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"Knowing I lov'd my books, he furnished me. . ."

Spring 1999

"A star danc'd, and under that was I born": Dame Judi Dench Sweeps the Field

By any measure, 1999 must rank as Dame Judi Dench's *annus mirabilis*; not only has she won the Academy Award and the Tony Award, but she has also been celebrated by the Shakespeare Guild, which presented her with the 1999 Gielgud Award at a gala ceremony in New York's Ethel Barrymore Theatre (scene of Dench's Tony-winning performance in *Amy's View*) on 17 May, after Dame Judi had won the Academy Award but before the Tony Award was announced. In the nationally-televised awards ceremonies, there was time for only the briefest acknowledgement of Judi Dench's achievements, whereas the Gielgud ceremony allowed two hours for celebration of the actress's remarkable career, which has included landmark performances in virtually every conceivable Shakespearean role.

Appropriately, the Barrymore's stage displayed the final set for *Amy's View*, seen only briefly in the closing moments of the play, a stunning reproduction of the auditorium at the Theatre Royal, Haymarket, one of John Gielgud's favorite theatres.

Speaking at the celebration, Zoe Caldwell, who won the Gielgud Award in 1998, offered a congratulatory message from the 1997 winner, Sir Derek Jacobi, who praised Judi for the "esteem and affection" she has won from her fellow-actors and for her "tragicomic truthfulness." Surely, Sir Derek suggested, Beatrice's words in *Much Ado About Nothing* suit Judi Dench perfectly, "A star danc'd, and under that was I born."

Both my wife Ellen and I have been struck by Dame Judi's star, following her career as closely as possible ever since we marvelled at her performance with her husband Michael Williams in Hugh Whitmore's *Pack of Lies* in 1984. We have managed to see her on stage only twice since then, but both experiences contributed mightily to our enthusiasm for her talent. In 1987, with *SNL* co-editor Tom Pendleton, we braved standing-room-only to watch her and Anthony Hopkins perform the definitive *Antony and Cleopatra* for our time, and in 1997 we saw the remarkable performance in *Amy's View* that won her the Tony for Best Actress. It was my great good fortune to see her performance in *Amy's View* for a second time not long ago on Broadway.

The stage performances have been reinforced by Dame Judi's appearances on film, whether in the relatively minor role of Mistress Quickly in Kenneth Branagh's *Henry V* or in the wonderful Victoria of *Her Majesty Mrs. Brown* and the bravura Elizabeth I of *Shakespeare in Love*. Add our addiction to



Dame Judi Dench at the Gielgud Award ceremony. Photo Credit: Mia Matheson.

the British sitcom *As Time Goes By* and it is easy to understand that, for us, Dame Judi Dench stands peerless as the greatest actress of her generation.

Amy's View

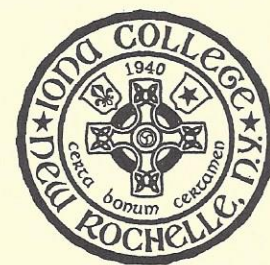
In *Amy's View*, Dame Judi plays Esme Allen, an actress who finds her only real fulfillment in life when she is on stage ("My work is my life."). David Hare has said that he did not have Judi Dench in mind when he started writing the play but that, by the time he reached Act 4, he knew that she was the obvious choice to play Esme. Most critics have found Act 4 the best in the play, perhaps because Hare wrote it with a specific actress in mind. In the first act, Esme explains that "the basis of the whole project" of acting is "to please without seeming to try." She continues: "That's what one's attempting. Of course, we all know it can't be achieved. But that's the ideal. To make it look effortless."

In the fourth act, as she and a young colleague prepare for the evening's performance, he says that he has been watching Esme from the wings: "I feel I'm beginning to understand your technique. . . . You never play anything outwards. I've noticed you keep it all in. So you draw in the audience. So it's up to them. And somehow they make the effort. . . ." When Toby asks

how to acquire this skill, Esme declares that "it comes with the passage of time. . . . You go deeper. . . . You go on down to the core."

The actress Siân Phillips comments that "[Judi] says she is not a technical actress, but her technique is in fact impeccable." One critic has praised Dench's "enviable power of bestowing truth and poignancy on everything she touches." For Dame Judi, the technique comes from the "core," and it is her "power of bestowing truth" by drawing us in that makes her a great actress. In his recent biography, John Miller writes that one director feels Dench's "ability to plumb great emotional depths" is "more than just a technical skill." The director says: "I think there's a great, great sadness somewhere in her life, a great well of sadness she digs into. She doesn't hide behind a character, she doesn't hide behind an accent, she's an inside-out actor."

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"A star danc'd, and under that was I born": Dame Judi Dench Sweeps the Field

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Seeing her on stage for a second time in *Amy's View*, I was struck by two details that help to explain her greatness. Esme smokes a great deal during the performance (Judi Dench does not smoke), and Dench makes the smoking into a significant expression of Esme's frustration and her enthusiasm. Even more impressive are the silences Hare has built into the role: for several critical minutes in both Acts 2 and 3, while others argue, Esme sits silent, and Judi Dench handles this situation so effectively that we are more aware of Esme silent than if she were an active participant in the discussion. Ben Brantley commented in his review for *The New York Times* that "those who know Dame Judi only from her recent work in film will discover qualities that a camera can't capture: a force of will-power, concentration, technique and sheer radiance that brand her presence into your memory."

The Gielgud Award Ceremony

In praising Dame Judi, Zoe Caldwell recalled her sublime performance in *Romeo and Juliet* early in her career (for the Old Vic in 1960) as "the definitive Juliet for our time." Indeed, noted Ms. Caldwell, every time Judi Dench plays a Shakespearean woman, she defines it for our time.

The celebration at the Barrymore Theatre offered a parade of luminaries praising Dame Judi's accomplishments, focusing on her acting excellence and her generous treatment of others. Christopher Plummer recalled the 1961 season, "when we were all so young and so beautiful," when the Royal Shakespeare Company's roster included not only Plummer and Dench but an extraordinary list of future stars, among them Peter O'Toole, Franco Zeffirelli, Vanessa Redgrave, Peter Hall, Ian Bannen, Colin Blakely, Dorothy Tutin, Ian Holm, Roy Dotrice, and Geraldine McEwan. Plummer concluded by reading sonnet 17, "Who will believe my verse in time to come/ If it were fill'd with your most high deserts?"

Rebecca Eaton of WGBH Boston, the PBS station responsible for so much of the British culture that reaches American shores, introduced a clip from *Her Majesty Mrs. Brown* and noted that Judi's daughter Finty played one of Victoria's daughters in the film. Sir Richard Eyre, who has directed the actress in many roles including that of Esme in *Amy's View*, described Dench as "a living national treasure" whose genius matches that of Yehudi Menuhin or Cary Grant: "she acts like Matisse draws." Indeed, Eyre contended, Judi Dench acts on instinct, never allowing technique to show, bringing head, heart, voice, and body into a marvellous harmony. Her impish sense of humor is complemented by her generosity, curiosity, humanity, and stoicism. And over all there is her sexy, subversive laugh.

Hal Holbrook, who was rehearsing his role as Shylock at the Shakespeare Theatre in Washington, offered Judi a reading of one of the speeches in his opening scene in *The Merchant of Venice*, anticipating the powerful performance he later delivered.

More Applause

Sir David Hare, author of *Amy's View* and of a number of earlier scripts featuring Judi Dench, used his presentation to illustrate many of the points in Eyre's praise. He recalled that he first saw the actress in 1962 in a production of *The Cherry Orchard*, starring John Gielgud and Peggy Ashcroft: his eyes were drawn to the Anya, Judi Dench (she won a Best Supporting Actress award for the role).

John Miller recalls that he first saw Judi in this production: "I remember how naturally she laughed and skipped about the stage and how touching she was in her scenes with her mother and uncle. Above all, it is that characteristic gurgling laugh that I associate with her Anya." When she portrayed Madame Ranevskaya in a 1989 production of the play, John Gielgud sent her a good luck note, "To my favourite actress in my favourite play."

Hare described Dench as a "lodestar to other actors" whose favorite stories are about mishaps on stage, such as the occasion when Gloucester's eyes popped out too fast. For Hare, acting is a judgment on character, who you are can matter as much as who you pretend to be, and audiences always "trust who Judi is."

Dench's fellowactor in *Amy's View*, Ronald Pickup, confirmed this insight by noting that, for Judi Dench, the offstage character influences her character onstage. During performances, Dame Judi inspires trust, love, friendship - and this observation led Pickup to read sonnet 30 ("When to the sessions of sweet silent thought") on friendship, "one of the most civilizing words in the language." Toby Stephens, son of the late Sir Robert Stephens and Dame Maggie Smith, explained that he first met Judi Dench when he visited his mother on the set



Dame Judi Dench and John Andrews at the Gielgud Award gala.
Photo Credit: Mia Matheson.

of *Tea with Mussolini*. Declaring that Shakespeare speaks as clearly now as ever about the human condition, Stephens read sonnet 65 for Judi ("Since brass, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless sea").

Brian Bedford offered two excerpts from one of the plays he is performing this year in Stratford, Ontario, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. After reviewing Theseus's humorous recitation of the entertainments offered to celebrate his wedding, Bedford brought the house down with his inspired performance of Nick Bottom's best moments in the play.

The audience at the Barrymore then enjoyed two more brief clips of Dame Judi in performance, first as Elizabeth I in the recent film, and then as Lady Macbeth in a typically definitive performance with Ian McKellen ("Come, you spirits/ That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here"). Keith Baxter read a congratulatory letter from Sir John Gielgud which included what Baxter called a "wonderfully backhanded compliment": "how wonderful was your Lady Macbeth, which I never thought you could achieve"! Gielgud also noted that Dame Judi's "sweetness and versatility know no bounds."

Zoe Caldwell, after imagining Queen Elizabeth II's congratulations

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"A star danc'd, and under that was I born": Dame Judi Dench Sweeps the Field

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("You're a marvellous Queen - would it be an imposition to ask you to take over?"), recalled Dame Judi's performance as Juliet under Franco Zeffirelli's direction in 1960: "This little spit of an actress did the impossible," making Juliet so real. "She spoke the poetry like an angel." Caldwell quoted the critic J.C. Trewin's praise: "A gleam of truth in every phrase."

Dame Judi Dench on Stage

A standing ovation greeted Dame Judi's arrival on stage, as Zoe Caldwell and Keith Baxter helped her to heft, at least briefly, the formidable Golden Quill award, normally housed in the lobby of the Elizabethan Theatre at the Folger Library. The actress, noting how uncomfortable she is on stage as herself, spoke briefly about a career that began at the Old Vic in 1957 when, after three years of training at the Central School of Speech and Drama, still only 22 years old, she portrayed Ophelia to John Neville's Hamlet. Characteristically modest about her own accomplishments over the course of the ensuing forty-two years, Dench insisted that "you cannot act on your own; it's something you do together." When Dame Judi saw another of David Hare's Broadway plays this season, *Via Dolorosa*, in which, alone on stage, he offers a solo monologue, she reportedly commented that, while she found the performance moving, "You don't act."

Dench's Focus: Acting as Community

For her, acting is a collective effort, and she is highly praised by her colleagues for her vivid interaction with everyone else on stage. Her conviction that acting is "something you do together" also helps to explain one of the traits directors find frustrating, her unwillingness to read a script, much less learn it, before the first rehearsal. But one director understands: "It robs her of her instinct to read the play without anyone else there. . . . she can't act without people in front of her." When she was filming *84 Charing Cross Road* with Anthony Hopkins, Dame Judi said to Hopkins one day, "in genuine puzzlement," "You really like filming, don't you?" Yes, he responded, "I love it. I think it's wonderful." But, Judi protested, "What is there? There's no audience."

After Dame Judi's brief acceptance speech at the Gielgud celebration, John Andrews, the president of the Shakespeare Guild, concluded the proceedings by bringing Dame Judi a bouquet of flowers, as the audience again erupted into a standing ovation.

The New Biography

In *Judi Dench, "with a crack in her voice," The Biography* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1998), John Miller offers a comprehensive and perceptive account of the actress's life and career. It is difficult to avoid superlatives in such an account, but Miller manages to tell the story without piling on too much fulsome praise. What comes through on page after page is the extraordinary range and accomplishment of Dame Judi's work, as well as the genuine decency, kindness, and sense of fun that mark her life, both onstage and off. 183 charities list her as a patron, and she frequently offers recitals to support these many worthy causes, including, of course, Shakespeare's Globe on Bankside. It was her idea to use a benefit performance of *Shakespeare in Love* to finance preservation of the Elizabethan theatre set used for the film, to help future actors in their work.

When John Miller approached her about the biography, she hesitated, recalling an earlier study (1985) and dreading any prospect of "all that talking about myself again." Married to one man, the actor Michael Williams, since 1971, Judi was born in York and was educated at a Quaker school. Her Quaker belief has been "one of the sheet-anchors of her life," which has had its full share of triumphs, challenges, defeats, and sorrows.

The Shakespearean Career

Given the extent of her achievement, it will be best in this review to discuss only a few of her Shakespearean roles, which have always been at the heart of her professional life. Several of those roles have already been alluded to, including Juliet, Ophelia, Lady Macbeth, and Cleopatra. Indeed,

these four could be used to mark stages in her career, Ophelia (1957) and Juliet (1960) coming early, Lady Macbeth (1976) somewhat later, during the years with the Royal Shakespeare Company, and Cleopatra (1987), one of her many triumphant portrayals on the stages of the Royal National Theatre. To focus on the Shakespearean roles is, perforce, to narrow the focus, away from her memorable performances in many classic and contemporary plays, from Chekhov and Oscar Wilde to Noel Coward and Stephen Sondheim, from Restoration comedy to Sean O'Casey and Bertolt Brecht.

SNL's Questions

In preparing this article, I was able to ask Judi Dench several questions, and her answers complement the insights offered in the biography. Asked to name her favorite Shakespearean roles, Dame Judi told *SNL* that this was not an easy question to answer and then listed "Cleopatra, Titania, Isabella, Viola, Lady Macbeth - in fact, I've enjoyed every Shakespearean role I've played, except one (Portia)." John Miller explains that she played Portia shortly after her marriage to Michael Williams, who played Bassanio in the same production. Nevertheless, she very much disliked the play: "It's the only play of Shakespeare's I dislike; everyone behaves so frightfully badly." Actually, Miller reports that she also disliked playing Regan: "it was the physical cruelty in the character that Judi found hardest to stomach" (she has also played Goneril, in a radio version with Sir John Gielgud, but, unfortunately, never Cordelia).

Her performance as Titania came earlier in her career, first on stage in Stratford in 1962, then on film for the same director, Peter Hall, in 1965. For the film, both Judi and Ian Richardson as Oberon were practically naked. Richardson tells an amusing anecdote, about the scene in which Judi runs through the woods, followed by children playing the fairies:

Peter stopped the camera and said, "Judi dear, is it possible for you to run without your breasts bobbing up and down?" Judi looked at him and said, "You've got to be joking. You're asking me to keep my boobs in order, and I've got nothing on except two little bits of chamois leather?" He said, "Well, could you try?" She went back and, do you know, she came down through the glade and I swear to God her bosom didn't move at all. I don't know how she did it, but she controlled it!"

Lady Macbeth and Cleopatra

Most commentators agree that Judi Dench achieved particular perfection in her performances as Lady Macbeth and as Cleopatra. The production of *Macbeth*, which began at the Other Place in Stratford, in the powerfully confining space of that small auditorium, played in several other venues as well over several years, so great was the demand for tickets. One critic wrote: "It is one of the few occasions in the theatre when I have felt that combination of pity and terror one is supposed to feel in tragedy: these are not monsters but recognisable human beings willing themselves to evil and disintegrating in the process." Dench, Ian McKellen as Macbeth, and Trevor Nunn as director all won awards for their work. Luckily, the production was also recorded for television and is available on videotape, as is Peter Hall's film of *Dream*.

Dame Judi won yet another of her many "Best Actress" awards for Cleopatra in 1987. Directing what he regards as "the best play ever written," Shakespeare's "Everest, much harder to bring off than *Lear*," Peter Hall declared that Judi Dench brought to the role "a sense of dangerous comedy; she was a dangerous woman.. I also think Judi is probably the best verse-speaker in England." Hall feels that "it's probably the best Shakespearean production I've ever done," and the critics agreed, in at least one instance comparing it to the legendary Michael Redgrave/Peggy Ashcroft performance in 1953. Declaring that he had not, "since Peggy Ashcroft, encountered a finer Cleopatra than Judi Dench," Charles Osborne concluded, "In a role which some might have anticipated would be outside the range of this versatile actress, she triumphs completely."

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Dame Judi Dench Sweeps the Field

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More Answers for SNL

Asked by *SNL* to name a Shakespearean role she would like to play, Dame Judi responded, "the Countess in *All's Well*." To the question asking her to name fellow performers whom she especially enjoyed working with, Dench replied: "There are so many, I don't know where to start . . . Ian McKellen, Michael Williams (my husband), Roger Rees, John Neville, Peggy Ashcroft . . . there are just too many to mention!" Indeed, and the long list of her fellow performers demonstrates just how extraordinary her career has been. During the run of *Macbeth*, Judi presented Roger Rees, the Malcolm, with a birthday cake that represented the set, with little icing figures on top, of the principals sitting in a circle of licorice. As John Miller reports, "Rees kept the figures and had them mounted in a glass frame as his memento of that time."

The index in John Miller's biography, listing Dame Judi's various traits, provides more examples of her "humour, and practical jokes" than of any other. One example must suffice:

At Peggy Ashcroft's eightieth-birthday gala [which occurred during the run of *Antony and Cleopatra*], Tim Pigott-Smith [who played Octavius] was in a skit on *Jewel in the Crown* and wore one black glove as Merrick, and Judi ribbed him, "That's strangely attractive, that one-armed acting." So the next night he wore one glove as Octavius, to no effect; later he slipped it into the basket with the asp, which did get a reaction. It then became a challenge to return it to the other unexpectedly - handed to him on-stage in *Mary Stuart*, falling out of her parasol in *A Little Night Music* . . . made up in the form of a chocolate cake for his birthday . . . an intimate game of long range ping-pong that only two dedicated practical jokers could sustain over several years.

As she approaches her sixty-fifth birthday this December 9th, Judi Dench has earned the respect and admiration of audiences and peers, expressed in these concluding words by John Miller: "[In her future work] we can be sure that she will, by turns, move us to tears and laughter, and give us that insight into the human condition that only truly great acting can offer. It is only a handful who qualify for that accolade in any acting generation, but unquestionably amongst them will be found the name of Judi Dench. After Queen Victoria her next screen monarch was Elizabeth I . . . and she jokes, 'I can only play Queens now.' Long may she continue to reign over us."

[J.W.M., with thanks to John Andrews and Erin Eagan for their crucial assistance]

Catholic Representation in Early Modern England

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Edmund Campion: Scholar, Friend, Martyr

Edmund Campion (1540-1581) is best known to history as a Jesuit priest executed for treason after travelling around the country for a little more than a year, celebrating Mass, hearing confessions, and preaching to his fellow Catholics. Shortly before his capture, his *Rationes Decem*, a theological challenge to the Anglican establishment, appeared in St. Mary's Church at Oxford; and in the previous year, his "Brag," stating clearly his motives for working as a priest in England, had caused a sensation as it circulated around the country. My seminar paper will review Campion's career, primarily in terms of his roles as scholar and friend, perhaps even "friend of Will." I hope to reach some conclusions about Campion's contributions to the literature of the period and to discuss the relationships between his work and life and those of his friend Sir Philip Sidney.

John Mahon (Iona College)

A Conjectural Emendation to Lines in *Romeo and Juliet*

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And indeed the sequent *shes do* disrupt the chiasmus by placing an unnecessary emphasis, like a misdirected spotlight, on a figure already implicit in the word *hope*. As for the metrical irregularity that Gibbons mentions, I cannot find it, since both lines are iambic pentameters. If, therefore, applying Occam's razor to the issue, we conclude that the problem lies in the last foot of the first line, we must try to find a word that rhymes with *earth* and which enhances the pattern of the chiasmus instead of disturbing it.

The word I would suggest is *death* (a parhyme comparable to *feast/guest* later in the speech), and no doubt associated with *swallow'd* in Shakespeare's mind by their collocation in 1 Corinthians 15:54 ("Death is swallowed up in victory") and the verse in Isaiah 25:8 ("He will swallow up death in victory") that it reworks. This, then, is how the couplet might have gone:

Earth hath swallow'd all my hopes in death
But she, the hopeful lady of my earth.

By introducing *death*, we add further stress to the fact that Juliet has survived her infancy whereas all her siblings have perished (a situation not unlike the start of *Great Expectations*). This reinforces the cold, occluding, mortal associations of *earth* at its first occurrence, very different from the intimations of living clay at its second. The pronoun doublet vanishes, furthermore, allowing the chiasmus to function without a distracting pronominal stutter, and Juliet survives all the more heroically against the voracious enjambment of death. Even a conservative editor like Gibbons, who defends the lines in the form that has come down to us, still concedes that there is room for doubt: "The simplest explanation for the broken rhyme is that the compositor misread a final word; error cannot be demonstrated, though it may be suspected" (95). I hope my explanation, otherwise wholly conjectural, at least passes that test of simplicity. Of its consistency I also have no doubt. When it comes to adequacy, that final criterion of a viable hypothesis, my readers will have to decide.

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The Play Behind the Play: *Hamlet* and *Quarto One*

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inconsistent, virtually unplayable *Hamlet*.

Certainly Foster is right that Q1 does present a more coherent narrative and a more consistent hero. However, his reading of the play is problematic at best and his conclusion that coherence necessarily creates a better drama is also dubious. It is just as likely that *Hamlet* holds such fascination - for scholars, actors and audiences - because of the continued inability to successfully pluck out the heart of its mystery. Foster's arguments do not explain the continued popularity of the inconsistent Q2/F *Hamlet* in performance any more than they explain why Shakespeare would have so thoroughly rewritten an already successful play (and without any awareness of the apparent damage the revision inflicted on the story). Because of the wealth of source material - much of it difficult to find elsewhere - *The Play Behind the Play* is a worthwhile book for scholars, but readers must still come to their own decisions about the place of Q1 in the editing process and the complex textual history of *Hamlet*.