



## For W. Shakespeare, All the World's a Tube

The BBC and Time-Life plan an ambitious project: all 37 plays on TV; the first will appear next month

By Malcolm G. Scully

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William Shakespeare will, for the next several years, be a growth industry.

The chief stimulus to the Shakespearean economy could be an ambitious project to telecast new productions of each of Shakespeare's 37 plays. The project, which began last year, is under the joint sponsorship of the British Broadcasting Corporation and Time-Life Television and will take six years to complete.

This winter and spring, in the series' "first season" in the United States, six plays will be shown on public television, beginning with *Julius Caesar* on Feb. 14. The tentative schedule for the rest of the "season" will be *As You Like It*, Feb. 28; *Romeo and Juliet*, March 14; *Richard II*, March 28; *Measure for Measure*, April 11; and *Henry VIII*, April 25.

### 700 to Offer Courses

Educational materials for use in high schools, colleges, and universities are being developed under the direction of a National Advisory Committee chaired by Maynard Mack, professor of English at Yale University and former president of the Shakespeare Association of America.

A spokesman at the Coast Community College District in California, which, along with the University of California at San Diego, is developing the college-level materials, said that about 700 two-year and four-year colleges are expected to offer courses this spring based on the series.

Some will be offered to adults on a non-credit basis; others will be offered for full undergraduate credit.

Even if you don't want to take a course based on the series, you can get a 32-page guide to the plays prepared by WNET, the public television station in New York where the telecasts will originate.

National Public Radio is planning to broadcast programs in conjunction with the series, including half-hour introductions to the individual plays and programs on Shakespeare's life and his use of language and music.

Videotapes of the productions will be sold—for \$350 each—or rented—for \$100 each—by Time-Life.

Previews of five of the first six plays were shown at the annual meeting of the Modern Language Association here.

Reaction among Shakespeare scholars was mixed. Most viewers awarded high grades to the productions of *Julius Caesar* and *Measure for Measure*, gave satisfactory marks to *As You Like It* and *Richard II*, and flunked *Romeo and Juliet*. Comments on *Romeo and Juliet* ranged from "disappointing" to "pedestrian."

However, despite the "unevenness" of the first six plays, virtually all of the faculty members said the attention the

series would bring to Shakespeare would be, in the words of one, "good for the Shakespeare business."

John F. Andrews, director of academic programs at the Folger Shakespeare Library and editor of the *Shakespeare Quarterly*, said he expected the series to stimulate a wide range of other Shakespearean activities.

"It will create new audiences for Shakespeare on film, in theater, in the classrooms, and in publications," Mr. Andrews said. "Even if the series were on the whole mediocre—which I don't think it will be—the net result would be salutary."

Yale's Mr. Mack added that the telecasts "will be a godsend in the regular college Shakespeare course." Even at prestigious institutions, he said, many students arrive never having seen one of Shakespeare's plays produced.

"I've been a teacher of Shakespeare all of my professional life, and I've never seen all of the plays myself," he added.

In a letter promoting the series to other faculty members, Mr. Mack said, "We will be able to teach plays that are commonly neglected, knowing that when seen they will be accessible to a degree rarely possible with the printed text alone. We will be able to reach students who, in the ordinary course of events, would never think of studying Shakespeare. We will even be able to ask our students to 'attend' all the plays they are expected to read."

Both Mr. Mack and Mr. Andrews said the existence of the series would enable faculty members to focus on questions of stagecraft and performance in Shakespeare—areas that once were generally ignored in literature courses but which many scholars now feel are crucial to an accurate understanding of the plays.

Both were pleased that the producers and directors had decided to set the plays either in Shakespeare's own time or in the time in which the action takes place.

### No 'Gimmicks' in Settings

"I'm delighted that they have decided not to use any particular gimmicks in the settings," Mr. Mack said. "To do so would mean that the tapes of the performances would become dated quickly."

John Wilders, a fellow and tutor in English at Worcester College of Oxford University, is serving as literary consultant to the series.

He explained at the Modern Language Association's meeting here that the decision to avoid experimental interpretations had been made at least in part because of the nature of the anticipated audience for the series.

"A majority of the audience will be seeing these plays for the first and perhaps the only time," Mr. Wilders said.

While experimental productions can

bring out certain qualities in a play that are not apparent in more traditional interpretations, he added, the advantages of experiment are "possible only when you have some basic, classic interpretation to use as a comparison."

Mr. Wilders added that the producers had decided not to use a single director for the entire series because "they did not want to impose a 'house style' on each one of the productions."

He said the role of literary consultant was one that evolved slowly, since "I had never been one before and the BBC had never had one."

Eventually, he became an adviser to the directors on what cuts to make if they became necessary and on what interpretations of scenes were consistent with an overall interpretation of a play.

He also spent at least one day a week "in the rehearsal rooms with the actors to help them make sense of Shakespeare's verse."

### 'Consultant, Not Commissar'

Throughout, Mr. Wilders said, "I serve as a literary consultant, not a literary commissar—so much more's the pity."

He added that he had encountered little real conflict between his roles as a scholar and as an adviser to television directors, although he found some directors more suspicious of working with a "pedant" than others.

He has found startling differences between the two realms, however. For instance, he said, advising students and advising actors are quite different.

If a student asks about a "particularly complex Shakespearean crux," he said, the scholar generally will smile, say that scholars have differed on the matter for a long time, and refer the student to various scholarly articles.

"If I make that kind of reply to an actor, he says, 'Look, I've got to say those lines, and I'd like a meaning, please.'"

"It is one of those rare cases where a scholar actually has to make his mind up," Mr. Wilders said.

The concept of making a television production of each of Shakespeare's 37 plays was first proposed by Cedric Messina, a senior producer at the BBC.

Mr. Messina described his reasons to a British journalist recently. "These plays are among the greatest contributions the English language has made to world culture," he said. "And as we have the facilities and the talent to do all the plays of Shakespeare, it becomes almost our duty to do them."

The American telecasts of the plays are being supported by grants from the Exxon Corporation, the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, and the Morgan Guaranty Trust Company of New York.



Feb. 28: *As You Like It*



March 28: *Richard II*



April 11: *Measure for Measure*



March 14: *Romeo and Juliet*