aggrieved if he could have seen the performance of "As You Like It" given by the Professional Woman's League at Palmer's Theater in November, 1893, when every part in the piece was entrusted to a woman.

"AS YOU LIKE IT" ACTED BY WOMEN

Here was a complete turning of the tables, a triumphant assertion of woman's right to do all that becomes a man. When

the comedy was originally produced at the Globe Theater in London—probably in 1600, but possibly a year or two earlier—no actresses had ever been seen on the English stage; and therefore *Rosalind* and *Celia* and *Audrey* had to be assigned to three lads whom the older actors had taken as apprentices. When the comedy was performed at Palmer's Theater in New York in 1893, almost three centuries later, *Orlando*, *Adam*, *Touchstone*, and *Jaques* were undertaken by actresses of a maturer age and of a richer experience than the Elizabethan boys could ever have acquired.

As one of those who had the pleasure of beholding this unprecedented performance, I am glad to bear testimony that I really enjoyed my afternoon, and that "As You Like It" lost little of its charm when men were banished from its cast. *Jaques*—the part that I make bold to believe was "written in" so that Burbage, best of elocutionists and most popular of tragedians, might not be left out of the cast—was undertaken by Mme. Janauschek, aging and enfeebled, yet still vigorous of mind and still in command of all her artistic resources. The *Orlando* was Miss Maude Banks, a brave figure in her attempt at masculine attire. The *Touchstone* was Miss Kate Davis; and *Charles*, the duke's wrestler, was Miss Marion Abbott.

There is a delightful unreality about "As You Like It," an element of "make-believe," an aroma of "once upon a time," a flavor of "old, familiar, far-off things"; and it was this quality which was plainly prominent in the performance by the Professional Woman's League.

Consider for a moment the fascinating complexity of *Rosalind's* conduct when she was impersonated by a shaven lad. The Elizabethan spectators beheld a boy playing the part of a girl, who disguises herself as a boy, and who then asks her lover to pretend that she is a girl. Set down in black and white this intricacy may appear a little puzzling; but seen on the stage it causes no confusion nowadays, and it is transparently amusing. Yet there was more verisimilitude in the performance in the Tudor playhouse than there can be in our modern theaters. It was easy enough for the youth who was playing *Rosalind* to look like a lad after he had once donned doublet and hose, because he was a lad and not a lass; whereas the woman who now

impersonates *Rosalind* finds it difficult, if not impossible, to make her male disguise impenetrable.

The fact is, however, that our latter-day leading lady is not inclined to take seriously *Rosalind's* attempt to pass herself off as a man. She is likely to be a little too well satisfied with her feminine charms to be really anxious to conceal them; she does not want the audience ever to forget that she is a woman to be wooed, even if she is willing to pretend that she is a youth. "As You Like It" is my favorite among all Shakespeare's plays, and in the course of more than half a century of playgoing I must have seen almost a score of *Rosalinds*; but I cannot now recall a single one who made an honest effort to deceive *Orlando*, as Shakespeare meant him to be deceived, and as he must appear to be deceived if the story is to be accepted.

As a result of this persistent femininity of *Rosalind* when she is masquerading as *Ganymede*, most of the *Orlandos* whom I can call up one after another let themselves flirt with *Ganymede*, as if they had penetrated *Rosalind's* disguise. It was a striking merit of Mr. John Drew's *Orlando* that he always treated *Ganymede* as the lad *Rosalind* was pretending to be, consistently making it clear to the audience that no doubt as to *Ganymede's* sex had ever crossed his mind.

A "STUNT" OF SEVEN JULIETS

I am inclined to guess that if the author of "As You Like It" had accepted an invitation from the Professional Woman's League, he would have sat out the performance at Palmer's Theater, gazing at it with tolerant eye and courteously complimenting the lady president or the lady vice-president who had been deputed to escort him to his box. But I make no doubt that his glance would have been less favorable had he been a spectator of a performance of "Romeo and Juliet" given in May, 1877, at Booth's Theater, for the benefit of George Rignold, who appeared as *Romeo* supported by seven different *Juliets*, the part changing impersonators with every reappearance of the character. Miss Grace d'Urffy danced in the masquerade, Miss Adelaide Neilson leaned down from the balcony, Miss Ada Dyas was married in the cell of *Friar Lawrence*, Miss Maude Granger shrank from bloodshed, Miss Marie Wainwright

parted from *Romeo*, Miss Fanny Davenport drank the potion, and Miss Minnie Cummings awakened in the tomb.

It cannot be denied that *Romeo* was the greatest lover in all literature; but he was not a *Don Juan* deserting one mistress after another, and still less was he a Brigham Young, married to half a dozen wives. The diversity of actresses, one replacing another as the sad tale rolled forward to its inevitable end, may have served to attract a larger audience than Rignold could allure by his unaided ability; but it was destructive of the integrity of the tragedy.

The inevitable result of this freakish experiment was to turn the mind of the audience away from the play itself, and to focus it on a succession of histrionic "stunts"—the single scenes in which each of the *Juliets*, one after another, exhibited herself in rivalry with all the rest. The continuity of the beautiful tragedy of young love in the spring-time of life was basely broken, its poetry was sadly defiled, and its dignity was indisputably desecrated. The actresses who lent themselves to this catch-penny show were ill-advised; they were false to their art; and they took no profit from the sacrifice of their standing in the profession.

While the performance was discreditable to all who were concerned in it, the major part of the disgrace must be assumed by the actor who lowered himself to make money by it. I am glad to recall that the majority of those who had been enticed into beholding this sorry spectacle seem to have been more or less dissatisfied.

MARY ANDERSON IN "A WINTER'S TALE"

The obvious objections which must be urged against the splitting up of a single part among half a dozen performers do not lie against the appearance of a single actor in two or more characters. In fact, the "doubling" of parts, as it is called, is one of the oldest of theatrical expedients. It was the custom in the ceremonial performances of the Greek drama at Athens, when there were only three actors, who might have to impersonate in turn seven or eight characters. It sprang up again in Tudor times, when a strolling company like that to which *Hamlet* addressed his advice numbered only a scant half-dozen members, and there might be in it only one boy to bear the burden of two or three, or even four female characters.

When several actresses come forward in swift succession to speak the lovely lines of *Juliet*, our interest is interrupted by every change; and the attention we are forced to pay to the appearance and the personality of each of the successive performers is necessarily subtracted from that which we ought to be giving to the character those actresses are pretending to impersonate. But when an actress appears in the beginning of the play as a mother to reappear at the end of the piece as a daughter, there is only a single adjustment of our attention to be made; and this is easily achieved. In some cases, or, at least, with some spectators, there might be no need of any adjustment, since these spectators might not become aware that the same performer had been entrusted with the part of the daughter as well as that of the mother.

When she revived "A Winter's Tale," Miss Mary Anderson so arranged the play that she could appear as *Hermione* in the earlier acts and as *Perdita* in the later acts, resuming the character of the mother only at the very end, when the supposed statue of *Hermione* starts to life and descends from the pedestal. Of course, there had to be a few excisions from the text of the fifth act, so that the actress could be seen first as the lovely maiden and second as the stately matron, beautiful mother of a more beautiful daughter. The lines thus cut out were only a slight loss to the beauty of the play, whereas the doubling up which these omissions made possible was a great gain for the spectators.

I feel certain that if Shakespeare could have been one of these spectators he would have been as delighted and as fascinated as the rest of us. He would have pardoned, without a word of protest, the violence done to the construction of his story.

BILINGUAL PERFORMANCES

Nor am I any the less convinced that if Shakespeare had been present at one of the memorable representations of his greatest tragedy when Salvini was *Othello*, and Edwin Booth *Iago*, he would have smiled reproachfully at those who were harsh in denouncing the performance as a profanation of his play, on the pretext that Salvini spoke Italian, while Booth and the rest of the cast spoke English. It would so greatly gratify a playwright to have two of his superbest parts sustained by the two foremost tragedians of the time that he

would be willing enough to overlook the apparent incongruity of their using two different tongues. Perhaps the author might have been inspired to point out to the cavilers that Salvini's retention of his mother tongue resulted in restoring to *Othello* the language which the Moor of Venice would have spoken actually.

It is, of course, a flagrant falsification of the fact for *Othello* and *Iago*, *Hamlet* and *Ophelia*, *Brutus* and *Cassius* to speak English instead of their native Italian, or Danish, or Latin. But this is necessary if an English-speaking audience is to enjoy "Othello," and "Hamlet," and "Julius Caesar"; and, as it is necessary, the spectators are rarely conscious that it is, strictly speaking, unnatural. It is one of the many conventions by which alone the art of the drama is made possible; and although it is contrary to the fact, it is not more conspicuously out of nature than a host of other departures from the actual.

The bilingual performance of "Othello," in which Salvini and Booth nobly supported each other, was not the first of those in which Booth had been engaged. When Emil Devrient came on a professional visit to the United States in the early sixties of the last century, Booth was producing a succession of Shakespearian tragedies at the Winter Garden; and he courteously invited the German actor to play *Othello* to his *Iago*.

At these performances Devrient spoke German, Booth spoke English, and so did

the rest of the supporting company—excepting only the *Emilia*. This character was cast to Mme. Methua-Schiller, a German actress who had migrated to America and learned to speak English with only a slight trace of foreign accent. As she had not lost the use of her mother tongue, she was allowed to alternate English and German, always employing the former except in conversing with Devrient, when she dropped into the latter. Perhaps her chopping and changing from English to German, and back again to English, may have been somewhat disconcerting and distracting to the audience, who would more readily adjust themselves to Devrient's constant use of his own tongue.

And the moral of all this is? Well, you can find it very pleasantly expressed in a quotation from a letter which was written by the foremost of American Shakespearian scholars to Miss Edith Wynne Matthison, and which is preserved in the introduction to Miss Theodora Ursula Irvine's excellent "How to Pronounce the Names in Shakespeare." Apparently Mrs. Kennedy had consulted Dr. Furness as to the pronunciation of a heroine's name:

Continue to call her *Rösalind*, although I am much afraid that Shakespeare pronounced it *Rösalind*. Of all men I would take liberties with Shakespeare sooner than any one else. Was he so small-minded that he would care about trifles? Take my word for it, he would smile with exquisite benignity and say:

"Pronounce the name, my child, exactly as you think it sounds the sweetest."

AT DAWN

UNDER that roof in the valley yonder

Lies the head all made of wonder,

Sleeping yet,

Dreaming yet;

For why should she wake when the dawn scarce stirs,

With her star-crowned head still asleep as hers,

And only the birds and I are awake

To sing for her sake?

Oh, teach me a song, you morning bird.

For me to take back to her, word for word,

To sing as she lifts each mighty lid,

Heavy with sleep as a pyramid;

Put into the song all the love of my heart—

A man's love, with a wild bird's art.

Richard Le Gallienne

Detroit, the Motor-Car Metropolis

ITS HISTORIC BEGINNING AS A FRENCH FORT AT THE CROSSWAYS OF THE CONTINENT, ITS DEVELOPMENT INTO A GREAT INDUSTRIAL CENTER, AND THE PHENOMENAL RECENT GROWTH THAT GIVES IT A CLAIM TO RANK FOURTH AMONG AMERICAN CITIES

By Judson C. Welliver

AGES ago, when the forces of nature molded the region of the Great Lakes, they marked the banks of the Detroit River as one of the strategic points of North America. Here is a site that commands main routes of travel and traffic, both by land and by water, between East and West, almost as Constantinople commands the gateway of Europe and Asia. Its importance was recognized when the early explorers penetrated the heart of the continent—first by the French, as is testified to-day by the name of Detroit.

In those militant days of the pioneers, the British had an instinct for the salt-water coasts; the French, for the great interior waterways, the lakes and mighty rivers. Salt water finally won the struggle, as it has done for Britain so many times since; but the French are entitled to chief credit for the exploration and early development of the interior. Justice requires, too, their recognition, among all nations colonizing this continent, as most humane and successful in their contact with the Indians. Detroit has preserved in its names, family and geographic, testimony to its historic debt to all three races. French and Indian names are everywhere, and no "F. F. V." is prouder of his descent from Pocahontas than are these old Detroit families of their relationship to the first Americans.

The French era of the Middle West is too little known by Americans to-day. Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac was a soldier of fortune and a favorite of Louis XIV. During his service in America, between 1691 and 1697, he conceived the idea of a

strategic post at the strait—the *détroit*—that connects Huron and Erie, to hold the lakes and the region beyond them for France; and in 1699 he laid his plan before the *grand monarque*, who approved it. Thus Detroit may claim the great Louis as its godfather.

Cadillac reached his chosen spot in July, 1701, with a company of fifty settlers and fifty soldiers, and planted a post there which he named Fort Pontchartrain, after a French minister who had helped him. He seems to have been a restless soul, and after a series of controversies with the French authorities in Canada—and with the missionaries, who charged him with being too lax in regard to selling liquor to the Indians—he got himself transferred to Louisiana. He journeyed overland to his new post down the Illinois and Mississippi rivers, and on nearing the mouth of the latter he christened Lake Pontchartrain after the same benefactor.

Deprived of its founder, the settlement on the strait remained French for nearly sixty years, until the Seven Years' War saw Britain wrest away most of France's possessions in America. It was occupied by a British force under Major Robert Rogers in November, 1760. The change was not to its immediate advantage, for the English and Scottish traders who came out with the garrison were distrusted by the Indians, and the few British settlers were regarded askance by the French. The place was a hotbed of continual intrigue, for at first the French and Indians plotted against the British, and later all combined against the