



Denver Center  
Theatre Company

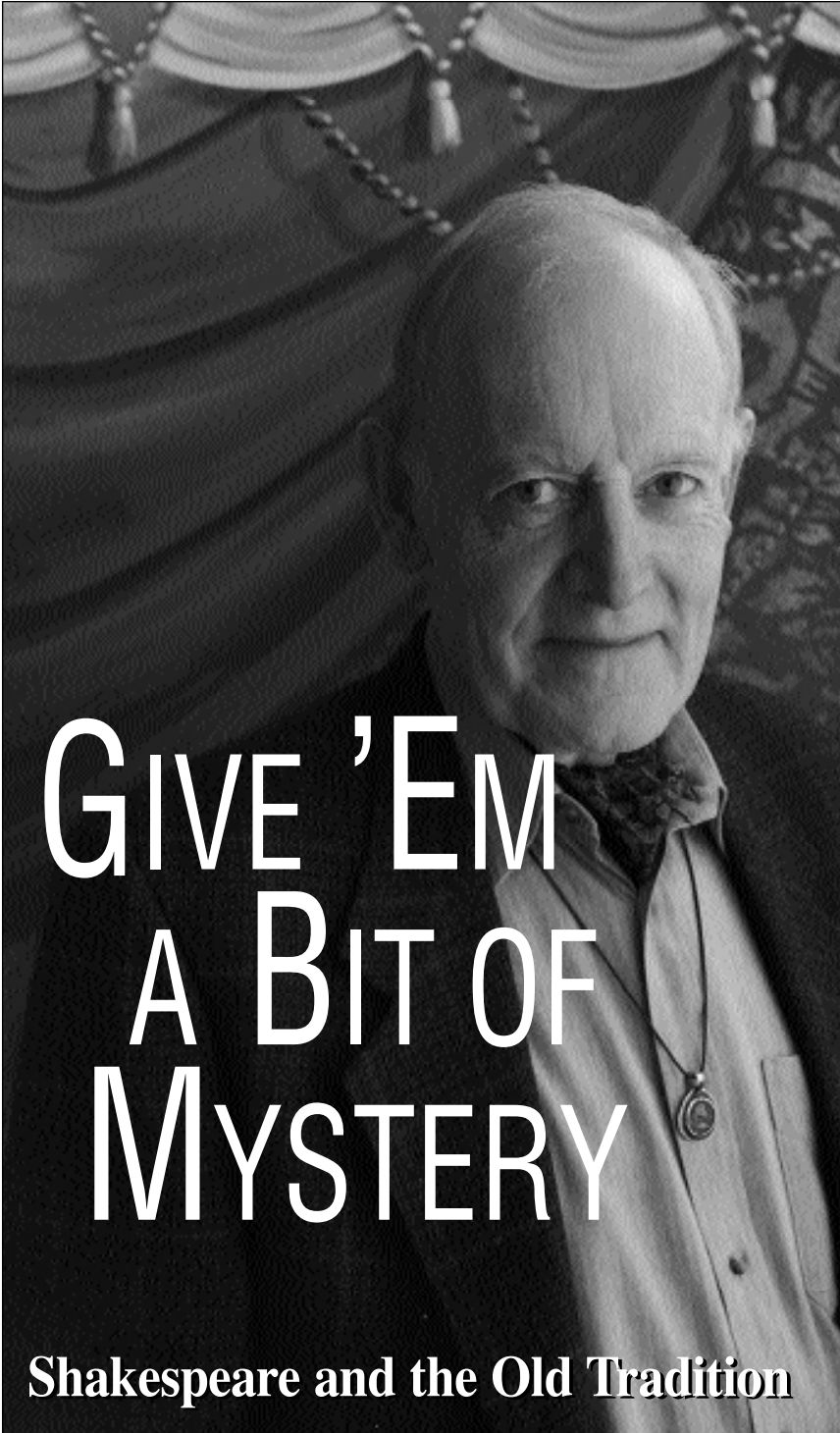
# Inside

# Out

A STUDY GUIDE

PRODUCED BY THE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

APRIL - MAY 2000



GIVE 'EM  
A BIT OF  
MYSTERY

Shakespeare and the Old Tradition

Photo by Gary Isaacs



## TONY CHURCH

**James Anthony Church** was born in a suburb southeast of London that he disliked as soon as he was old enough to discover he disliked it.

At the outbreak of World War II when he was nine, he was evacuated to Gloucestershire for nine months to live with his great aunt. There, he went to a public elementary school with classes of 56 or 60 students, as they were then taught by ancient teachers because the young ones were all going off to war.

He was there for about six months and then went to boarding school on the south coast. His mother eventually joined him when she was also evacuated from the bombing. The school itself was evacuated to Wiltshire near Salisbury, again because of the bombing. Tony spent three years in Wiltshire where he began acting. That is where he first acted in a Shakespeare play. In 1941, at age 11, he played the part of Lorenzo in *The Merchant of Venice*.

**T**he acting bug had first bitten Tony at age seven when he played a dwarf that was to become Grumpy when the film *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* was made. But the play he was in was *Snow White and Rose Red*; it had seven dwarfs in it with no names. The dwarf Tony played was a grumpy dwarf, so Tony really played Grumpy before there was a Grumpy.

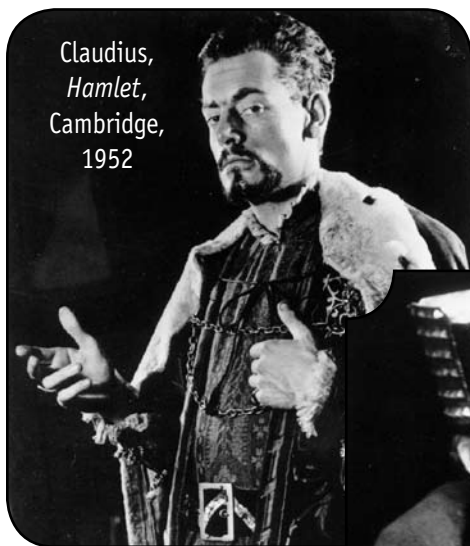
Tony went on to Cambridge University, but theatre and acting were not included in the curriculum at either Cambridge or Oxford at this time. This was long before any university

CHURCH continued on page 2

## CHURCH *continued from page 1*

drama department had been established in England. Peter Hall and John Barton, who are currently at Denver Center Theatre Company for the rehearsals of the upcoming production of *Tantalus*, were his colleagues at the university. In fact, Peter and Tony met on their first day.

Tony performed 26 roles in the course



Claudius,  
*Hamlet*,  
Cambridge,  
1952

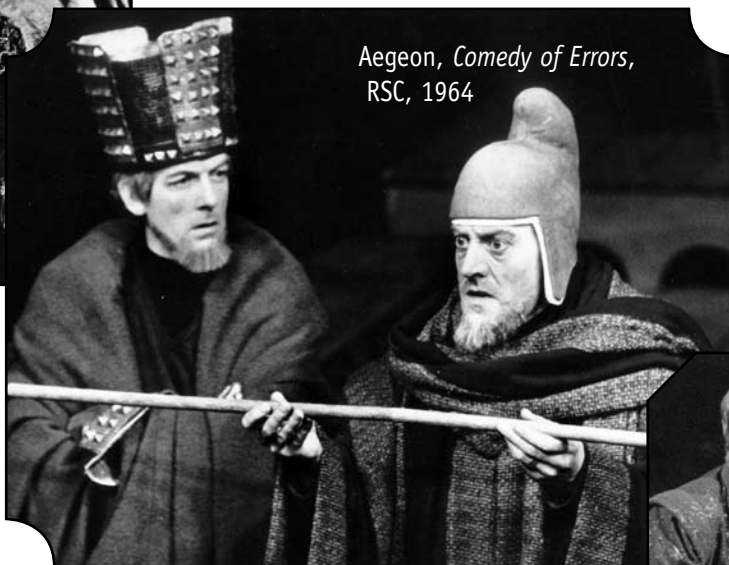
of the next three years in amateur companies. The amateur dramatic club had its own theatre at Cambridge. It was an entirely student-run organization; the students managed it and designed the productions themselves.

In 1960, Tony became a founding member of the Royal Shakespeare Company because of Peter—now Sir Peter Hall—who became the director of the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1959 and invited a whole new company of people to join. One of the unique features of the Company was that a number of actors signed long-term contracts—three years initially. Tony did several three-year contracts and eventually became an associate artist; this meant that he gave the company first refusal. Tony worked consistently in the Royal Shakespeare Company for the next 28 years.

Tony's production, *Give 'Em a Bit of Mystery*, is made up of bits of business and moments of innovation handed down from one generation of actors to another in the form of tradition. Tony showcas-

es his research of this long acting tradition and notes that although the "tradition" was respected and noted in the acting profession, it was also true that performers really made their reputations by breaking with it and by starting new methods of doing things. In the course of the show, Tony maps the long history and continuity of the traditions and

Tony maps the long history and continuity of the traditions and includes the stories of the actors who broke with the old and started the new.

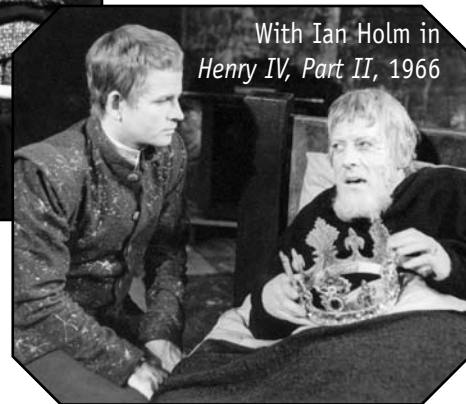


Aegeon, *Comedy of Errors*,  
RSC, 1964

includes the stories of the actors who broke with the old and started the new.

Quite a lot of the early part of *Mystery* is about the fact that the scripts of Shakespeare changed because people rewrote, simplified, romanticized and did all sorts of things to make the plays more popular. Leading actors mercilessly cut the plays so that their roles were really the only roles of note and we now recognize that important parts of the Shakespearean experience were denied to the audience because the plays were so radically cut. For example, parts like Claudius in *Hamlet* were reduced to fifth-rate roles because the play is very long and it is usually the part of Claudius that gets cut. "These things make huge differences in the play," says Tony Church.

Tony has contributed to the "tradition" in the play *King Lear*. At the end of the play, the controversy has always raged as to whether Lear dies thinking his daughter, Cordelia, is still alive, or knowing with absolute certainty that she is dead. It is all a question of interpretation of the words. "Why look, her lips, her lips," exclaims King Lear. Does it mean her lips are cold and dead, or does it mean her lips are moving? She is dead, but it is a question of what he [Lear] perceives. There is a long tradition that, in fact, he thinks she is coming back to life. "What I did when I performed it in a three-sided theatre" said Tony, "was to lift up her head and show the dead face to the audience. I just took her head and turned it so that everybody could see, assuming they [Albany and Edgar] were where the audience was, and then I collapsed. The author, Marvin Rosenberg, who wrote *The Masks of Lear* and has collected information on every bit of business that every actor has ever done, told to me that if he authored a second edition,



With Ian Holm in  
*Henry IV, Part II*, 1966

he would put that bit in, but he never did a second edition, so it is not in print and therefore not in the "tradition" at this time."

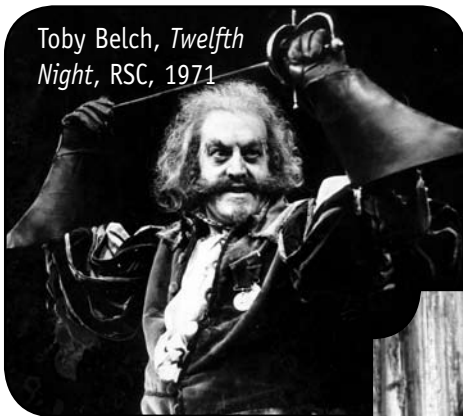
Tony further states, "I have performed Prospero [from *The Tempest*] twice. I made a great performance of actually drowning the book [of magic] on stage, which is what most Prosperos do not do because it is rather difficult to achieve. Breaking the staff is commonly done but not drowning the book." Prospero says, "I will break my staff." Tony has seen a

CHURCH *continued on page 3*

## CHURCH *continued from page 2*

lot of Prosperos not break the staff, but he actually does both because he thinks it is very important to the play.

When asked how he uses aspects of the old “tradition” in the modern parts he has played, Tony states that he was brought up to show the greatest respect for the *language* of a play. He has to understand the thought processes as



Toby Belch, *Twelfth Night*, RSC, 1971

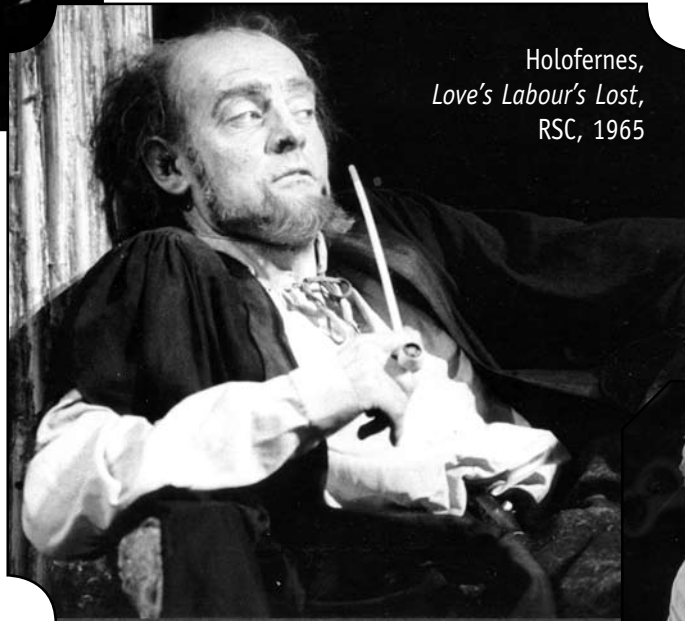
expressed in the language of a character. He has to understand the actual choice of words and their arrangement in the lines to understand the character.

For example, in his performance in the DCTC’s *Molly Sweeney* a few years ago, the character he portrayed was a man who was born in the town of Limerick (Ireland), and therefore, presumably had a Limerick accent. He had gone away, become a world famous eye surgeon, had a breakdown, become depressed and given up his profession. He had returned to being an eye surgeon in a small town in the county of Donnegal. He had not been there very long, so he would not have had a Donnegal accent. Fortunately, Mr. Church had heard Frank McCourt on radio talking about his book *Angela’s Ashes*; Tony used McCourt as the basis for his accent. But having got the accent, Tony had to discover the actual cadences and shapes of this very, very educated man who had not spent that much of his life in Ireland. Because of this, Tony had to gloss on top of that—something that went a bit farther. Because all Brian Friel, the playwright, gives you is three people sitting on stage in chairs who

talk to the audience and not to each other. So, the play is nothing but a play of language—a memory play. The language of the eye doctor, therefore—is all important.

“When it came to acting in *Travels with My Aunt* by Graham Greene,” said Tony, “of course, there were different characters. Each actor, though, played the nephew who is a stuffy, sort of suburban bank manager. On the other extreme, I also played the character of the aunt, herself. Because her name was Aunt Augusta, I felt it was a clue from the author because it is also the name of Lady Bracknell in *The Importance of Being Earnest* by Oscar Wilde. I believe that there is a whiff of Bracknell in Aunt Augusta.

So my knowledge of Edith Evans who



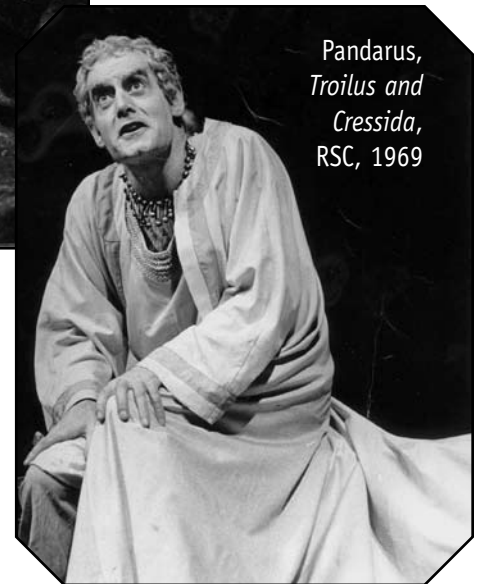
Holofernes, *Love's Labour's Lost*, RSC, 1965

Tony states that he was brought up to show the greatest respect for the *language* of a play.

was the great Lady Bracknell of the 20th century, helped me. I used her precision of speech, not the sort of great, wild noises Edith Evans makes, but I kept my voice absolutely precise and rather high and flutey and that gave me insight into the character.”

Tony discusses naturalism in his piece—natural acting. He means realistic acting because there is a word “naturalistic” that he considers very dangerous. It means being very low key all the time like the acting in the most boring “soaps.” There, he says “everybody behaves as they think people really behave and, in fact, people do not. People are much more extreme, there is much more variety in real life.” He maintains that “naturalistic” invention is a falsity, but being natural, being real, means what the actor does comes from motives and is based on proper observation of motive and character.

Tony’s favorite Shakespearean roles include Falstaff, Lear and Shylock and they are the three roles that he has played more than any other. He played Polonius in *Hamlet* at the Royal Shakespeare Company, one production was directed by Sir Peter Hall and another by John Barton. “The John Barton *Hamlet* was very much about the players, the company of actors who came into the play,” said Tony. “They were really the key to it. A lot of the interpretation was done with very simple staging. The sets were created by



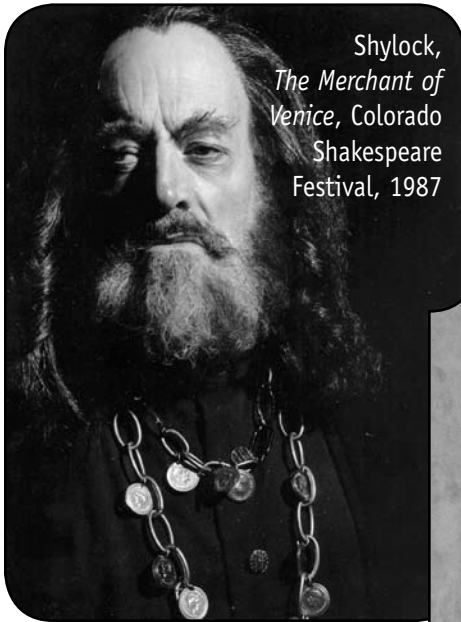
Pandarus, *Troilus and Cressida*, RSC, 1969

people sort of picking up things and using them as they were going along. In the Peter Hall production, it had been very much about the political establishment headed by Claudius and Polonius against which Hamlet was a rebel. It was very much a play for the time of the

CHURCH *continued on page 4*

## CHURCH *continued from page 3*

“angry young man” against the establishment. David Warner [Hamlet] dressed like a student with a long student scarf. Though it was done in Tudor costumes in terms of the cut, the materials were of early 20th century officialdom. Hamlet looked like a student from Wittenberg and he was identified immediately by all the young people as being one of them.



Shylock,  
*The Merchant of Venice*, Colorado Shakespeare Festival, 1987

Young people surrounded the theatre every night. It was an extraordinary experience. I had never seen a Shakespeare play turn someone into a star in quite that way. Despite dreadful reviews, the play was a huge success.”

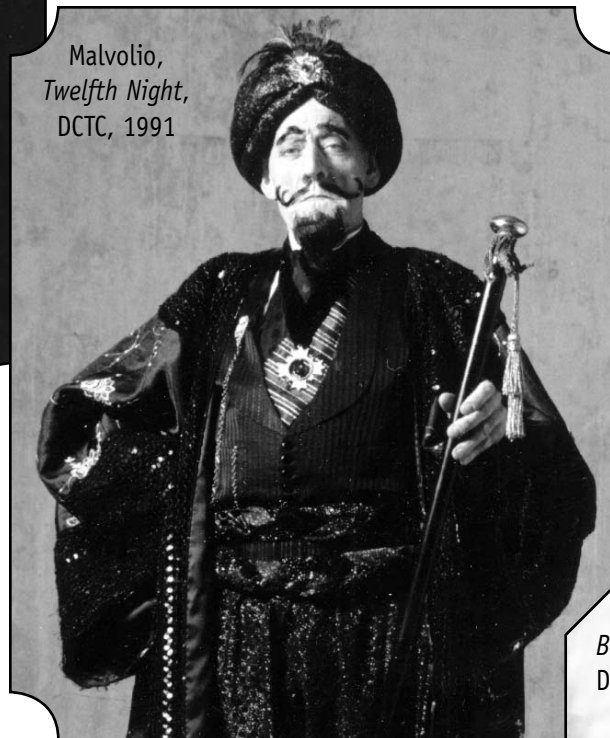
**T**here is only one great Shakespearean role that Tony has not played. That is Jacques in *As You Like It*.

He has recorded the part of Menenius in *Coriolanus*, but he has never played it on stage and that is another role that is still available to him at his age. There is also the King of France in *All's Well That Ends Well*.

Tony believes that bits of business are still important today. He states that actors like them because they illustrate what they (the actors) are doing. He explained what he meant by referring to Jamie Horton, Randy Moore and Mark Rubald as the comics in the Denver Center Theatre Company's *The Winter's Tale*. These actors had a lot of shtick that they did and Jamie as Autolycus

had an amazing pack that he and the designer worked on together which he brought on as a peddler; it was cleverly designed and used for many purposes. It was a piece of business in itself. Everybody Tony has seen playing Autolycus redesigned his peddler's kit to do things. When Tony was in *Loves Labour's Lost* playing Don Armado, the

The most important thing is to keep acting and to keep working, and also to realize you are going to be unemployed a lot of the time...



Malvolio,  
*Twelfth Night*, DCTC, 1991

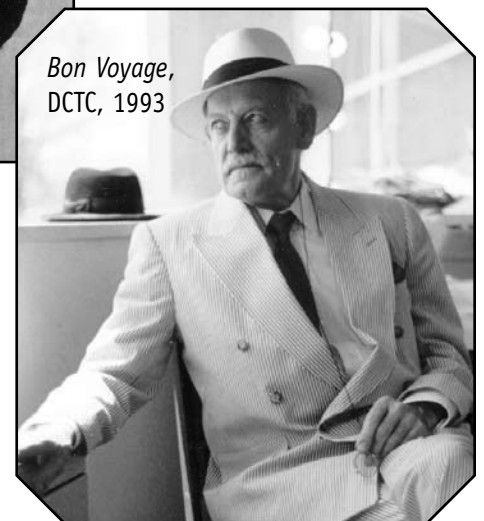
actor playing Holofernes, the schoolmaster, carried in his gown not only a schoolmaster's cane, (which he wagged about a lot), but a whistle, a school bell concealed in his costume, a small blackboard and chalk—all of which he used. His business made him a complete school in himself.

Granted, these are extreme examples, but very often you make things clear with stage business and shape and time and phrase things in a way that just language and being the character cannot do. Some actors have an instinct for it and are brilliant at it, on the whole, I find props rather confusing,” said

Church.

When asked what advice he would give young actors, Tony said, “A young actor of today is in the world of today, which, in this country, is heavily run by television and film, about which I know very little. I could not give anybody any advice on how to get into television or films or what to do when you get there except that really good stage actors, if they do get there, are usually a success if they can make the transition. The most important thing is to keep acting and to keep working, and also to realize you are going to be unemployed a lot of the time, which is equally true in England.

“In England, there is no artificial division between theatre, TV and film (there is not much film anyway). Theatre and television mingle-mangle all the time because all casting is done out of London anyway. And it is much easier to control it there. Though unemployment rates are just as bad there, good actors can make a living in the theatre. However, there is no national theatre in the U.S. except in the regions; the regional theatres are the national theatre. Broadway is mostly musicals. So, my advice would be, if you happen to be any good at singing and dancing, first of all, work at it, because that is the way in the theatre to make a living, more than any other. Secondly, create your own



*Bon Voyage*, DCTC, 1993

work; form your own company; employ yourself, wherever possible.” ■

# S GREAT NAMES IN Shakespearean Acting

In England, reputable professional acting emerged during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I along with the growth of a national non-religious drama. Among Elizabethan actors, **RICHARD BURBAGE** (1567?-1619) was prominent. His portrait shows him to have had a muscular, stocky physique, capable of graceful movements and it is recorded that he possessed a melodious voice. Of his art, we know little, except that he performed Hamlet, Lear, Othello and Richard III to the satisfaction of his good friend, William Shakespeare. As far as scholars are able to determine, the acting of this period was formalistic; the Elizabethan actor was distinguished primarily by his excellent voice and was expected to base his actions and gestures on the words of the playwright, as well as to act with decorum and modesty.

After the Puritans lost power in England in 1660, 18 years after closing the theatres, Charles II returned to the English throne. A step toward theatrical revival was taken by **SIR WILLIAM DAVENANT** (1606-1668) who formed a company with his friend, **THOMAS KILLIGREW**. Sir William secured a patent from Charles II to build two playhouses and organize two companies of players. Davenant shamelessly rewrote some of Shakespeare's roles. To his credit, however, he hired **THOMAS BETTERTON** (1635-1710) who captured and dominated the English stage for 50 years. Betterton's acting style was characterized with "passionate feeling, variety in characterization and judicious use of the voice."<sup>1</sup> One of Betterton's contemporaries was **EDWARD KYNASTON** (1640?-1706) who was one of the last men to play female roles on stage. Samuel Pepys (1633-1703) wrote in his famous diary that Kynaston was "the loveliest lady I ever saw."<sup>2</sup> Though young men had historically played female parts, Davenant hired women to play these roles. **MARGARET HUGHES** (?-1719) is credited with being the first woman to cross this barrier and appear on the London stage. In December 1660, she performed Desdemona in Shakespeare's *Othello*.

"Although study of the passions seemed to point in the direction of modern character dissection, the 18th century studied the passions, it would seem, in order to produce the proper stance and gesture on the stage."<sup>3</sup> Acting during the first part of the 18th century was marked by emphasis on vocal pyrotechnics and exaggerated physical action. **JAMES QUIN** (1693-1766), a popular Falstaff, was described by one critic as "rolling out his heroics with an air of dignified indifference."<sup>4</sup> It was **CHARLES MACKLIN** (1697?-1797) who shaped an atmosphere of change. He rejected the sing-song attitudinizing behavior of his predecessors and gave completely fresh and natural characterizations of Shylock, Iago, Mercutio, Richard III, Polonius and Macbeth.

Macklin influenced **DAVID GARRICK** (1717-1779) who infused his acting with native talent and intelligence. He had great mobility of face, figure, limbs and voice. Garrick was an acute observer of human nature and this made up for his lack of professional training. In 1747, he and James Lacy took over the Drury Lane Theater and he became an actor/manager. One of the actresses Garrick introduced in his company was **SARAH SIDDONS** (1755-1831) who was born into the Kemble family of actors. Sarah Siddons was versatile; she had strong and expressive features and her voice could be both plaintive and powerful. Her articulation was perfect and her stage presence completely self-assured. During her tenure on the stage, she changed the concept of costume by eliminating the over-abundant hoopskirts and towering wigs. **JOHN PHILIP KEMBLE** (1757-1823), Sarah's brother, was cold, classical and correct. He had a

certain affectation in his pronunciation, but his mannered style made him an effective Coriolanus. He was manager at Drury Lane and then at Covent Garden. He was scholarly and inventive and introduced the use of historically accurate costuming.

The 19th century, with its upsurge of industrialism and democracy, brought about a new style of acting with a search for a new realism on stage. It drew its inspiration from

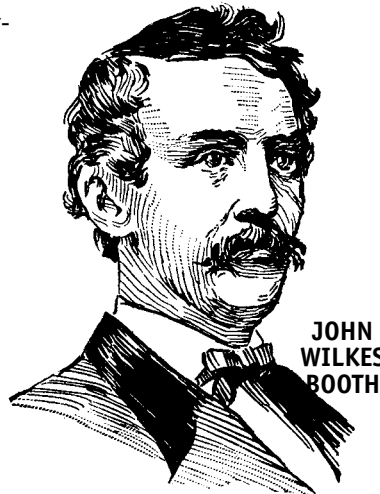
**GEORGE FREDERIC COOKE** (1756-1812) who excelled in roles that showed human nature at its worst, notably Richard III. He was physically energetic and influenced **EDMUND KEAN** (1787-1833). Kean's fresh interpretation, his energy and violence of emotion, in contrast to the cold postures and recitations of other actors, made him the ideal of the romantic temperament.

His style of acting was characterized as "more pregnant with meaning, more varied and alive in every part."<sup>5</sup>

**JUNIUS BRUTUS BOOTH** (1796-1832) was greatly influenced by Kean. He and Mary Holmes left England and came to America. One of their offspring became a noted actor and another the assassin of President Lincoln. Junius Brutus Booth played Iago, Shylock and Richard III, but missed many performances due to alcoholism and instability of mind.

**WILLIAM CHARLES MACREADY** (1793-1873) attempted to burn with the fire of Edmund Kean, but this was in conflict with his nature. He was the perfect Victorian gentleman who loved great drama, but not the theatre. He did, however, introduce domestic touches into high tragedy. His restrained acting incited the fury of the American actor, **EDWIN FORREST**, which led to New York's Astor Place riot.

**SIR HENRY IRVING** (1838-1905), the



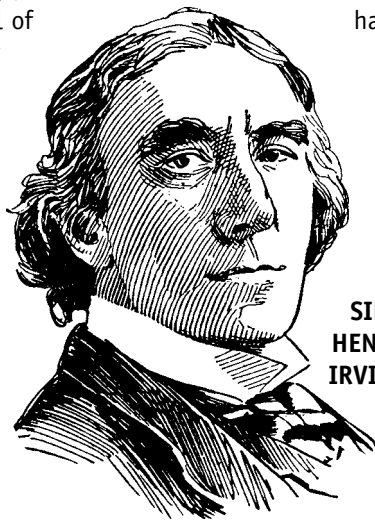
first actor in England to be knighted for his achievements, was the logical heir of Edmund Kean. But most critics acknowledged the fact that Irving was not successful in major tragic roles because of his inadequate voice and peculiar gait. He was more interested in by-play and “in the creation of the role as an actor than in merely presenting the words and thoughts of the dramatist. He believed that high tragedy should be played in the realistic manner which had been confined to comedy and melodrama.”<sup>6</sup> He became a star and manager of the Lyceum Theater. His acting partner was the actress **ELLEN TERRY** (1848-1928). This association lasted for 24 years and, although Terry was not a tragedian or actress of very wide range, critics admired her portrayal of Portia from *Julius Caesar* and her Ophelia opposite Irving’s Hamlet.

**HERBERT BEERBOHM TREE** (1853-1917) was an actor/manager of Majesty’s Theater. Beerbohm’s productions of Shakespeare were huge, monumental and carried the element of spectacle “to extravagant extremes” with scenic effects and tricks.<sup>7</sup> His competitor was **JOHNSTON FORBES ROBERTSON** (1853-1937), also an actor/manager. Forbes’ classical features and natural elegance were an asset to his performance of Hamlet which was praised as “being sweet, grave, well-bred and natural” by the critic and playwright George Bernard Shaw.<sup>8</sup> **LEWIS WALLER** (1860-1915) was another actor/manager who played about 200 parts without missing a performance.

Though many British actors toured the colonies, the U.S. had its own domestic players and innovators. The first American idol of the stage was **EDWIN FORREST** (1806-1872), archetype of the vigorous, self-made actor. He was given to dramatic poses and sonorous speech, but he carried his audiences by his physical power and deep-toned voice, not by subtlety or insight. When he toured England, his performances met with mixed reaction; this led to a deep antagonism between him and William

Charles Macready. Macready’s intellectual finesse contrasted with the physicality of Forrest. This, plus the differences in class and nation, led to the fiasco known as the Astor Place riot.

**EDWIN BOOTH** (1833-1893) was the son of Junius Brutus Booth. As a young boy, he was the guardian of his alcoholic father; as an adult, he lost first wife, Mary Devlin, his brother John killed Abraham Lincoln and his second wife lost her sanity. Edwin Booth’s acting was quiet and intelligent and brought a new style to the American stage. His melancholy nature helped attune him to the character of Hamlet and, like modern Method actors, he converted Hamlet into himself.<sup>9</sup> Booth’s brother, **JOHN WILKES BOOTH**, was also a handsome Shakespearean actor, before becoming infamous for his assassination of President Lincoln.



**SIR HENRY IRVING**

The 20th century produced a prodigious number of great Shakespearean actors. **JOHN BARRYMORE** (1882-1942) came from a theatrical family (Lionel and Ethel) who could trace their lineage back to the Elizabethans (Mrs. John Drew). John was extraordinarily handsome and loved to create, but hated to act. His Hamlet was convincing and clear and on Broadway, and his Richard III was considered a rousing success by critics. He also starred in many movies.

There were other great names of this time. **EDITH EVANS** (1888-1976) was one of the great English actresses of her day. She could completely transform herself into any character from Juliet’s nurse to Cleopatra. Her description of the way to speak Shakespeare’s lines was to leap from one emphatic word to another to avoid the oratorical style. **DONALD WOLFIT** (1902-1969) was an English actor/manager who devoted himself chiefly to Shakespeare. During World War II, he produced “blackout” tours of the English provinces; he also gave lunch hour excerpts from the plays. **SIR RALPH RICHARDSON** (1902-1983) of films and stage is best known for his Falstaff in *Henry IV*. He conceded he was best at

comic roles. **DAME PEGGY ASHCROFT** (1907-1991) has played Portia, Juliet, Viola and Ophelia as well as appearing in films and BBC television productions.

**ALEC GUINNESS** (1914-) has played the Fool in *King Lear* to great acclaim but is more familiar to movie audiences for his witty comedies and his character in *Star Wars*. **RICHARD BURTON** (1925-1984) was a member of the Old Vic company in 1953 where he performed Hamlet, Coriolanus, Sir Toby Belch and Caliban. In 1964, he played Hamlet, directed by John Gielgud. **SIR DONALD SINDEN** is an Associate Artist of the Royal Shakespeare Company. He has acted on stage, TV and films. For the RSC he has played such roles as Henry VIII, Benedick, King Lear, Othello and Malvolio.

Two giants of the 20th century Shakespearean stage are **LAURENCE OLIVIER** (1907-1989) and **JOHN GIELGUD** (1904-). In 1935, Olivier and Gielgud alternated the roles of Romeo and Mercutio in *Romeo and Juliet*. Olivier joined the Old Vic in 1937 where he played Hamlet with strength, virility and an Oedipus complex. He was a studious observer of human behavior and worked on characters from the “outside in.”<sup>10</sup> He performed most of Shakespeare’s tragic heroes and brought *Hamlet*, *Henry V* and *Othello* to the screen. In 1963, he became director of the National Theater in England. Franco Zeffirelli, the director, sums up Olivier’s accomplishments with these words: “It is an anthology of everything that has been discovered about acting in the last three centuries. It is grand and majestic, but it is also modern and realistic.”<sup>11</sup> Contrastingly, Gielgud’s acting style is more vocal than physical. He is the grand-nephew of Ellen Terry and is gifted with a beautiful voice and special eloquence. His Hamlet and King Lear are considered to be unequalled. Unlike Olivier, he learns his roles from inside out, “not concentrating on showy effects, but trying to absorb the atmosphere of the play and background of the character.”<sup>12</sup> His successful one man show, *The Ages of Man*, a collection of speeches and poems, prompted critic Walter Kerr to write that “the fusion of mind and matter is perfect.”<sup>13</sup> ■

# THOUGHTS ON

“

“Now what [an actor] represents is man in his various characters, manners and passions, and to these heads he must adjust every action...”  
—Thomas Betterton to Charles Gilden, 1709. p. 97.

**“But above all, never let your Shakespeare be out of your hands, or your pocket; keep him about you as a charm; the more you read him the more you will like him and the better you will act him.”  
—David Garrick in a letter to Mr. Powell, 1764. p. 136.**

“Kean maintained that Shakespeare was his own interpreter, by the intensity and wonderful genius of his language. Shakespeare...was a study, his deep and scrutinizing research into human nature...”  
—F. W. Hawkins. *The Life of Edmund Kean from Published and Original Sources*. London: Tinsley Brothers, 1869, Vol. I. p. 328.

“There are many causes for the growth of naturalism in dramatic art, and among them we should remember the improvement in the mechanism of the stage. For instance, there has been a remarkable development in stage-lighting.”  
—Sir Henry Irving, 1885. p. 357.

“I have frequently observed things, and...if I have not got a very good memory for anything else, I have got a memory for little details. I have had things in the back of my mind for as long as 18 years before I have used them. And it works sometimes, that, out of one little thing you have seen somebody do, something causes you to store it up...And ultimately, you find in that (thing) the illuminating key to a whole bit of characterization.”  
—Laurence Olivier, 1967. p. 410.

**“The struggles and agonies of the actor, as he winds his way through this labyrinth process every night upon the stage, are of very little account or interest to anyone except himself....No one knows if he is suffering in his heart while he plays an emotional scene, or if he is merely adding up his household bills....”  
—John Gielgud, 1939. p. 402.**

“The painter and the sculptor go to Italy to study the old masters. They are not censured for imitation; and why may not the actor have his preceptor, his model? Why should he be denounced for following the footsteps of his old master? Why should he alone be required to depart from tradition?”  
—Edwin Booth, 1886. p. 561.

“I can never understand the actors who say they lose themselves completely in a part. I do not know what they are talking about. Yet there is a double identity that is very real...to me...and somehow, never quite the same.”  
—John Barrymore, 1923. p. 594.

”

## NOTES

1. Cole and Chinoy, p. 93.
2. Grebanier, p. 32.
3. Cole and Chinoy, p. 96.
4. Cole and Chinoy, p. 94.
5. Grebanier, p. 171.
6. Cole and Chinoy, p. 253.
7. Grebanier, p. 331.
8. Grebanier, p. 337.
9. Grebanier, p. 231.
10. Grebanier, p. 493.
11. Cole and Chinoy, p. 409.
12. Grebanier, p. 489.
13. Grebanier, p. 491.
14. Styan, p. 1.
15. Lockwood, p. 4.
16. Lockwood, p. 15.

## SOURCES

Brook, Donald. *A Pageant of English Actors*. London: Rockliff, 1950.

Cole, Toby and Chinoy, Helen Krich. *Actors on Acting*. New York: Crown Publishers, 1970.


Grebanier, Bernard. *Then Came Each Actor*. New York: David McKay Co. Inc., 1975.

Pearson, Hesketh. *The Last Actor-Managers*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1950.

Rockwood, Jerome. *The Craftsmen of Dionysus*. New York: Applause Books, 1992.











Styan, J.L. *Modern Drama in Theory and Practice*. Vol. I. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

**T**ony speaks of traditions in the theater. Explain some traditions in your family, clubs, work, etc. Example: putting up your Christmas tree, special family celebrations.

Tony also speaks of “overthrowing or making new traditions.” What traditions have you discarded or changed. In your family, club, work, etc. Example: Mom always made a big Sunday dinner.  Now you order in.

Interview your parents and grandparents how have their traditions stayed the same. How have some changed.


Mr. Church speaks of the strain of naturalism in acting. Watch a TV program such as “ER,” “Law and Order,” “West Wing,” “City of Angels,” “Providence,” etc. Compare the acting to how you speak/ behave. Is the acting natural? Does it seem more intense? Less? Is it an exaggeration of how we all speak and behave?

As Tony explains, stage business is sometimes used by actors to help to create the character. Have a student volunteer follow these directions: Sit in a chair  Sigh  Look left  Look at left wrist  Look straight ahead and tap your foot  Look left  Sigh  Look at left wrist  Look straight ahead  After the student has performed these activities, ask the other students to identify his/her action. How did the actor’s business create a situation? Can you think of a story based upon this short piece of business? 



Acting students rehearse a scene. Props are all around you—pick up a few and create a little story with them.

Rehearse the following scene with your partner. Once you have familiarized yourself with the lines, add a situation that would fit the scene. Then, add business or actions based upon the situation. After you have practiced, perform for the rest of the class.

- A: Hello. 
- B: Hi.
- A: How are you?
- B: Fine. And you?
- A: Okay.
- B: Just okay?
- A: Yeah. Well, I gotta go.
- B: Okay. See ya.
- A: Yeah, see ya.

Select a popular actor who has many T.V./film credits in their career such as Tom Hanks, Julia Roberts, Dustin Hoffman, Robin Williams, or Meryl Streep. Think of at least three roles that the actor played and analyze ways he/she created that character. How did the actor use his/her voice? Body and movement?

Business or actions? Costumes? Etc. Have any of these roles or actors impacted entertainment history? Why or why not?

After reading a Shakespeare play, select a role from the play that you would like to portray. Create a pantomime of business that the character might do; it may be from the play or from your imagination. For example, if you were going to play Prospero from *The Tempest*, you might pantomime concocting a magic potion from a book. How would this exercise be useful if you actually were cast in the role? What aspects of acting did you use in the activity? Can you think of other exercises that actors might use to prepare for a role?

One-person shows have been a popular form of theatre over the past few decades. Many artists such as Anna Devereaux Smith, Spalding Grey, and

John Leguizamo have created careers out of one-person shows. Why do you think actors/writers would choose this medium? How would a one-person show differ from a traditional play in writing style, technical demands, acting style, etc? Can you think of a plot that might lend itself to a one-person show rather than a traditional form?

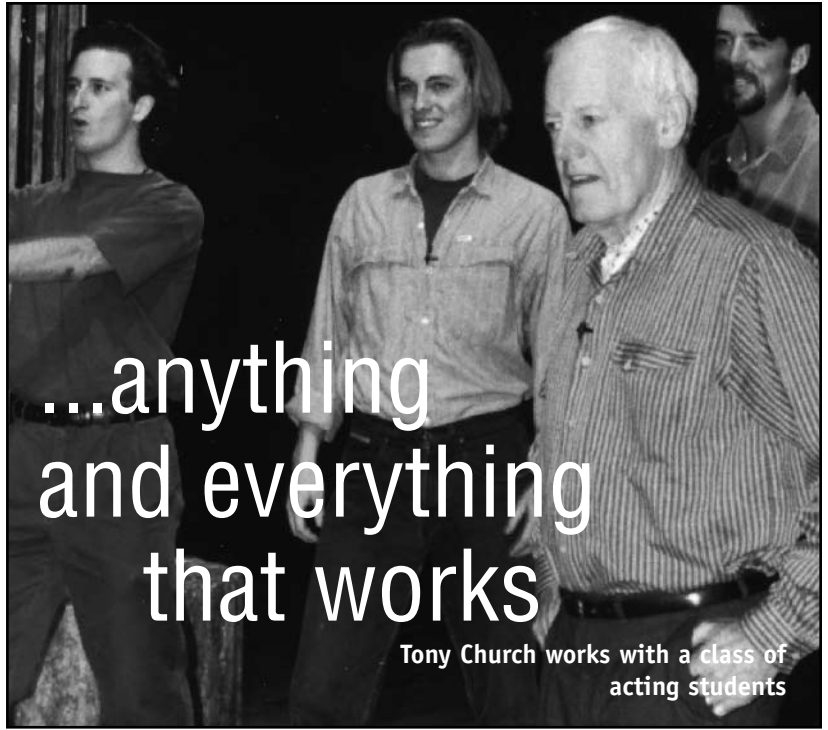
*Give 'Em a Bit of Mystery* traces changes in acting styles over a period of time. Pick something that you are interested in: costume, transportation, games, sports, etc. Pick something specific like a rich person’s costume, or a specific sport and trace the changes from the 16th century to the present. Make sure you define what caused the changes, for example, advances in technology have completely changed our form of transportation. Create a timeline and show on the timeline when important changes occur. ■

“Realistic” is a slippery term in dramatic criticism. In 1909...Edward Gordon Craig observed in *On the Art of the Theatre* that the artificiality of the Kembles had been supplanted by the more natural Edmund Kean, who had surpassed in being natural by Macready, who seemed stilted when Henry Irving arrived.”<sup>14</sup>

The trend in drama from the earliest times to the present has been from external reality to internal, or psychological, reality, writes Jerome Rockwood in his book, *The Craftsmen of Dionysus*. He gives two methods that an actor can use in approaching a role.

“Presentational acting,” the actor presents the character to the audience by imitating the speech, movement, mannerisms and emotional manifestations he/she thinks the role requires. Many times he/she may actually “feel” the emotion in rehearsals, but for a performance he imitates those words and gestures he/she has developed during rehearsals. Actors who adhere to this method believe this is the only way the actors can reproduce the effects they want. If one were really to “feel” all these emotions, they would lose the control necessary to imitate the character. This method calls for scrupulous attention to voice and movement because these are the tools of the actor. The actor rehearses each vocal nuance and inflection in the lines. Movements are planned and sometimes facial expressions are practiced in the mirror. In this way, the actors find the particular expression they want to convey the intention of the character and then repeat it at every performance.

The second method is called “representational acting.” In it, the actor attempts to “represent” the role by actually thinking the thoughts and experiencing the emotions of the character he/she is playing. Voice and movement are important, but the



...anything and everything that works

Tony Church works with a class of acting students

representational actor places much more emphasis on the internal—the psychological and emotional—determinants of the character. The actor believes every moment on stage must represent the inner life of that character. This method differs from the presentational actor in that the presentational actor relies on calculated movements or external manifestations to convey the character.

Both methods are based on observations of nature and both strive to present the truth of the character on stage. “It is in the procedures for attaining this goal that the difference lies. The presentational method imitates what is seen in nature; the representational approach attempts actually to recreate the natural condition.”<sup>15</sup>

When we put good actors of both camps side by side, it is not always easy to see which actor is practicing which method. Able actors borrow this, change that, reject one thing or another until they come up with their own unique system—a potpourri of anything and everything that works. ■

Give *Em a Bit of Mystery* is made possible in part by the generosity of John and Sandra Downing and Bob and Judi Newman

Inside Out is intended for students and teachers but may be enjoyed by audiences of all ages.

The Student Matinee program is sponsored by



Denver Center Theatre Company

Donovan Marley, Artistic Director  
A division of The Denver Center for the Performing Arts

Sally Gass, Contributing Writer  
Linda Eller, Editor  
Chris McCoy, Activities  
Melanie Simonet, Designer

