

Naturalism Meets Classicism

The Training and Early Shakespearean Career of Dame Judi Dench

By

Donna Douglas Brewer

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of  
The School of Letters of the University of the South  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in English and American Literature

May 2014

Sewanee, Tennessee

Approved:

Date:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Ann Jennalie Cook, Ph.D.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Jennifer Lewin, Ph.D.

\_\_\_\_\_  
John Grammer, Ph.D., Director, School of Letters

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May 2014

## Abstract

After practically growing up on stage in York, Judi Dench studied acting at the Central School of Speech and Drama in London, where she graduated in 1957 and immediately began acting professionally with the city's pre-eminent theatrical company housed at the Old Vic. Dench received harsh reviews for her first public performance as Ophelia and retreated to begin a gradual rise to great acclaim with her subsequent portrayals of Katherine of France, Juliet, and Titania. These early high-wire adventures that initiated Dame Judi Dench to the world of acting lie at the heart of my thesis because I believe they forever shaped her career. Tension grew between the classical training that she refused to compromise and the increasingly naturalistic directorial tendencies of the time. The conflict between these traditional and emerging ideals affects her even now, winning respect and affection from audiences as she balances the two. Viewers relate to her spontaneous, naturalistic performances, yet she maintains the highest standards of articulation and theatricality in every role, from Shakespeare to sitcoms, from Ibsen to action films.

This work explores the youth, formal training, and earliest professional Shakespearean performances of Dame Judi Dench as a microcosm of British theater at the time. My research was completed near Sewanee, Tennessee, over the course of five years, with the English-Speaking Union of Nashville funding one summer of research in England. The appendices are presented with cooperation from the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, the Royal Shakespeare Archive, the Old Vic Archives in Bristol and Birmingham, and the Harvard Theatre Collection, as well as personal interviews and e-mails with Judi Dench, John Barton, Cicely Berry, Barbara Jefford, and Kate Duchêne.

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To God be the glory.

To Steve — my rock. Peanut butter and jelly time is over . . . at least for now.

I love you and thank you for persevering with me.

For Bryan, Kristin, Vivi, and all my students — my gifts to the world.

May you always reach for the stars.

Thanks to Rick and Willie Sommer, John Grammer, Jenn Lewin,  
Nick Moschovakis, and others who believed in me, making this work possible.

Each day, my teaching and writing perpetuate your legacy.

I am grateful to the English-Speaking Union of Nashville for research funding.

With love and gratitude to Ann Jennalie Cook,  
who generously shares the wealth of her wisdom by mentoring others.  
I could never repay you for the time, sweat, and ink you have invested in my efforts.

You are a benevolent taskmaster, and I am forever grateful.

Words cannot suffice.

## Naturalism, Verse, and Risk in Shakespearean Performance

Only one woman, often described as Great Britain's national treasure, once moved "the Queen into second place as the nation's most liked and respected person" (Cochrane). For Dame Judi Dench, the accolades continue to accrue, though "she found herself dumbstruck . . . after being awarded the ultimate accolade" when "readers of *The Stage* newspaper . . . named her the greatest stage actor ever" in December of 2010 (M. Brown). A veteran in every type of performance imaginable, the actor's greatest love is classical texts performed for live audiences in repertory (Dench, *And Furthermore* 240). However, she is more famous to the masses for her work in television sitcoms and films, especially in the James Bond franchise. Dench often rejects the status of national treasure as "too dusty, too in a cupboard, too behind glass, too staid" because she strives to remain unrecognizable and "do the most different thing [she] can think of next" in her career (Teeman).

Instead of resting on her many laurels that include a Paladine D'Argentino for *Romeo and Juliet*, six BAFTA awards, three SWET awards, three Olivier awards, two Golden Globes, one Critics Circle Award, one Tony Award, one John Gielgud Award, the revived Southbank Award, one Best Supporting Actress Oscar, and seven Oscar nominations, she prefers new challenges and a busy schedule (Dench, *And Furthermore* 253; "Dench Wins"; "Judi Dench: Awards"). Dame Judi prioritizes time spent with family, along with service to approximately two hundred charitable organizations and professional challenges to keep her life interesting (Cochrane). It has been said that "Dench, who has played both Queen Victoria and Queen Elizabeth I on film and was made a Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire in 1988, is beloved by the

English public for her quintessential Britishness;” however, the rest of the world has also come to admire her since she launched her film career in 1997 (Lahr; Feinberg).

In an interview for *Newsweek* in 2006, Nicki Gostin asked Dame Judi for details about her acting technique, to which she replied,

I work entirely on instinct, nothing else. I’m a kind of animal. I’m not intellectual in any way. I never read plays; I just do them because someone asked me to. Tony Hopkins and I didn’t know how ‘Antony and Cleopatra’ ended during our first read-through. (63)

While she claims to act instinctually, those instincts are fueled by her diligent professional training and consistent implementation of the technique she gained thereby. When her unorthodox approach inspired Gostin to follow up by asking if she considered her approach naughty, Dench replied, “Not naughty. Dangerous. I’ve gotten myself into real trouble by saying yes to a play, then going to the first reading and realizing, ‘This is a bummer’” (63)! Daring to begin rehearsals without knowing all the plot is only one example of this woman’s idea of fun. She is also known to enjoy practical jokes, laughter, vacations, and ordinary days spent with her family, her friends, her pets, and her community.

Directors adore her, many actors have written of her mentoring as they worked alongside her, and fans have been known to chat with her on London’s trains (Riding). Once, members of a striking labor union even serenaded her with “Hey Jude” as she walked the red carpet (Strang and Flint). The legendary John Barton<sup>1</sup> admires Dench’s

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<sup>1</sup> Barton provided this information in a personal interview at his London office on July 19, 2010.

work ethic and professionalism, while acknowledging that she is a “terrific giggler,” one trait that challenges directors on occasion. Barton tells one story about an incident when he was filming a segment of *Acting Shakespeare*, and he spilled coffee in his chair. Since they had very limited production time in the studio, he sat in his hot coffee to avoid the fit of giggles that would have surely ensued from Dench, at the cost of valuable studio time. In a telephone interview, Cicely Berry<sup>2</sup> remembered Dame Judi as “lovely to work with,” “great,” and “always receptive to instruction” when she taught her at Central and coached her in Royal Shakespeare Company productions. Kate Duchêne admires Dame Judi and appreciates her willingness to mentor young actors. When voicing her apprehension about playing Shakespeare as a young actor, Duchêne remembers the senior actor’s encouragement: “It’s easy, Darling. Follow the punctuation. You may not know what it means, but you’ll find out. Just follow the punctuation.”<sup>3</sup> She confides that Dench credits Peter Hall for this advice.

After over fifty-seven years in the limelight, Judi Dench landed her seventh Oscar nomination in 2014, despite macular degeneration and two knee replacements the previous year. Failing eyesight has limited her ability to read, paint, watch movies, and carry on her daily routines, yet she chooses to focus on the positives in her life and continue what she enjoys — her work as an actor (Feinberg). A crew member from *Philomena* has been quoted as saying, “Dame Judi was 'inspirational' for how she coped with her failing sight” on the movie’s set (Brady). This seems an insurmountable obstacle for actors who must memorize their lines. However, Dench has always enjoyed

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<sup>2</sup> Berry provided this information in a telephone interview on May 14, 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Duchêne provided this information in a personal interview at Shakespeare’s Globe, July 13, 2010.

having scripts read aloud to her, either asking friends and family to help with lines or learning them from audio recordings (Strang and Flint; Feinberg). The crew from *Philomena* reported that in spite of her vision problems, “she was always line-perfect,” adding that “She may not be able to see her scripts but she delivers lines like no-one else” (Brady). It is my contention that Dench’s voice and naturalistic acting technique, as well as her sense of professional decorum, were instilled when she studied at the Central School of Speech and Drama and worked in repertory at the Old Vic early in her career during a paradigm shift in professional theater. In his biography, Gerald Jacobs points out that “Judi could hardly have chosen a more exciting moment in English stage history to begin a professional acting career” (20). With John Osborne’s *Look Back in Anger* opening in May of 1956, “just a few months after Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* had so confounded London’s arbiters of taste (Judi had been to see both),” the young actress made her entrance on the British stage just as “a tidal wave of British playwrights, including John Arden, Harold Pinter and Arnold Wesker, was about to break and transform the theatrical landscape” (20). It must have been exhilarating to work during such a revolutionary moment in English theatrical history. This working environment certainly spawned her love for living dangerously on stage and before the camera.

## Early Life and Training

*The Guardian* documents Judi Dench's first professional role as the Virgin Mary in the York Mystery Plays performed in April, 1957, shortly before she graduated from the Central School of Speech and Drama ("Mystery Plays at York"). Within one week, she was called to her first London audition that facilitated "her London stage debut as Ophelia in *Hamlet* at the Old Vic Theatre and [her first appearance] on Broadway as Katherine in *Henry V* with the Old Vic Company" (McDonald 107; Zucker 47). Thus began one of the greatest Shakespearean careers since Richard Burbage. According to John Lahr,

Her Juliet in Franco Zeffirelli's 1960 stage production of 'Romeo and Juliet'; her Titania in 'A Midsummer Night's Dream,' directed by Sir Peter Hall in 1962; her Viola in 'Twelfth Night' in 1969; her Lady Macbeth in Trevor Nunn's magnificent 1976 production; her Cleopatra in Hall's 1987 'Antony and Cleopatra' -- all are exemplars of contemporary Shakespearean performance.

Yet the multi-faceted career the actress has crafted began with challenges and disappointment. Dench's artistry emerged from her study at London's Central School of Speech and Drama and her earliest professional work at the Old Vic, where she learned superior traditional speech and acting technique while embracing each professional challenge that came her way.

Born in 1934 and raised in a family involved in theater in many capacities, Dame Judi Dench virtually grew up on stage. In the words of biographer John Miller, “It was medicine that brought the Dench family to York, but it was the city’s strong associations with drama, amateur and professional, that kept them there” (11). Her father, Reginald, a physician who “was a keen amateur actor,” enjoyed performing, as did Judi’s brothers Jeffery and Peter, while her mother Olave “became a highly skilled wardrobe mistress” (12). On August 3, 2014, Dame Judi spoke and shared some of her favorite poems and speeches from the plays as part of the Stratford-upon-Avon Poetry Festival, sponsored by the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust. During her recital, the actress revisited early childhood memories of her father awaking her each morning by reciting poetry. Since Dr. Dench knew the works from memory, he expected young Judi to learn them as well, fostering her love for poetry recitation at a very early age.<sup>4</sup> Attending the School of Art in York, Dench planned a career as a painter or a stage designer after abandoning her original desire to become a professional ballet dancer (19). She was quite familiar with the Central School of Speech and Drama because her brother Jeffery studied acting there, and his stories about the excitement of training for theater at Central inspired his younger sister to give up her frustration with art school in favor of the stage (20).

According to Lolly Susi’s *The Central Book*, “Early 20<sup>th</sup> century actor training in England was casual and experimental, mainly ‘taught’ on an ad hoc basis by directors or ‘rehearsal masters,’” but by the 1950s, “drama school training had come to the fore as a recognized route into the profession” (Susi 42; Sutherland 108). Judi Dench studied at the Central School of Speech and Drama from 1954 to 1957, its last three years in the

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<sup>4</sup> This information was relayed in an interview with Ann Jennalie Cook, who attended the event.

<sup>5</sup>Royal Albert Hall, where the educational emphasis followed its name – speech took precedence over drama (Susi 119). Elsie Fogerty, founder of the school and a pioneer of speech therapy, spilled her passion for the spoken word into her pedagogical theory and instructional practices, implemented and maintained by Gwynneth Thurburn, her successor (22). Susi explains that “By 1942 Central was recognized as a leading institution for actor training, and the respect earned by Thurburn in the fields of speech therapy, speech and voice training for teachers helped maintain a high profile for the school” (86). Dench credits Central for providing her with methods that made her a professional:

What did I learn at Central? My technique. I expect, a lot of other things too. But entirely my technique. I knew nothing about breathing properly. I knew nothing about relaxation. There’s a difference between an amateur and a professional, because an amateur might be able to do a part absolutely wonderfully for a short time, but their voices will pack up eventually, or their energy will give in, and that’s what being a professional is about. (Zucker 48)

The technique Dench learned at Central in the 1950’s was originally created by Elsie Fogerty, along with Dr. H. Hulbert, though their methods were maintained and further developed by Gwynneth Thurburn after she became principal of Central during Dench’s time at the school. Hulbert worked for years to find “a method of controlled relaxation

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<sup>5</sup> See Appendix A for an image of the Royal Albert Hall, home of the Central School of Speech and Drama when Dame Judi was a student (66).

and effortless breathing” that Fogerty helped refine for the benefit of actors (Susi 22). In their work together, she reached the conclusion that “movement and speech are inseparable,” declaring that “speech is merely audible movement” (23). This doctrine eventually evolved into an acceptance of the Alexander Technique<sup>6</sup> at the school, though it took many years for Central to apply this discipline to its courses in any official way (185). In their terms as principal at Central, both Fogerty and Thurburn maintained their professional status as specialists in speech and voice, utilizing the school as a research facility to test their methods of vocal training (26, 86). *The Central Book* states that

Once students were accepted on the three-year course, they could expect to study voice production, prose reading, verse speaking, phonetics, and the history of drama and theatrical design. They would learn how to stage a production in a variety of spaces, interpret text and direct actors. (123)

This curriculum that began with rudimentary principles of vocal training culminated in performance and production experience in various venues.

The school’s academic program was quite structured, with the first year emphasizing improvisation and mime to build concentration and communication skills. In fact, Dench has written that “For the first year we weren’t allowed to open our mouths, we just learnt to do a lot of breathing exercises and the Alexander Technique” (Dench,

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<sup>6</sup> Created by Frederick Matthias Alexander when he lost his voice repeatedly during public speaking engagements, the Alexander Technique addresses posture, proper breathing, and the release of negative tension to promote unity of mind and body (MacDonald 10, 12). “It leads to an upright and most graceful carriage, which is why it is of interest to actors and why most drama schools have the use of an Alexander Technique teacher” (173).

*And Furthermore* 10). As Central students progressed, Thurburn invested a great deal of time “teaching her young students not only to honour the metre and give balance to the music of the verse, but also to speak simply and convey its meaning” (Susi 26). This realistic, natural style aimed to emphasize the message, not the speaker, with exaggerated line delivery and gestures. In teaching this lesson, “Fogerty had laid out for her students one of her most memorable tenets – the matter not the manner” (26). That ideal has remained absolute in Judi Dench’s work.

In his biography, Gerald Jacobs reports that “At Central, Oliver Reynolds and Cicely Berry ‘worked hard with Judi on voice projection and not only did she overcome her problems in that quarter but she very definitely ensured that hers was a voice to be recognized and reckoned with’” (18). Her continual progression towards vocal perfection remains one of Dench’s greatest assets. Jacobs points out that the actor’s “indebtedness to Cicely Berry stretches over many years, both women having served the Royal Shakespeare Company with distinction” (18). However, before working for the RSC, Dench remembers Berry as “a precise and technical tutor, explaining physiology and demonstrating the importance of relaxation and breathing techniques” that Dench considers vital for actors (18).

In addition to her technique, Dame Judi also credits Central with teaching her how to behave as a professional since “experienced . . . theatre directors were brought in for their third year when, for the first time, students performed plays to the public” (Susi 124). Athole Stewart, Dickie Hudd, and other working actors instructed students at Central during their final year of training, making certain they knew how to operate efficiently while performing with theatrical companies (41). Dench was a star pupil at

Central, taking many school awards including “a First Class Diploma, the Spotlight Prize, the William Poel Prize, the Gold Medal and the Elsie Fogerty Prize” (McDonald 107; Miller 22). The Fogerty Prize went to the outstanding student of the year, demonstrating Dench’s excellence as she trained and the respect she earned from both school officials and peers (Miller 22).

When asked about her time at Central through e-mail in 2011, Dame Judi reported her gratitude that she

was at Central the last three years that the school was based at the Royal Albert Hall under Gwynneth Thurburn. The emphasis then was very much on voice and how to use it to best effect – how to project, how not to lose it, and how to breathe properly. The school then was very theatre-orientated. (Dench, “Re: Your Thesis”)<sup>7</sup>

Dench often credits Central with providing her with skills to be a true professional, valuing the speech training that taught her to use and maintain her voice effectively through its constant use. When asked how the school had changed years later as her daughter attended Central, she replied that

When Finty was at Central, the whole emphasis had changed. Television and films had become much more prominent and theatre was almost the poor relation. As a result, I feel that the voice training was neglected. (Dench, “Re: Your Thesis”)

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<sup>7</sup> See Appendix K on page 76. Dame Judi provided this information through e-mail May 20, 2011 .

Given the current job market for actors, it is not surprising to find that Central and other acting schools have shifted their focus to match the workplace. Television and film work demand less strength in vocal performance because cameras and sound equipment do a great deal of work for the actors, rendering projection and vocal stamina less important. However, Dench's comments suggest that relaxation of vocal training has lowered the quality of contemporary acting, or at least robbed young actors of a useful tool. Almost every time one reads her advice to actors, she warns that they must have boundless energy, and they must get professional training (Dench, "Acting and the Theatre" ix-x). Because of the three years she trained, learning to build and sustain her voice, Judi Dench justifiably prides herself in her vocal range and stamina. However, in spite of her excellent preparation at Central, she experienced a baptism by fire in her first professional role from which her vocal training and technique could not save her.

“To Be or Not to Be”

Central’s reputation for “train[ing] voices that could fill theatres” served Judi Dench well when she launched her acting career (Susi 48). After earning her first professional role as the Virgin Mary in the York Mystery Plays and completing a hugely successful course of study at Central, she was quickly auditioned and invited to join the company at London’s Old Vic, the premier theater for Shakespearean work in England at the time<sup>8</sup> (McDonald 107). In her own words, Dench “arrived in 1957, the final year of the Old Vic’s five-year-plan to perform all the plays of Shakespeare” (Dench, *And Furthermore* 15). This five-year cycle opened with Richard Burton’s *Hamlet*, featuring Claire Bloom as Ophelia, and ended with John Neville’s *Hamlet*, to whom Dench played Ophelia (15). The ambitious project began in 1953 when Michael Benthall, the company’s new artistic director, announced the plan to present Shakespeare’s entire canon in repertory, declaring that “The theatre is so identified with Shakespeare now it is very difficult to get the public to accept anything else. . .” (“Five-Year Plan” 6). While audiences expected to see such productions at the Old Vic, the directors and Benthall also “left no doubts that they [were] concerned to pay off the capital debt of over £50,000 incurred during the rebuilding as soon as possible” (6). Shakespeare sold tickets and satisfied the classical demands of the theater’s clientele; however, Benthall also found ways to extend the company’s appeal and pay its expenses through recruiting popular mainstream artists and new talent (Rowell 146).

John Miller reports that “The competition for the part of Ophelia had been fierce, with about forty other actresses desperately keen to play opposite John Neville’s

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<sup>8</sup> See Appendix B for a photograph of London’s Old Vic (67).

Hamlet,” yet Benthall heard about Dench after an open audition held at Central just one week before her graduation and requested that she audition for him (27). After that audition, the director shocked Dench when he

walked up on to the stage and said, ‘I’m going to take an enormous risk, I’m going to cast you as Ophelia. If it’s not working, I’ll ask you to step down and you can understudy.

(Dench, *And Furthermore* 12)

Since she had been hoping merely to walk on, she was thrilled to capitalize on Benthall’s gamble. Besides Ophelia, she played First Fairy in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Juliet in *Measure for Measure*, walked on as a spirit of Eleanor conjured in *Henry VI*, and understudied for Rosie Webster as Cordelia in *King Lear* (Bate and Jackson 200). The press sensationalized Dench’s casting as Ophelia with such headlines as “‘ENTER JUDI – LONDON’S NEW OPHELIA – Old Vic make her first-role star’ in the *London Evening News*, and ‘The girl with the week’s biggest break’, in the *Daily Express*” (Miller 27). John Neville felt that the Old Vic’s publicity department mismanaged her professional debut, claiming that they should have “let the media discover her for themselves” instead of forcing her into the spotlight too soon (31).

Judi Dench remained grounded in the midst of such media hype and has written that she “had a problem with projection” while studying at Central, but credits Benthall with helping “cure” her of that “vocal shortcoming” (Dench, *And Furthermore* 237; “Acting and the Theatre” xi). She remains fiercely loyal to her discoverer, writing that “Michael Benthall was never really given the credit that was his due for his achievements at the Old Vic ” (22). John Neville seconds her assessment, commenting that “‘Michael,

whom I adored, was a great and under-rated director and, above all, he was the greatest discoverer of talent” (Miller 31). In addition to giving Dench the first opportunity to act professionally in London, he

had a wonderful eye as an impresario in choosing a company. In Richard Burton and John Neville he had the precursors of the Beatles and Johnnie Ray, the audiences used to go mad when they came on, and his courage in casting Frankie Howard and Tommy Steele paid off at the box office. (Dench, *And Furthermore* 22)

Burton and Neville both gained celebrity status through their classical roles at the Old Vic. While neither Howard nor Steele was considered a classical actor, both the comedian and the rock star lured new audience members to purchase tickets, filling a vital role in supporting the theater’s ventures. Benthall took risks by hiring many unexpected, sometimes even unknown actors at the Old Vic; however, most of these gambles paid off critically and financially, merging popular culture with traditional performance and giving rise to new talent like that of Judi Dench (Rowell 146; Dench, *And Furthermore* 22). Her acting career was born when Benthall brought her to the “Unlucky Horseshoe of [London’s] Waterloo Road” (Tynan 13). There, this groundbreaking *Hamlet* revolutionized future productions in its editing of the text, its special effects, and its evocation of the Oedipus complex in the closet scene that rendered the plot more realistic for many.

Before Benthall’s 1957 *Hamlet* premiered in London, it was presented in Liverpool. In her memoir *And Furthermore*, Judi Dench remembers that “The Liverpool

reception for *Hamlet* was tremendous, I got notices the like of which I have never had since, saying things like ‘The Vic takes a gamble, and a star is born’” (16-17). These praises must have been quite exciting for the young professional, but she took a tumble when the reviews turned sour in London. According to her, “The press did make quite a thing of it prior to the London opening, so they were gunning for me after that” (17). Riding the tide of shifting public opinion can prove challenging for seasoned performers, yet it must feel particularly difficult for new actors adjusting to the profession. *The Stage*’s article “Brilliant Production of ‘*Hamlet*’ at the Old Vic” states that Dench “provides little of interest while she is a sane Ophelia; many another actress could do better” (9). This mediocre assessment was followed by a similar review by W. A. Darlington in the *Daily Telegraph* when he wrote that “Judi Dench made a nice little Ophelia, if not much more” (Miller 30). With the headline “Miss Dench was built up too soon,” the *Sunday Dispatch* continued the media barrage with Richard Findlater’s assessment that she “tripped over her advance publicity and fell flat on her pretty face” (30). He advised that “A few years’ hard labour, in proper obscurity, will do wonders” (30). These reviews seem unfair since they offer no evidence of insufficient technique or mistakes to support their claims; the critics simply did not like her performance.

In spite of the poor reception, Dench “carried on and played the part [of Ophelia] for a year,” along with her walk-on and understudy duties and small roles in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *Measure for Measure* (Dench 17; Bate and Jackson 200). In 2011, the actor stated that she remembered little about the minute details relating to Benthall’s *Hamlet* since it happened over fifty years prior (Dench, “Re: Graduate Thesis”). She did know, however, that Ophelia gave away artificial flowers in her

insanity because “There was a superstition in those days that fresh flowers in a theatre were unlucky” (Dench, “Re: Your Thesis”). Since the Old Vic’s company worked in repertory, actors kept busy with rehearsals and performances of different productions on alternating days of the week. Dench’s first professional run with *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, one of the Shakespearean plays she has performed most often, seems like light duty since she played the First Fairy with only one major speech; however, according to Barbara Leigh-Hunt, “The hours were very long. We were on our feet rehearsing from ten o’clock until one, and from two till five, and then quarter past seven till eleven for the evening performance” (Miller 28). In his biography, Franco Zeffirelli speaks of his admiration for England’s repertory system, crediting it for producing London’s “fine, selfless players” who remained humble as they “provided such good training for newcomers” (163). The arrangement served Dench well, providing mentors for the young actor and ample opportunities to watch more experienced performers.

However discouraging, Dench feels that beginning her career with challenge and criticism made her a stronger professional, adding that “It was very hard, but maybe it’s good when you get a hammering so soon” (Cochrane). This stoic reaction to “hammering” from critical reviews is echoed when she says, “If you get bad notices for the first thing you do, it doesn’t half bring you up with a jolt” (Dench, *And Furthermore* 17). She does not argue against the verdict of her early detractors; however, she certainly worked hard to overcome the critical press.

While many London critics delivered negative, though vague, notices to young Judi, Kenneth Tynan and a few others wrote favorably about the show. In fact, Tynan declared that Benthall’s *Hamlet* was “Textually and conceptually . . . as near to a

definitive ‘Hamlet’ as anything [he had] ever seen.” He further asserted that “With imperious intelligence, Mr. Benthall has brought off a minor Shakespeare revolution,” high praise indeed. While impressed with the production overall, Tynan was not impressed with Neville’s Hamlet. Dench fared better: “The Ophelia, Judi Dench, is a pleasing but terribly sane little thing.” She clung to the “pleasing” words in Tynan’s critique and to *The Guardian’s* “Elsinore -- or Officers’ Mess?” that called her Ophelia “quietly effective,” for those responses inspired hope for her acting career (Cochrane). Others also noted positive aspects of her performance. For example, *The Stage’s* review conceded that “in the mad scenes she has a remarkable haunting quality,” that she was very “natural in expression and movement,” and that the critic would “long remember her” (“Brilliant Production” 9). Perhaps this naturalistic acting style fed her detractors; however, in *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Muriel St. Clare Byrne states that “Judi Dench received less than her due of praise for Ophelia,” noting that “Her outburst at the end of the nunnery scene . . . was strongly and clearly carried” and “Her madness had an effective darting vigor, and the timing was good” (515). Whatever their basis, the favorable notices that “found her playing touching and honest” were not enough to save her from overwhelming critical disapproval (515). Any positive feedback, however modest, got lost among the stinging criticisms of the Old Vic’s spectacular media hype and her own performance. Michael Benthall succumbed to the pressure, but John Neville and the rest of the company stood by Dench for as long as possible.

Neville denied the critical charge that the young performer was awarded the role of Ophelia long before she had the skills to play it successfully by declaring that “Judi was a very fine Ophelia. She had exactly the right quality – vulnerability” (Miller 31).

Dench has written that Neville played an important role in her professional development throughout this difficult situation, mentoring her through the trials of her first professional work in London's West End. In *And Furthermore*, she writes, "The Old Vic was where I learnt how to be part of a company, and John Neville showed me how a company should be led, which he did so brilliantly" (18). As the principal actor of the company, he felt responsible for helping the young actors, and since he played Hamlet opposite Dench's Ophelia, the two spent a great deal of time together. Dame Judi remembers crying throughout a performance of *Hamlet* once when she got the flu. Afterwards, Neville lectured her, saying "Never, ever, ever, ever do that again" (19). He went on to say, "That's not what they come to see you do. If you can't do it, let your understudy do it. What they come to see is the play and a story, and you having the flu isn't part of it" (19). Young Judi seemed to take the advice to heart, as she quotes Neville's words admonishing her that "you have to learn to put those [distractions] in a little side-compartment sometimes, and draw on them when you need them" (19). In this trying time, Dench also remembers that "every single night [she] watched every play in the season from the wings" and learned a great deal from what she saw (17).

While experienced actors took their unflattering reviews in stride, the inexperienced were more susceptible to the negative consequences of bad press. Dame Judi relates the story thus:

In 1958 the company was about to embark on a six-month tour of America, and Michael Benthall sent for me. When I went in, he was standing, looking out of the window, and I think he found it quite difficult to break the news. He said,

‘Judi, you didn’t get very good notices as Ophelia. So when we go to America, you are not going to play her. How do you feel about it?’ (19)

One can certainly imagine how the young actress felt at that moment, though Benthall then asked her if she still wanted to make the trip to the U.S. with the company. When she assured the director she did, he took her out of *Hamlet* and gave her the roles of Katherine, Princess of France in *Henry V* and Maria in *Twelfth Night*. Although “Both of those were very good parts,” Dench was understandably disappointed (19). Ophelia was recast with “Judi’s heroine, Barbara Jefford” playing opposite John Neville’s Hamlet (Jacobs 21). In a 2014 telephone interview, Jefford recalled that she needed another major role for the tour since she was leading lady of the company at the time. She remembered nothing about Dench's negative reviews for Ophelia and did not find it awkward to take over the role for the U.S. performances. Ms. Jefford found her predecessor very professional about the casting revisions, as is expected in a repertory, reporting that several personnel changes were made for the traveling productions.<sup>9</sup>

Dame Judi acknowledges that “it was quite hard not being in *Hamlet* when we got there. At the end of the tour it was to be televised in New York” (19); however, after losing her role in *Hamlet*, Dame Judi “was not too proud to watch Barbara Jefford as Ophelia, an experience she profited by” (Miller 40). Jefford had to leave before playing Ophelia in Europe and Yugoslavia, and Dench disregarded her bruised ego, fulfilling her responsibility to the company by stepping back into her former role for the tour’s final

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<sup>9</sup> Barbara Jefford provided this information in a 2014 telephone interview.

performances.<sup>10</sup> In her biography the actor says, “I felt I played it better. I’d watched Barbara play it; I couldn’t copy her performance because I’m not like her, but I felt I understood it better” (40). The tour included a stop in Paris, where the company earned rave reviews. According to *The Times* of London, on July 13, 1958, Dench played Ophelia in a Paris performance that was deemed a triumph. In fact, *Le Monde* named it “the definitive *Hamlet*,” and she received “much praise for her Ophelia in madness” (“Old Vic Triumph”). French critics appreciated her natural approach to the role and thought she acted with restraint, “without trying to look like something out of Botticelli” (“Old Vic Triumph”). The Yugoslavia production must have also been noteworthy, for *The Stage*’s column entitled “Chit Chat” reported that all performances of *Hamlet* were sold out before the company arrived, inspiring as many as seventeen curtain calls, along with a recital for 2,000 students which sold out within one hour. Moreover, upon the Old Vic cast’s return to England, *The Stage* reported they had two laurel wreaths among their souvenirs. One went to John Neville for his performance as Hamlet, and the other went to Judi Dench for her portrayal of Ophelia (8). According to the column, “The wreaths are given to people who the Yugoslavs think have achieved artistic perfection” (8). The actress had gone full circle as Ophelia, flying high on the wheel of fortune, plunging in defeat, then rising again in triumph.

Despite critical silence on the matter, one can only conclude that Dame Judi’s rigorous classical training combined with her onstage observations of other performers and critical responses to craft a more sophisticated presentation when she resumed her first major role.

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<sup>10</sup> See Appendix C for an Angus McBean photograph of Dench’s Ophelia (68).

### An Age of Queens

Judi Dench assumed the role of Katherine of France in the Old Vic's production of *King Henry V* that opened May 31, 1960. She also played Katherine for the BBC's *An Age of Kings* and the Old Vic company's U.S. tour. The naturalism of her performance carried over when the role was reprised, winning Dench the largest audience of her early career by broadcasting her portrayal of Katherine across Great Britain. The BBC television serial was recorded live and replayed later throughout the United States with great publicity and cooperation from the academic world. Summaries of the plays and other materials were distributed to educational institutions and households across the country to advertise and augment the experience for Americans with limited knowledge of British history or Shakespeare's works (Kiley and Marder 566). When asked about her experience in filming *An Age of Kings* in 2014, through e-mail correspondence, Dame Judi recalled that "At the time it was incredibly innovative and when it was all put together I believe it was the first time that anything like it had ever been done. It also employed a great many actors."<sup>11</sup> The production's innovative format, joining Shakespeare's history plays into an early television series, as well as its showcasing many local actors and technicians of noteworthy talent, made the serial a huge success.

*And Furthermore* records Dench's memories thus:

For *Henry V* I was wooed by three different actors playing the King. The most difficult time was when I was simultaneously playing the Princess of France opposite

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<sup>11</sup> See Appendix L. Dame Judi provided the information in this section through e-mail April 5, 2014 (77).

Robert Hardy in *An Age of Kings* on BBC TV in the daytime,  
and with Donald Houston at the Vic in the evening. (18)

Such an experience has not been repeated in Dame Judi's career, and she remembers the challenge of two productions featuring the same characters with "Different moves, different frocks and different cuts," commenting that "It was quite complicated, and not easy to keep the two roles separate" (Dench, "Re: Graduate Thesis"). While Dench's lines were abridged very little, the royal wooers had inconsistent cuts that varied her cues, and wearing different costumes would also affect her carriage and movement. Since one production was for television, the blocking was much more minimal and contained, while the Old Vic required its actors to fill a full-sized stage and project throughout the theater (Dench, "Re: Graduate Thesis"). Besides playing opposite three unique kings with dissimilar cues, clothing, and blocking, she also conspired with three different players in the role of Alice, Katherine's attendant. Working in repertory demanded that actors labor for hours in rehearsal, while performing two or three productions at the same time, so Dench's additional engagement for *An Age of Kings* must have consumed any small amount of leisure left for her. Yet she states that "In spite of all that, I remember it as a very happy time and it was wonderful to have been a part of such an amazing and memorable production" (Dench, "Re: Graduate Thesis"). Like all budding professionals, the young performer accepted the jobs available to her as she literally worked night and day to build her career after her first professional setback and subsequent triumph in the Old Vic's *Hamlet* (Miller 44).

John Neville, who played Hamlet to Dench's Ophelia in 1957-1958, made his directorial debut with the Old Vic's 1959-1960 production of *Henry V*, according to the

program notes; however, the show received a mixed critical assessment. One review credits Neville's production for its sensitivity and clarity, noting that "the poetry mingles with the action, and it insinuates, rather than underlines the horrors of war" (Landstone). Crediting the director's sensitivity and natural communication of the text, along with his restraint in dealing with passionate emotions evoked by war, Charles Landstone goes on to grieve that, in spite of many great acting performances, "notable playing cannot compensate for a Henry who is not in the picture." Donald Houston received terrible reviews for his portrayal of King Henry V with complaints that he "overemphasizes the famous speeches, and lacks the spiritual arrogance which alone can make this monarch a figure of romance" (Landstone). It is difficult to imagine the Saint Crispin's Day Speech over-emphasized; however, one cannot deny the need for arrogance in the portrayal of the king. In *Shakespeare Survey*, John Russell Brown echoes Landstone's criticisms of Houston and is not impressed by the overall production, with its abundance of "theatrical cliches" ("Three Directors" 134). Nonetheless he lists "the return of the glove, the French lesson and the wooing scene" as strengths since they were "played easily, without forcing<sup>12</sup>" (134). This speaks well for Dench since her Katherine portrays a prominent role in two of the three scenes praised. Yet Brown notes that, overall, "the wholly comic playing of the wooing belittles one of the themes of the play and loses something of its formal strength" (135). The serious implications of Henry's courting of Katherine are obvious, and the historic rivalry between the British and French is certainly a serious affair; however, despite this criticism of the scene's tone, Dench's other portrayals of Katherine for the North American tour and *An Age of Kings* followed suit, with a

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<sup>12</sup> See Appendix F for a photograph of Dench's Princess Katherine with Donald Houston as Henry V (71).

naturalistic, lighthearted playing of the romantic interlude between King Henry V and Katherine of France.

When Michael Benthall prepared to take the Old Vic company on a tour of the U.S. and Canada in the fall of 1958, several changes were made in the touring productions of *Hamlet*, *Twelfth Night*, and *Henry V*. In addition to Barbara Jefford's casting as *Hamlet's* Ophelia, both the role of Henry V and the position of director for that production were changed, with Benthall directing all three touring productions, while Laurence Harvey assumed the role of Henry V<sup>13</sup> (Atkinson). The plays were cut and "tailored to fit the time limits of a Broadway evening, but the essential elements [were] retained . . . [and] played with skill and vigor," according to the majority of American theater critics (Cooke). Despite the abbreviated texts, the company managed to transport a rather elaborate set overseas. John Beaufort observes that the repertory productions "are scenically visualized with a degree of elaborateness which suggests that the exigencies of extensive travel have not overridden the demands of stage spectacle." In other words, the set was noteworthy and extravagant, befitting three first-class productions.

Judi Dench remembers that the change in actors playing Henry V had little effect on her, yet she does not speak fondly of Laurence Harvey. In her memoir, she declares that he "never looked into my face, he just looked above my head"(18), going on to observe, "I felt nobody could be that tall" (18). Known as "Little Miss Dench" to some critics, it makes sense that the 5 feet 1½ inch actor notices differences in height and knows about the challenges they can create. Gerald Jacobs also writes that she is

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<sup>13</sup> See Appendix D for a photograph of Dame Judi's Katherine with Laurence Harvey as Henry V (69).

“undeniably sensitive about her height” (34). John Miller avows that she did not like Harvey, going on to reveal that she found him arrogant and that “there was a suspicion that he was only there to promote his film, *Room at the Top*” (38). Having made his motion picture debut in 1948, Harvey’s early attempts at live theatrical performance were mediocre at best, and “his screen persona was emotionally aloof if not downright frigid” (“Room”). Apparently North American audiences found the actor’s cool persona a good fit for Henry V since he won rave reviews in the tour. Richard Cooke says that “Laurence Harvey is a good choice for Henry. He is a fair-haired, strongly built man with a face more open and rugged than is usually associated with Shakespearean rulers.” In addition to such qualities, Cooke also admires Harvey’s vocal range and his “flair for comedy” in the courting scene with Dench, proving that American critics found the light mood effective for the wooing scene. John Beaufort claims that “Mr. Harvey asserts what would nowadays be called the right qualities of leadership for Shakespeare’s hero-king,” though he regrets “that Laurence Harvey has not been allowed more contrast between the big hortatory scenes and those more intimate moments,” thus qualifying Cook’s praise for Harvey’s range. Brooks Atkinson proclaims that “Laurence Harvey’s portrait of the King is the most stimulating acting in the current repertory,” a note that must have raised the hackles of the other performers. Dench once told John Miller that she “didn’t think he [Harvey] was a very good Henry V” (38). In spite of the actor’s questionable skill and motives for joining the production’s cast, the tour was a resounding success that further established Judi Dench as an up-and-coming actress of note.

Miller reports that “The company played from coast to coast, traveling across the States by train to San Francisco” (39). All three touring productions received positive

reviews in the U.S., and Dench received a fair share of praise for her limited role. For example, John Beaufort notes that the Princess of France is “delectably played by Judi Dench.” Brooks Atkinson writes that she presented a “pert but bewildered Katherine.” Richard Cooke observes that “There is excellent casting and acting all through this *Henry V*,” going on to write that “Among the French, only Judi Dench, as the French princess Katherine, has a very sympathetic part, but she makes the most of it and adds a very pleasant touch of beauty, charm and wit.” Her lively portrayal appears to have revived Dench’s confidence and placed her favorably into the public eye at a critical time in her career.

While playing Katherine at the Old Vic, Dench also took the role for two installments of *An Age of Kings*, the BBC’s epic serial television event that was recorded and broadcast across the U.K. live from London and re-broadcast for American television audiences at a later date. This production offers contemporary viewers a unique opportunity to see the young Dench at work, without editorial influence, since theatrical performances were not filmed for archival preservation until much later. Patricia Lennox explains the ramifications of the live broadcast for the audience thus:

For *An Age of Kings* the matrix where the strengths of television and theatre met was in the live broadcast. Like a theatre audience, BBC viewers saw each episode at the moment of performance. This audience of over three million shared the immediacy and energy of a live transmission, cameras running, no room for revision or covering up mistakes — an immediacy that sports events still

retain. The actors brought the adrenaline of being on live camera to that performance. (184)

Because this television series was originally played and recorded live, actors felt the same nerves and adrenalin as in a live theatrical performance. Viewers also experienced the production as it happened, exactly as Dench and the other actors performed it, with no cuts or re-shoots.

Oscar Campbell describes *An Age of Kings* as an “internationally famous British Broadcasting Corporation television series, which tells the full story of the rulers of 15th-century England in the language of England’s greatest poet and dramatist” (1). This amalgamation of Shakespeare’s histories required shortening most plays to “two parts of approximately an hour’s playing time each” (7). Since most of these works require around three hours of running time, significant cuts were demanded to meet this time frame. The episodes in which Dench appears make only minimal cuts to Katherine’s scenes, leaving her English lesson and courting scene with King Henry V very much intact. According to Kiley and Marder, “The cutting . . . displeased virtually no one” (568), a consequence which is quite an accomplishment. While John Russell Brown was dissatisfied with the Neville’s elisions for the wooing scene in the Old Vic’s production, Henry’s serious claim of “a good heart” remains to resonate with “the offences come from the heart” in *An Age of Kings* (“Three Directors” 135; *Band of Brothers*). In *Shakespeare Survey*, Patricia Lennox observes that “In England the press treated the BBC series as a national theatre event” (182). Television offered a new outlet for Shakespearean performance in the 1960s, expanding the audience by allowing an infinite

number of viewers to enjoy live performances simultaneously, forming a community of sorts. Lennox goes on to reflect on the fact that

What made *Kings* unique was the connection from play to play. It worked as a real television series. It had many of the elements that define television programming: it was a serial story with characters [like Dench's Katherine of France] who reappeared and where events [like Katherine's courtship] had later impact. (186)

Shakespeare's history plays were not simply spliced together; instead, they naturally functioned as a mini-series because of reappearing characters, the relationships that developed among individuals and nations, and particular events that determined the outcome of the future episodes.

In addition to the serial format, Lennox reports that "there is [an additional] advantage in a broadcast: the microphone allows actors to speak in 'a normal voice' with 'a more rapid and cogent delivery', and cameras make it easier to pinpoint significant details – and reactions" (183). Such intimacy better communicates the challenging Shakespearean text, enabling script editors to keep the maximum amount of text possible. The camera's ability to zoom in and out to help viewers focus on appropriate aspects of the performance also provides a better grasp of the text. This is surely the case in Princess Katherine's scene when she practices English with the assistance of her attendant Alice. Both women speak French quickly and naturally, laughing as viewers eavesdrop on the private lesson. The camera zooms in to emphasize Katherine's raised brows and wrinkled nose when she mispronounces "bilbow" and her embarrassment over

forgetting the names of body parts in a new language. Oscar Campbell relishes the fact that “the actor unworried by the problem of projecting [her] personality and voice to the far corners of an auditorium can devote every aspect of [her] art to the giving the resonant verse of speeches its deserved rhetorical and dramatic significance and its imaginative reach” (10). The camera rarely shows Dench below the waist, and the close-up shots assist viewers in comprehending foreign aspects of this scene as well as showing when the actors’ “faces appear on-screen with a depth that is lost in the mid distance shots which must be brightly lit for technical reasons” (Lennox 183). The acting is so effective that knowledge of French is hardly required to understand the enormity of Katherine’s apprehension about the impending changes in her life. The cameras and sound equipment also play a role in effectively communicating Shakespeare’s language with their ability to provide close-up visuals emphasizing facial expressions of the actors and clear sound recordings amplifying vocal articulation of the texts.

For many reasons, television has proven an invaluable medium for Shakespearean presentations. According to Lennox, this early mini-series presented “a changing style in Shakespearean performance. Most of *King’s* actors, many of them with Old Vic experience, were performing in the still controversial ‘new style’ with television-friendly intimacy, naturalness and, as some critics complained, with less emphasis on the ‘poetry of language’” (183). The Old Vic’s relaxed, casual performances would develop further in Franco Zeffirelli’s realism for his direction of *Romeo and Juliet*, with its naturalistic style, as well as in his later productions. Judi Dench embraced some aspects of the so-called “new style,” while maintaining her commitment to classical ideals regarding respect for verse and proper speech technique. Participating in a television production of

this magnitude transported her into the homes of millions of television viewers, affording her great media exposure for an outstanding performance.

The total running time for *An Age of Kings* is recorded as 947 minutes in the production credits. During this vast period of time Dench appears for a mere 24 minutes, less than one-fortieth of the total length. Nonetheless, her role is virtually uncut, her name is emphasized by appearing last in the production credits, and her picture appears on the current DVD cover. Though this performance occurred very early in her career, Dench's headliner status is noteworthy. One contributing factor is the dearth of female roles in the series, with Queen Margaret appearing most often, in six of the fifteen episodes, Mistress Quickly in four, Isabel in two, the Duchess of York in two, the Queen in two, Alice in two, Lady Anne in two, and Dench's Princess Katherine in two, with various ladies-in-waiting, and a few others who appeared in only one episode. Dench must have appealed to a broad audience as the young, rich, beautiful princess who falls in love and marries a British king, the romantic plot from fairy tales and many young women's dreams. The beauty, comedy, and romance Dench embodies must have provided a breath of fresh air for viewers, especially amid the testosterone-laden political turmoil and war surrounding her scenes in the series.

Viewers get their first glimpse of Dench's Katherine in "*Henry V: Signs of War*," around 32 minutes into the episode. She stands in the background witnessing the conflict between her father, King of France, his counselors, and English ambassadors who parley before the Battle of Harfleur. Though this teaser shows Dench only for a moment, she enjoyed watching the filming of the battle. In fact, Dame Judi has vivid memories of *An Age of Kings*' Battle of Harfleur, recalling that

When we were filming the scene at Harfleur, a lot of rocks were thrown from the battlements. Unfortunately, one of the actors speared one of the ‘rocks’ on his sword, so everyone knew they were made of polystyrene. The director was not amused! (Dench, “Re: Graduate Thesis”)

Although the director did not appreciate the humor of the situation because of his inability to edit the live broadcast, it seems likely that Dench burst into one of her famous fits of giggles in the wings.

The princess’s English lesson comes after the victory at Harfleur, 43 minutes and 40 seconds into the episode, and runs less than four minutes. In the black-and-white film Dench appears to wear white and gold, with an elaborate headpiece featuring a shoulder-length veil around the sides and back of her head. The headdress features stones with three prongs raising the veil to give the effect of a coronet, its ribbon designs in diamond shapes and encrusted pearls covering her head completely, concealing her hair. Dench’s costume also includes a necklace of knuckle-sized shimmering stones in three individual strands dangling above her cleavage. She wears a large ring on each hand. Her gown has a fitted bodice with tight long sleeves and an overdress of satin or silk with long, flowing sleeves and scalloped edges that mirror the rest of the French royal family’s attire. The ornate dress shimmers with fleur-de-lis appliques, reaffirming her nationality, while large twinkling stones gird her waist, and sparkling trim encircles her neckline and outlines the front of her overdress. The jewels and glistening trim on her gown look beautiful, even in black and white.

The television stage blacks out on the victorious Henry V before the lights fade back in, accompanied by non-diegetic flute and harp music to open the English lesson scene with a close-up shot of Princess Katherine mouthing words as she reads, pursing her lips as though practicing her pronunciation while she studies in a small English book like any young student. Patricia Lennox sees that the “The close-up is the dominant visual pattern in the series,” and this scene certainly follows that pattern since it hardly shows Katherine below her waist (183). The scene also serves to demonstrate how “The close-ups are cinematic” with depth in the production as a whole because the light fades to shadow behind Katherine and her maid, thereby enhancing the two women featured in the scene and showing them in a soft, sympathetic light (183). The princess studies her English earnestly and appears to feel pressure to make a good impression on the British king so that he will treat her family and the French citizens more favorably. The set for Katherine’s language lesson features several columns, drapes embellished with a diamond design that resembles wallpaper, and an unseen bench on which the princess and Alice sit. Television viewers hear disembodied male voices invading this domestic haven as Katherine and her maid finish their lesson and flounce behind the rear curtain to avoid an intrusion of men, ending their scene while the soldiers enter and continue their plans for the imminent battle.

The courting of Princess Katherine by King Henry V begins 40 minutes and 45 seconds into the “*Henry V: Band of Brothers*” program and runs through 55:12, almost fifteen minutes. Stairs curve from stage right and stage left to meet at the back in a bridge of sorts. A heavy, arched wooden door stands below. Flags, banners, and various drapes decorate the space, while the arched doorway serves as a portal to a garden with

small potted trees and a single garden bench. Once again, before her most important scene occurs, the television audience gets a quick look at the princess when she stands at the front of a full stage, on a bottom step at the right, just behind her parents, as the scene opens about 36 minutes into the episode. Katherine's presence is emphasized by costuming since she wears white, while the majority of the cast wear darker hues. Katherine's clothing does not change from the first time viewers see her in the series until the last, with the exception of her necklace, which loses two dangling strands of jewels to leave only one in the final scene. Henry, now without his armor, woos the princess in an ornate tunic with elaborate design and large jewels for his romantic mission. After he tells the Queen of France that Katherine is his "principal demand," he holds his hand out to the princess, and she responds by placing her hand atop his and moving with him through the heavy arched doorway, into a private garden. Though he wears his crown for the treaty talks, he removes it quickly, tossing the symbol of his authority over a guard's spear as he and Katherine walk through the wooden portal. The king tousles with his hair like any romantic youth as the courtship begins. The audience feels a kinship with Henry in this moment, without the power of his crown and at the mercy of a woman.

Dench's Katherine appears very anxious, fidgeting with her hands, panting and darting her eyes from side to side, a departure from the stereotypical cool and calm princess. Henry startles her when he speaks his first line and touches her shoulder from behind, at which she jumps, putting her hand up to her chest. After a few lines, when Katherine's attendant enters, viewers see the princess relax visibly, smirking and making eye contact as though the ladies share an inside joke. Alice never speaks in this scene, yet she and Katherine communicate effectively, as women do, through body language.

When Henry delivers his long speeches, the camera captures Dench in profile, her face hidden from viewers by her veil. We cannot discern an expression as she stands perfectly still, building the dramatic tension, keeping her emotions private until she is ready to disclose her feelings to the king. In this scene of romantic surrender, Katherine keeps the upper hand by remaining completely formal, not removing her crown or backing down in any way. If Henry can win Katherine's love, the two nations will join, figuratively and literally, with their offspring ruling both France and England. Henry dons his crown once again at the end of the courtship scene, reclaiming his duties and his rewards after successfully completing his romantic quest.

The vast majority of Dench's screen time appears in close-up to medium-range camera shots. Lennox observes that "In scene after scene the screen fills with a headshot, the camera stays steady, capturing details such as "Princess Katherine's slight moue of disapproval as her suitor, Henry V, awkwardly puts a foot on the bench where she sits" (183). Only a close-up view could showcase Dench's slight raising of brows and lowering of her eyes to the king's offending foot. Viewers also watch Katherine put a hand over her gaping mouth, sharply inhaling in shock when Henry mangles her native language. Then she laughs at him to his face, very much like a child. The close shot allows viewers to enjoy her ploy when Katherine pretends not to understand Henry's English, then gets caught at her own game when he declares that she loves him. The camera's ability to zoom in provides an intimacy that enables audiences to share the early flirtation of the royal courtship as if part of the scene. As Katherine becomes more attracted to Henry, she maintains more eye contact and allows him to move closer to her face while he speaks, though she sometimes darts her eyes to the side in an effort to

escape the romantic spell cast by his charisma and his language. Henry and Katherine are not king and princess in this scene; they are merely man and woman.

Henry paces and generally moves his body much more than Katherine, and of necessity most of her movement comes from her waist and above after she sits on the bench. Figuratively confined by duty to her parents and her nation, she must sacrifice her wishes to make peace. Yet how tempting if she could like or even love her husband, regardless of their circumstances. Dench effectively portrays the universal feminine desire to be courted, even if the outcome of the courtship is predetermined. Until Henry tries to kiss her, Dench's primary movement comes from her face. Her eyes move almost constantly, while her mouth pouts, smiles charmingly, and laughs in turn. Her eyebrows rise and lower, her nose wrinkles in humor, and she often flashes a cheeky grin after laughing at the king's expense or sharing a private joke with Alice.

Dench's only wide-angled shots occur at the beginning of the wooing scene and the final image when Henry and Katherine marry. Even her squealing attempt to escape Henry's kisses is constrained within a medium shot. She struggles to hold back laughter as the king butchers her language and botches his attempt at chivalric romance; however, she allows him to move in for an almost-kiss as he speaks to woo after he kisses her hand, at which point Katherine bolts, running and shouting "Ah!" She hides behind her attendant, then a column, wide-eyed and gaping. Henry pulls her out by the hand and boxes her in with an arm/hand on the column. He first makes eye contact, lifts her chin with one finger, then kisses her. Katherine puts her hand on his chest and returns the kiss. Henry whispers, "Welcome, Kate," and gives her three additional short kisses.

Finally, the royal couple re-enter the original palace hall through the arched portal, ready to fulfill their duty. At the end of this scene, the couple separate, with Katherine going up the stairs on stage right with her family and Henry going up the stairs on stage left with his followers. If viewers look carefully, they will see that the set blacks out at the end, leaving only a spotlight on the kneeling king and princess as the couple meet in the middle of the bridge over the door, where they kneel and hold hands, joining their personal lives and those of their nations in a tableau of marriage. The BBC cameras and microphones capture Dench's naturalistic portrayal of Katherine perfectly. The sound equipment allows the actress more quick and clear speech that sounds like genuine conversation, while cameras zooming in from different angles capture nuances in her facial expression, achieving the production's mass appeal in addition to an effective, realistic communication of Shakespeare's language.

The production also gave Dench publicity by transmitting her image into the homes of a cross-section of citizens across England and North America. Peter Dews wrote that the staff were greatly pleased with the programs, confessing that "The results, in the United States and in the Commonwealth as in Britain, exceeded our wildest hopes. We found a new audience for Shakespeare" (Dews 5). This, the only visual recording of Dench's earliest performances, showed her work to millions who could never have seen her perform in theaters.

*A Naturalistic Romeo and Juliet*

After working with Dench for two years in repertory, Michael Benthall cast her as Juliet in the 1960 Old Vic production for which he hired Italian Franco Zeffirelli as director (Miller 45). Although respected for his operas at Covent Garden, Zeffirelli confessed to doubting his ability to direct Shakespeare successfully in the show's program notes because "it is so difficult for a foreigner to believe that any but British or American people would be able to touch their own cultural heritage" (*Romeo and Juliet Program*).<sup>14</sup> Nonetheless, he undertook the challenge of imbuing a classical Shakespearean production with Italian spirit for Londoners in hopes that post-war British audiences would "prove . . . that times [had] changed in Europe and people of different backgrounds can easily work together for creating a new European conscience" (*Romeo and Juliet Program*). That open spirit struck a chord, inspiring a congenial cast and a warm show, prompting Dench to write that "Despite bad reviews of the opening, audiences flocked to it. We had the longest run of the play for ages – over 120 performances" (*And Furthermore* 23). Though theater critics were sharply divided in their reviews of the naturalistic production, London audiences shouted their approval over all murmurs of disdain.

Dench has recorded her memories of working with Franco Zeffirelli in several books, articles, and interviews, admiring both his persona and his methods of theatrical direction. In her memoir *And Furthermore*, she declares that "Franco was quite unlike any other director I had ever worked for," leaving readers to ponder what made him so unique (22). Dench elaborates about the Italian director in an interview with Julian

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<sup>14</sup> See Appendix G on page 72.

Curry, asserting that “Franco was very different, because of his passion and his glamour. He was very glamorous. . . . And it was thrilling working with him. Thrilling” (23). The British do not typically idolize actors and directors; however, it is understandable that the young actress would be dazzled by the glamour of the young Zeffirelli. As to his technique, Dench explains that “I was used to them [directors] being down in the stalls, and asking you to make a certain move from out there. He [Zeffirelli] would be doing it beside you, which was a bit off-putting, because he was better than either of us” (22). This demolition of the imaginary wall separating directors from actors endeared him to this cast because he literally worked with them, on the stage, demonstrating what he wanted instead of issuing orders with detachment.

His attention to every visual aspect of the production appears in his warm, detailed set, while Julian Curry’s book features a picture of Zeffirelli closely inspecting Dench’s hair braid, a detail that many directors would not bother addressing. According to her, “The way Franco worked was very much on instinct, tremendously on instinct” (Curry 17). Instead of mapping out all the details ahead of time this director “senses it as he goes along” (Dench, *And Furthermore* 20). Dench enjoyed the spontaneous nature of Zeffirelli’s direction and did not find him a dictator. Perhaps this work with him in her formative years contributed to her habit of beginning plays fresh, without having read the full script, and with creating the physical appearance of her characters early in rehearsal. Zeffirelli’s open approach enabled actors and audiences to experience theater as a community.

Before the Old Vic’s memorable production of *Romeo and Juliet* opened, one newspaper article announced that “Mr. Zeffirelli . . . [was] directing Shakespeare for the

first time, and [was] the first Italian director to work with the Old Vic company” (“Zeffirelli’s”). Since his foreign citizenship and lack of experience were noted and emphasized by the press from the outset, the director must have felt a great deal of pressure to prove himself worthy of this endeavor. As to the overall interpretation of the work, early articles emphasize that “His conception of the play is said to be realistic in treatment and will be one of the largest productions to be staged at the Vic” (“Zeffirelli’s”). The realism Zeffirelli employed in the production proved controversial as the director displayed the passions of the human heart in ways that offended some audience members. His passion imbued every aspect of the performances to such an extent that, according to Stanley Wells, “The production’s psychological innovative nature, with an emphasis on adolescent passion and Italianate verismo, caused it initially to receive bad reviews . . .” (28). Oddly enough, the youthful passion and the Veronian realism that inspired criticism in the beginning evolved into the performance’s greatest strength.

In regard to the youth of the cast, Dench comments that at the Old Vic “Nobody could remember when it had been cast with actors so young: we were all in our early twenties” (Dench, *And Furthermore* 22). In his biography, Zeffirelli remembers being thrilled because Dench was “small and doll-like and looked even younger than her age, Just the way I’d always imagined Juliet should be” (163). She and the rest of the director’s youthful cast inspired a new demographic to experience Shakespeare’s work as “young people came in droves and, by a strange coincidence, at the end of the run . . . *Romeo and Juliet* slotted neatly into the world of the Beatles, of flower-power and peace-and-love” (164). The director even writes of Sir John Gielgud in the stalls after the show,

“surrounded by laughing, crying kids,” wishing he were lucky enough to have such an audience (165). While his inexperienced actors provided both challenge and opportunity for Zeffirelli, John Russell Brown observes that “His success was chiefly with the young characters in the earlier part of the play” (150). Apparently the gamble of using actors who were near the age of the characters paid off at the box office because the Old Vic had to extend the season due to popular demand (Zeffirelli 164). This fusion of classical and pop culture continued the trend that began at the dawn of Dench’s acting career, growing stronger with each role she assumed.

The show’s Italian realism was first conveyed by the set. In his review for *The Guardian*, Philip Hope-Wallace wrote, “Mr. Zeffirelli’s decorations and use of lights and bells is picturesque in the Rheinhardt manner. It is ingenious and often seizes attention.” Indeed, the warm, intimate set is admired in most reviews. When asked what she remembers about the production in general, Dench recalls that “there was a gasp on the first night. Because the Vic, I don’t think, had ever seen anything quite like it” (Curry 18). Zeffirelli designed the set, in addition to directing the production, creating “very warm and Mediterranean” lighting with “streaks of sunshine coming through a window or lattice” (18). According to Dench, the lighting mimicked natural sunlight perfectly, and “Everything was really broken down . . . . The bottoms of walls and things like that, he spattered the base of walls with dirty water to look like dog pee. Edith Evans said, ‘The costumes are disgusting. You all look so dirty!’ It did exactly look like a painting” (21). Such intentional grunge manifested a new level of naturalism unparalleled in the theater at that time. Curry reports that “Milton Shulman wrote ‘It looks and feels like Verona. The citizens might be Veronese. Everything about this production pulses with

radiant light, and the picturesque seediness of Italy” (21). The “seediness” was amplified because Zeffirelli “put a fantastic passion into it, and the whole production had a hot Italian atmosphere about it, using dry ice to create what looked like a heat haze, people putting towels and sheets out over balconies, the boys lying asleep on the fountain – it looked absolutely beautiful” (Dench, *And Furthermore* 22-3). In this creation of a life-like city, anonymous characters carried out the business of daily life. Dench told Curry that “There were always things happening in the background. Because Franco staged it all in such a way there was a proper life going on. It’s like at the beginning, with people putting their stuff out over the balcony. That was Franco’s invention” (28). While all the movement by so many different actors might prove a distraction, Dench insists that it enhanced the production.

In *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Robert Speight compliments Zeffirelli on his set, observing that one “difficulty is to contrive a setting – or settings – which shall suggest a number of very different places in quick succession; and this he solved” (426). While Speight feels the director solved the set challenges, John Russell Brown writes a mixed review, noting the impact of multiple alterations to the set in *Shakespeare Survey*, observing that “Some of the changes marvelously mirrored the change of mood implicit in the text: the most effective was to Juliet’s bedroom with the pale blue walls and a tall bed furnished with the same blue and white, making these colours dominant for the first time and giving a sense of space, femininity and domestic peace” (154). This alteration contrasts nicely with the heat and grime of the outdoor spaces, emphasizing the shift to Juliet’s haven; however, Brown concludes that, overall, “too many scene-changes were trivial in effect” (154). He believes Zeffirelli overplayed this element, complaining that

“Twice a curtain rose to show the stage covered with smoke giving a hazy impression and to singing or calling and a whole crowd of stage-dressing supernumeraries. Two sets of curtains were used within the proscenium . . . so that the scenery could be changed on every possible occasion” (154). The reviewer asserts that “a simpler setting with a brisker pace would have allowed the director to give the breathing time which is necessary in Acts III, IV and V for presenting the theme of responsibility and the deeper understanding which men learn through the catastrophe” (155). The need for a less complicated set to allow the action to move more quickly is easily understood, but just how the quicker pace would allow “more breathing time” and communicate the themes better in the last three acts of the production remains a mystery. Many would argue that a quicker pace allows less time for the audience to process the import of the events they have just seen. It appears that Zeffirelli tried to allow time for such processing with his slower-paced production.

The muted color palate carried over to the majority of the production’s costumes. Peter Hall (not to be confused with the Royal Shakespeare Company’s founder and director) designed the costumes for the Old Vic’s 1960 production of *Romeo and Juliet*. In *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Robert Speaight protests that “Mr. Peter Hall’s costumes . . . were altogether too dun-colored for my taste” (426). The subdued hues appeared in a variety of clothing changes that showed different sides of Juliet’s character, and Dench has recorded that her costumes were primarily “soft browns and ochres and gold and cream” (Curry 18). One of her dresses was so heavy that her elderly dresser could not carry it up the stairs, yet Juliet’s softer side showed as well (18). In contrast to her weighty formal attire, Dench notes that at one point “Franco had me on the ground, in a

nightie – he had copied a child’s nightie, a most marvellous shape – and instead of being all poetic, he had me crouching on the ground” (31). The various shades of Juliet’s character, reflected in her clothing, ranged from stiff formality to playful childish innocence, conveying character to the audience. Dench once noted that she “was always going and changing. Hugely quick changes. It was just off and straight back on again” (*And Furthermore* 25). This swift shifting relates to Dench’s memory of Zeffirelli saying that “There’s nothing bridled about them [Romeo and Juliet]. They’re fast and impulsive. They’re not contained in any way. They’re completely free emotional spirits, passionate spirits” (18). Juliet’s unchecked passion rules her brief, frantic life that plunges into irreversible tragedy by the end of the play.

Zeffirelli’s realism continued from the set, with its misty atmosphere that caused the audience to breathe the air of Italy, to the costuming and the action. Brown reports that “An editorial in *Theatre Notebook* spoke of ‘revelation’, *The Observer* of ‘revelation, even perhaps a revolution,’ and *Theatre World* of excitement, ‘unity of presentation’, and a ‘reality which lifted one inescapably back to medieval Italy’” (147). Once the audience entered Zeffirelli’s visual portal to Renaissance Italy, the action and characterization carried out the production’s realistic Shakespearean experience. *Romeo and Juliet* offers one of Shakespeare’s most varied plots in relation to movement, since characters from rival families open the play with threats of violence and attend a formal masked ball with dancing in Act One, long before any major action takes place. Bill Hobbs choreographed the fights, which Dench remembers as being very authentic. She told Curry that “They looked really as if people were having a proper fight. I mean really, really. They were really animated and up and over everything and up and down stairs. I can’t imagine how

long they must have rehearsed” (19). In a personal interview, Ann Jennalie Cook clearly remembered the production in New York, especially the fight choreography which was “so much more realistic than anything I had ever seen that I thought someone was going to get killed – and I don’t mean Tybalt or Mercutio!<sup>15</sup>” Fight choreography so believable adds yet another level of vigor and realism to Zeffirelli’s first Shakespearean production.

The action in *Romeo and Juliet* volleys between deadly fights and romantic scenes of love, both requiring direction for movement. Dench remembers that “The dancing was very formal, and extremely beautiful,” and the program credits Pirmin Trecu with the dance choreography (Curry 27; *Romeo and Juliet* Program). The formal ball marks the first romantic interlude for the lovers, so meticulously choreographed that critics pay attention to their movements in the balcony scene and later in the play as well. In *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Speaight objects to Zeffirelli’s choice to stage the balcony scene “where Romeo was made to scramble up a tree and start a petting-match with Juliet” (425). His complaint that “the poetry and poignancy of the Balcony Scene derive from the fact – implicit but nevertheless clear – that these young lovers never touch” can be debated, especially in light of the director’s effort to employ Italian realism in the production (425). Dench’s memory that “What he [Zeffirelli] was most concerned to do was to get rid of ‘English’ passion and get a really ‘Italian’ feel” offers some explanation for the physical romantic expressions of the protagonists” (Bate and Jackson 201). Discussing Juliet’s passion for Romeo, Dench declares that “we couldn’t wait to get into each other’s arms, and he [the friar] actually used to hold us apart” (Curry 30). The physical passion continued, even in Romeo’s absence as she also remembers “falling

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<sup>15</sup> Ann Jennalie Cook provided this information in a personal interview March 11, 2014.

backwards” to the bed and once admitted, “I used to lean backwards over the side” of the bed, longing for Romeo (30). Juliet’s transformation from child to adult appears to have been dramatic in Dench’s portrayal, with the metamorphosis revealed through physical action. Apparently Zeffirelli saw the “petting match” and recurring physical expressions of love between the couple as a natural result of first love and thus directed his young cast to act accordingly.

Zeffirelli’s naturalistic fortress, in lieu of the typical romantic balcony, inspired mixed feelings among reviewers (Zeffirelli 163). According to Curry, “Kenneth Tynan wrote that ‘The balcony scene is heart-rendingly good. Their encounter is grave, awkward and extremely beautiful’ (25). Conversely, Curry reports that “Harold Hobson said ‘In the balcony scene Miss Dench flaps her arms about like a demented marionette’” (28). This terminology could hardly be complimentary, yet the word “awkward” crops up again when Alan Brien asserts that “The balcony scene was clumsy and awkward” (28). Speaight goes on to deplore the fact that “Miss Judi Dench was made to flop over the rail of the balcony, like a sulky child who doesn’t agree that it’s bedtime” (426). That note must have thrilled the director and his cast since Dench reports that “When we did *Romeo and Juliet* for Zeffirelli in 1961, we strove to make them children” (Hill 127). In response to critics who called the scene ineffective, Dench replies that she believes Zeffirelli intentionally designed “the balcony too high, and not easily reachable” (Curry 28). In his biography the director explains that instead of a lovely balcony with artificial flowers, he saw it as “a rather bleak fortress meant to deter a foe and protect the family treasures,” particularly in light of the time period and family feud that set the play (163). The realistic set required Romeo and Juliet to work for their romance, rendering it more

precious, and Dench has asserted that it “should be awkward, and it should be unprecedented in their lives. Certainly unprecedented in Juliet’s. And she’s got somebody inside calling her all the time” (Curry 28-9). Zeffirelli chose to maximize the realism of copious architectural obstacles and interference from society in his production with the certainty that the more the world conspires against the star-crossed lovers, the more heart-breaking the tragedy plays out.

Some critics felt that Zeffirelli took his realistic production too far. Speaight reacts thus: “Miss Dench has all the makings of a Juliet, but why was she apparently forbidden to make up? You do not make Juliet any more real by refusing to let her look pretty – and, left to herself and her lipstick, Miss Dench is very pretty indeed” (426). Yet Dench answers that criticism by referencing her memory of Zeffirelli saying, “I don’t want anything stately about these two. They’re children, they’re little, young children, and they’re entirely imbued with the passion of Italy and the passion of the feud between their families, and the passion between the two of them” (Curry 18). The idea of passionate children may seem an oxymoron to some, but these protagonists are emerging adults with raging hormones and passions out of control. From most accounts, their natural appearance and immature movement effectively conveyed their youthful innocence. Of course, Romeo and Juliet grow up over the course of the play, as demonstrated by one critic’s observation that “Miss Dench sheds her kittenishness when she lolls on the bed aching for love, and even more effectively when she stands wide-eyed and soul-stabbed at the threat of her husband’s exile” (25). These physical cues showed audiences the maturation process Juliet undergoes in the play as her body displays both her passion and her mortal fear for her husband after Tybalt’s death.

Zeffirelli also worked to feature the determination of his heroes. Dench told Holly Hill that “Up until we did the play, productions were about these very romantic, very poetical, beautiful, lyric lovers. There’s more antagonism in it than that, and that’s what I worked for in *Juliet* . . . that kind of intolerance of youth, of simply lying on the ground with your hands over your ears and saying “Don’t!” (12). The refusal to accept the ignorance of their parents and their society builds a depth of character that exalts these tragic adolescents as more wise than their parents. In his natural portrayal of *Romeo and Juliet*, “Zeffirelli did not condescend towards his young lovers and did not underestimate them. He gave prominence to a sense of wonder, gentleness, strong affection, clear emotion and, sometimes, fine sentiment, as well as to high spirits and casual behaviour” (Brown 148). In their undaunted youthful optimism and their informal, realistic behavior, Zeffirelli directed his principals to flop, climb, pet, and brawl, rendering them “so compellingly alive that the loss of the full play is the more unfortunate,” according to John Russell Brown (155). Apparently this production drew audiences into the action, allowing them to care about the characters, to identify with and feel the tragedy of their loss.

Zeffirelli’s realism encompassed the set, lighting, costumes, movement, characterization, and even his treatment of Shakespeare’s text and direction for its delivery. As a result, many critics thought he rendered his dream vision too naturalistically. As an opera director, Zeffirelli’s previous directorial experience involved limited spoken dialogue, leaving him inexperienced with this aspect of performance. Most critics agree that his approach to the poetic text was too natural, and some found the lovers overly immature in this production. Phillip Hope-Wallace wrote

that “Judi Dench is a really young-looking Juliet and has some genuine and compelling moments. But her tendency to take the lines like a little girl of precocious habits . . . is ill conceived. This is a ‘little’ Juliet, touching only on a single note of dismay.” John Russell Brown writes in support of the cast’s line delivery in some portions of the play, arguing that “The ‘art’ of much of the poetry in this play was surely intended to sound like a delighted and energetic response to immediate sensations, and in regaining this impression the actors responded in an appropriate way to the conscious artifice of their text” (150). His admiration for the youthful delivery of Shakespeare’s lines as “delighted and energetic”(150) indicates that Zeffirelli’s realism worked in some parts of the play; however, this strength also led to a perceived weakness: “The distraction, frustration and fear of the young lovers were well represented with nervous intensity; the fault here was that the cries and groans and other physical reactions were sometimes at odds with the technical demands of long speeches with elaborate syntax and rhetoric” (151). For him, at least, the cast sometimes got carried away with their physical and non-verbal auditory reactions, distracting the audience from the play’s intended focus, especially during the long speeches.

Despite Juliet’s childish prating, Hope-Wallace observes that “Where Mr. Zeffirelli succeeds is in making the words, however indifferently spoken, flower into action.” Observing Hamlet’s advice to the players, Zeffirelli directed his cast to embody the text, making certain to “suit the action to the word, the word to the action” (3.2.18-19), effectively conveying the text through physicality. According to observers, “At all parts where the play tends towards violence and panache, he [Zeffirelli] proceeds with great originality and courage. But where everything resides in the thing spoken, in the

sound of the poetry, he is much less secure, though served by not at all ungifted players” (Hope-Wallace). This is a startling observation, considering Zeffirelli’s success in opera, the most demanding of all vocalization. Juliet’s action in the play is limited to her romantic interludes with Romeo, leaving Dench without violence and panache to please Hope-Wallace and the other critics since her only violence was directed at herself in Act V. According to Dench, Zeffirelli’s reluctance to instruct actors in line delivery, especially in Shakespeare’s verse, left the young cast on its own to effectively speak Shakespeare’s poetry with disappointing results since they “didn’t know enough, and . . . were much criticized for that” (Curry 18). Without doubt, oral interpretation of the poetic speeches marked one major weakness of this production, especially in the last half of the play.

According to John Russell Brown’s article in *Shakespeare Survey*, Franco Zeffirelli’s production of *Romeo and Juliet* remained “in the repertory of a London or touring company of the Old Vic from 4 October 1960, into 1962, bringing them a greater success than they [had] enjoyed for more than a decade;” however, the success was surprising considering the mixed reviews the show received from the press (147). In fact, according to the *London Theatre Magazine*, “It’s hard to remember a production that’s won such flatly contradicting opinions, from ‘appalling’ and ‘worst ever’ to ‘the best London Shakespearean production since the war . . .’” (Curry 22). It appears that the sharply divided theatre critics created a controversy that helped boost the show’s popularity, with audiences wondering if they would see the greatest or the worst theatrical production in London.

Curry goes on to quote the *London Theatre Magazine* as declaring that ‘If Mr. Zeffirelli has ignored our time-honored traditions, then it’s only time someone did, for the English theatre is becoming petrified in its own conventions’” (22). Apparently many were ready to see something new in the West End, and Zeffirelli’s willingness to try radical techniques paid off in ticket sales, expanding his career to include theatrical and eventually movie direction. Dench recalls that he rejected the traditional idea of Shakespearean actors standing like statues quoting poetry, admitting that “of course we swung, perhaps, too far the other way. But nevertheless I wouldn’t have foregone any of it for anything” (21). In spite of her fond memories of playing Juliet, arguably Shakespeare’s most tragic yet romantic female role, Stanley Wells claims that her performance “appears to have forced her to think hard about the balance in classical acting between psychological verisimilitude and the demands of poetic drama,” a balancing act the actor continues to perform on stage and in film today (28). In Dench’s biography, John Miller observes that

It was the criticisms of the verse-speaking that cut deepest and to this day, when the subject of *Romeo and Juliet* comes up, Judi’s immediate response is, ‘Ah yes, the one without any poetry!’ with an edge in her voice that reveals just how deeply they cut. (48)

For an actor with Judi Dench’s training and technique, criticism of her speech and handling of poetic language may represent the most hurtful criticism of all. According to John Russell Brown, “Some critics complained that this treatment of the dialogue destroyed the ‘poetry’ of the play. But it would probably be truer to say that the poetry

was rendered in an unfamiliar way” (149). In spite of critical objections, this abridged and naturalistic rendition of Shakespeare’s text appealed to the masses, popularizing the play, especially among youthful audiences.

## The Fairy Queen

In 1961, Judi Dench left Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet* production, forgoing the opportunity to participate in its American tour in favor of joining Peter Hall's newly formed Royal Shakespeare Company in Stratford-upon-Avon (Dench, *And Furthermore*, 23). In *The Spectator*, Bambe Gascoigne admires Peter Hall's acting company that featured longer contracts and strong young women as principal actors, with Dench named as a promising addition to a list that includes Vanessa Redgrave, Dorothy Tutin, and Diana Rigg. In 1962, Dench first debuted in Stratford as *Measure for Measure*'s Isabella, then opened eight days later as Titania, one of her signature Shakespearean roles ("Dream Revived at Royal Theatre"). According to the *Guardian*, her first documented portrayal occurred in a 1953 Bootham School production when she was eighteen years old; however, in her memoir *And Furthermore*, Dench fondly describes an earlier production in which she played Titania at the Mount School when she was a boarding student there (Foster; Dench 28). She claims the fairy queen as one of her favorite Shakespearean roles (28). Roger Warren writes that Titania is perfect for Dench because "She has the full range of qualities that the part requires: natural authority, a spontaneous impish sense of humour, and the ability to speak formal verse with both clarity and sensuous beauty" (149). Born with a marvelous sense of humor and a penchant for drama, she trained diligently and continues to build her skill in formal verse articulation.

She first acted in the *Dream* professionally in 1957, when she played First Fairy at the Old Vic, followed by a portrayal of Hermia in 1960 before finally landing the role of Titania in Peter Hall's "revival of his original 1959 production" in Stratford (Dench and Miller 220; Dench, *And Furthermore* 28). This original earlier staging of the play

was reborn yet again when Hall directed a Royal Shakespeare Company film version released in 1969.

Along with many critics, Dench has written favorably of the set design for the Royal Shakespeare Company's 1962 staged production in Stratford, remembering that "Lila de Nobili designed the most unbelievably exquisite set, which looked like an Elizabethan hall when you went in" (*And Furthermore* 29). Placing the mansion in a wooded area facilitated a merger of nature and formal society with "the wood growing up round and behind the staircases and balconies," invading the confines of civilization and blending the natural world with an Athens that killed trees to build its habitations (Trewin 514). Among the wooden hills and coves, the fairy queen's domain was tucked away, and "For the forest scenes, lighting changed, a backcloth rose, and, jewel-like, Titania's bower lay revealed beneath the balcony, with a shimmering vista of moonlit birch trees above and behind the staircases and balcony" (Mullin 530). The frosted realm must have been lovely in the soft lighting that simulated moonlight. Gascoigne notes that "foliage is normally a major pitfall for the theatrical designer," yet de Nobili's set effectively utilized plants to morph the stage from forest to manor house in an instant, "thanks to the cunning use of painted gauzes" (Warren 148). Such backdrops captured the ethereal element of magic, with the ability to appear solid on one light cue and completely non-existent on another.

The production's visual appeal continued in the costuming of its actors. According to Michael Mullin, "The mortals wore period costumes, and, neatly solving the riddle of the fairies' nature, the immortals were dressed in 'fantastications on Elizabethan chic'" (530). The choice of period fantasy clothing worked so perfectly for

Titania and the rest of Shakespeare's fairies that "the fairy court mirrored the mortal one," wearing Elizabethan clothing "but made of a fabric which suggested the cobwebs, dew and gossamer of the fairies' natural environment" (Warren 148; 150).<sup>16</sup> In *And Furthermore*, Dench remembers the production's version of the costuming thus: "The clothes were Elizabethan and very mothly-looking; halfway down, my skirt became a cobweb" (29). This choice provided a visual manifestation of the connection between the fairies and the forest over which they presided. Dench goes on to explain that "We were a bit dirty and all barefoot, which we covered with sparkly stuff" (29). The dirt accented the fairy world's connection to nature, while the sparkle evoked the fantastical, along with Dench's idea "for the fairies all to have those pointed rubber ears" (29). She also had "an extraordinary wig " that had been made in Paris out of yak hair . . . like the top of a dandelion," adding another facet to her environmental connection in the play (29; 81). J.C. Trewin marveled at the appearance of "Miss Judi Dench, a Titania who looked like spun crystal" in her portrayal of the fairy queen with shimmering skin, dandelion hair, bare feet, a royal attitude, and fairy children as subjects (514).

Dench received high praise for her first professional appearance as the fairy queen, and critics reported that "The revival was a happy surprise," approving the fact that "the director allowed Titania to speak the whole of 'The forgeries of jealousy,'" a speech that was omitted from the original production yet helps establish her character in Act II (514). Roger Warren asserted that Bottom's "scenes with Titania were at the heart of the production, especially when Judi Dench joined the company in 1962" (149).

Apparently Dench's Titania and Bottom unified the three parallel plots since they linked

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<sup>16</sup> See Appendix I for a photograph of Dench with Ian Richardson as Oberon (74).

human, fairy, and natural kingdoms with Bottom's provincial charm and his donkey ears and hooves, along with his exposed face rendering him man and ass simultaneously<sup>17</sup> (77). In regard to Titania's characterization, Gerald Jacobs quotes Peter Hall as stating that "it's very important to Judi what shoes she wears, what the floor of the stage is made of, how she stands" (35). Dench's insistence on grounding herself likely springs from her tendency to fall, especially on opening night (Dench, *And Furthermore* 10). Hall goes on to recall that "the whole part of Titania was released when I suggested she played it barefooted. She could be nimble and earthy -- bang her heels and run off" (35). Perhaps her bare feet relieved her fear of falling in such an action-packed production.

While most critics reviewed Hall's 1962 production positively, the *Daily Telegraph*, in spite of questioning the experimental direction, assessed the production's acting, asserting that "only one performance really stood out from some sound teamwork and that was Judi Dench's Titania" ("Dream Revived"). Amazed with her acting, Michael Mullin called her "a wild-haired Titania of Dresden, pale as death," reporting that "As the balance shifted away from broad farce, Oberon, Titania, and the fairies took on a more sinister, threatening cast, an aura of 'beautiful, petulant malice'" (531). Dench's Titania, along with the other fantasy courtiers, manifested the dark side of Shakespeare's dream vision by displaying the destructive power of jealousy, selfishness, and manipulation in love, through the fairy rulers' marital dispute over the Indian boy and Titania's exploitation of Bottom. According to *The New York Times*, the *Times* of London reported that "It is impossible to admire or find comfort in the immortals as here presented. They are utterly restless creatures. They have not a heart between them"

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<sup>17</sup> See Appendix J for a photograph of Dame Judi's Titania with Paul Hardwick as Bottom (75).

(“Dream Revived”). The evil bent of the fairies would be amplified for Hall’s film made for American television and released in 1969. Yet in spite of Titania’s dark side, Gascoigne believes that Dench performs “with a careful subtlety and precision of technique which, nevertheless, never tarnishes [her] freshness.” Her line delivery draws admiration in this early production, with the acknowledgment that she remains natural, not stiff or frigid, causing Gascoigne to call “her voice, body and hands in perfect yet easy control” as she “speaks Titania’s poetry in such a way that one just wants to sit back and bathe in the beauty of it.” Her articulation of Shakespearean verse has only improved over the years and has developed into a trademark of sorts for the actress.

Judi Dench reprised the role of Titania, helping to develop the conception of Peter Hall’s cinematic dreamscape after “NBC announced that it would eventually televise the [Peter Hall 1959] stage production in the United States, though the film actually came more directly out of the 1962 Stratford revival” (Rothwell 147). “Eventually” is a key word in the NBC announcement, since ten years passed before Hall’s production, which by then had changed greatly, was filmed and “transmitted in 1969 ‘coast to coast’ for some 25 million viewers in North America” in living color (147). This was the second major Shakespearean television broadcast in which Dench acted, but Peter Hall’s film cast her in a leading role, as opposed to her minor part in *An Age of Kings*. Kenneth Rothwell calls Hall’s production “A crossover film made for both television in the USA and theatrical release in England” that brought Shakespeare’s work to homes and selected cinemas on both sides of the Atlantic (147). One newspaper headline read, “Shakespeare Is Given CBS Prime Time,” in the *New York Times*, and Jack Gould points out that *Mission Impossible* was replaced with *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* on CBS network

television, the equivalent of substituting Shakespeare for *Law and Order* or *Housewives of New Jersey*. This prime-time broadcast of Shakespeare's play transmitted Judi Dench's voice and image into the homes of millions in North America, as well as cinemas across Great Britain, providing her first principal Shakespearean role seen by a mass audience.

Peter Hall added a touch of naturalism and experimental cinematic techniques to the film, adapting Titania's role to fit his evolving interpretation as the play transferred from live theater to television. Jack Jorgens quotes the director as emphasizing that

Titania's speech explaining [the unnatural confusion in the seasons] has often been cut in the past, yet it is the essence of the situation. The King and Queen of the Fairies, embodying animal nature, are quarrelling, and their quarrels have upset the balance of nature.

This is what the play is all about. (51)

Opening the production with visual evidence of the natural disorder caused by Titania's quarrel with her husband announces Hall's belief that their conflict is paramount, even before their characters appear. The imbalance in nature that results from their disagreement sets the stage for the entire production. Judi Dench and Ian Richardson carry themselves with sufficient authority to create such elemental disorder as they preside over the green world in natural glory, confirming Hall's statement that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* "is not a pretty balletic affair, but erotic, physical, down to earth" (Rothwell 148; Jorgens 51). His filmed production certainly bears out that

interpretation, its minimally-clothed and lusty fairies bonding with nature by way of their bare feet, green skin, leafy costume accents and uninhibited sexuality.

Judi Dench spends her screen time in the forest dreamscape as Titania, making very little contact with Athenian society, allowing audiences literally to see more of her than they had ever seen before. In her book *And Furthermore*, she recalls the film's costume design strategy:

When we made the film of it at Compton Verney, Peter said that those costumes looked much too substantial and mortal in a real wood, so they started to get cut down, and cut down and cut down, and it ended up with me just being sprayed in green body paint every morning. (29)

Hall's opinion that the 1962 garb appeared too "substantial and mortal" in the woods caused the Stratford cobwebs and gossamer to dissolve into mere paint, a string bikini bottom, and foliage over her nipples that left the fairy queen nearly nude. Jack Jorgens believes that "Costume, an extension of the actor's body, is really another form of gesture. It communicates not only sex, age, social class, occupation, nationality, season of the year, and occasion, but subjective qualities--moods, tastes, values" (22). Titania's shell of body paint merges her with the forest, in contrast to the subservient fairies who wear much more clothing. This choice conveys Titania's confident eroticism, intimately linked to nature. Her long straight brown hair, pointed ears, a few strategically-placed leaves, and a small silver tiara with crystals complete Titania's look, with one large stone at the front of the tiara shaped like a small glowing unicorn horn. Her hair partially conceals the fairy queen's body in some camera angles, but overall, the small bits of ivy,

dotting her skin like moles or freckles, leave little to the audience's imagination. Tiny ivy leaves look like tattoos on her breasts, as if nature has branded the fairy queen as its own. Her bikini underpants with ivy vines as side straps glow grungily with sweat and glitter on her skin.

Viewers first see flashes of Titania running through the woods with her child followers about 21 minutes into the film, at which point she meets Oberon and stands chest to chest with him, looking up to challenge him in a stare-down even though he is taller. The camera shots angled up at Oberon show his power and force viewers to look up to him, as do most of the characters in the play. At the same time, the camera angles down at Titania, emphasizing her smaller stature and weakening her stance. Before she says, "Fairies skip hence, I have forsworn his bed and company," Oberon puts a hand to her cheek and forces her to look at him, asking, "Am I not thy lord?" She meets the challenge in his eyes without wavering until she breaks eye contact and commands her followers to "skip hence," leaving with her pride intact.

Titania behaves quite differently in the ensuing scene with the children, mothering them as she smiles gently and speaks to them kindly. Her followers receive affection and patient guidance while her eyes are more open, her voice softened. After she gives the command, the children sing her a lullaby and play music on flutes, pipes, and one long horn with ivy growing on it; they cover her with small evergreen sprigs as she loses consciousness. When Titania is almost asleep, the children sing a loud verse of the song and wake her again, but she merely smiles at them and lies back down. While they repeat the chorus softly, she goes to sleep. Such action confirms the idea that "Changes in character are often signaled by shifts in dress" since she finds strength in her natural state

but loses power when the children cover her in leaves and sing her to sleep, leaving her vulnerable to Oberon's mischief while she dreams (Jorgens 22). This is the only occasion when Titania's body is covered, presaging her loss of autonomy when she falls under the influence of nectar from the magic flower. As a result, Titania makes a fool of herself with Bottom and eventually loses the Indian boy. The camera captures Titania's resting image at the end of the scene, buried in the evergreen leaves with only her face uncovered. Perhaps the fairy queen's followers bury her bitterness towards her husband in this shot, for she is never the same antagonistic fairy wife after she sleeps and falls under the power of Oberon's love potion.

When she awakes under the influence of the love-in-idleness flower, Titania's tiara is missing, symbolizing her loss of authority and free will. Then she gapes and swoons in adoration of Bottom after rousing to the clamor of his horrible singing. In her eyes, he seems even more adorable than the children who follow her as she takes him captive and makes him her love slave. In the beginning, the fairy queen mothers Bottom but sexualizes her attitude quickly by swearing she loves him and kissing him on his donkey mouth. She even makes a smacking sound with her lips, though viewers can see his saliva and bad teeth. In spite of Bottom's repulsive nature that she would normally abhor, Titania also puts her hands on his shoulder and chest, very much as she has done earlier with Oberon. When Bottom tries to run away, she magically pops up in front of him to block his way. However, she is not angry as she was with Oberon; instead, she toys with him. At one point, when his donkey snout bumps into her breast, she laughs at him. Titania stands above Bottom as Oberon stood over her, with the camera angle adjusting to show the change. While she discusses purging "his mortal grossness so he

can like an airy spirit go,” she puts her hand on his face, reprising the gesture of Oberon in their opening scene (Donaldson 50). She lovingly cradles his snout and strokes his head, ordering her servants to wait on her lover. He rolls his eyes in ecstasy and moans as she speaks, rendering the scene highly erotic.

Titania’s words conjure a spell because Bottom loses his desire to escape her. She giggles at his ridiculous comments to her followers after they introduce themselves, and we see vapor come from her mouth as she speaks. [It was obviously cold outside during the shoot!] She cuts her eyes over to Bottom when she discusses “some enforced chastity” and gives him the knowing smile of a lover. The ass-man then hee-haws loudly, blinking his eyes in astonishment when Titania mentions taking him to bed once again, with that knowing smile. After she commands Cobweb to tie up her love’s tongue, her young follower obediently ties Bottom’s jaw with an ivy vine to keep him silent and leads him over to the queen’s bower, here a simple hole in the ground with some green plants growing around the top, as opposed to the shimmering bower of ice tucked under the wooden stairs in the Stratford production. Titania squats there waiting for Bottom to lie down, then wraps herself around him, kissing him passionately. In contrast to earlier productions of an innocent or ambiguous relationship, Dench’s Titania becomes a dominant sexual partner while Bottom lies back to enjoy the intercourse.

Because “Judi Dench [wears] virtually nothing to shield her nubile body,” she has from the outset presented the fairies as powerful and erotic, not Edenically innocent, according to Kenneth Rothwell (148). Rothwell further claims that her “voluptuousness stirs up the whiff of bestiality in the nocturnal union between Titania and Bottom with its latent eroticism,” but does it really (149)? While sexual activity between the two was

shockingly a new interpretation espoused by Hall in 1969, bestiality is another matter. In the film, Titania is a green non-human, thereby linked with the forest itself, while her husband has horns. Is it such a leap for her to sleep with an ass? Some would claim that she married one. In a sense, all the fairies are animals living in the forest, outside the social confines demanded of humanity.

Peter Hall's film adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* excels in its treatment of Shakespeare's text, though many reviewers frowned on its "alleged amateur photography," along with its abundance of close-up shots and its "surreal avant-garde elements" (Rothwell 149). Dench credits the director for excellent guidance in her lengthy poetic speeches, especially the important "speech about the bad weather that has resulted from her quarrel with Oberon" for which she was praised (Warren 149). The actor must have found it ironic to star in, arguably, the best-spoken Shakespeare film of the time, playing Hall's Titania after what some considered the worst treatment of the verse when playing Zeffirelli's Juliet (Rothwell 148; Curry 22). Nonetheless, her broad appeal as Titania translated well when Dench played the fairy queen in Peter Hall's 1969 film, and Hall confirmed his assessment of Dench as "the definitive Titania, certainly of [his] lifetime" by asking her to reprise the iconic role once more at age 75 for his production at the Rose in Kingston (Jacobs 35; Foster).

## Onward and Upward

In 1957 Dame Judi Dench found herself in a unique position as she entered a world of professional theater in flux, initiating her career during a paradigm shift in theatrical styles. On one hand, she knew and loved the tradition of England's rich classical theater, having grown up immersed in it; but on the other, she learned a more naturalistic approach to speech and acting when she studied for three years at London's Central School of Speech and Drama with Gweneth Thurburn's emphasis on classical technique with a naturalistic delivery (Dench, "Your Thesis"; Susi 26). She also entered the world of professional theater at the dawn of the age of television and film, with their inherent naturalistic style and emphasis on mass appeal. When she first acted professionally at the Old Vic, Michael Benthall married classical and pop cultures by hiring Frankie Howard, Tommy Steele, and other mainstream celebrities to lure crowds to the box office, influencing Dench early in her career by helping her understand that classical theater and pop culture need not be mutually exclusive (Rowell 146). In fact, she has successfully merged the two, creating quality entertainment for the masses.

In spite of her determination to marry two sometimes conflicting theatrical traditions with projects such as *An Age of Kings* and Peter Hall's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Dame Judi Dench was not fully embraced by the motion picture industry until 1997, when Harvey Weinstein saw her in the television broadcast of *Mrs. Brown*. At that point, the famous producer declared: "No, this is a movie," and set out to transform the British telecast into a motion picture (Feinberg). After a casting director and a well-known agent pronouncing her too theatrical for film and her face as all wrong for it in her youth, the actress must have been thrilled to excel in productions for the big screen

during her twilight years, reaching a broader audience and conquering her final professional frontier (Langley). At age 63, she won a BAFTA for her performance in *Mrs. Brown* and received her first Oscar nomination, inspiring a tattoo of Weinstein's name on her derriere that she flashed for him at the BAFTAs. (Dench repeated the joke when nominated for *Philomena* in 2014, with Oprah Winfrey as a witness) ("Judi Dench Flashes"). Despite her early work in live theater and British television, as well as her keen sense of humor, many Americans were oblivious of her talent until she finally entered American consciousness by assuming the role of "M," head of Britain's Secret Intelligence Service, in seven James Bond films between 1995 and 2012 (Feinberg).

Over the years, Dame Judi Dench has successfully bridged the gap between classicism and naturalism as she walks a tightrope between competing theatrical schools on her own terms, enjoying immense success in most every acting arena. She brings professional discipline to her television and film work, while contributing warmth, spontaneity, and authenticity to live theatrical performances. *The Hollywood Reporter's* Scott Feinberg justly observes that "As the legendary Judi Dench nears her 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, she is enjoying as great a third act as any actor ever has," despite serious health concerns. She recently prevailed over ailing eyes and knees, attending the BAFTA Awards ceremony unaided, six weeks after her second knee replacement surgery in one year, and later returned to India to film the sequel of *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* with a host of her best friends from British theater (Feinberg; Singh). Anita Singh also observes that "Dame Judi Dench has notched up some of the best reviews of her career for *Philomena*," garnering a BAFTA nomination and receiving the American Academy of Motion Picture

Arts and Sciences' nomination for Best Actress in a Leading Role for the seventh time, at age 79.

In 2014 Dame Judi lives her dream by spending time with family and avoiding retirement, while striving to remain unrecognizable and “do the most different thing [she] can think of next” in her career (Teeman). Perhaps her tempestuous maiden voyage into professional theater in *Hamlet*, *Henry V*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* fortified her for the storms ahead; nonetheless, her career has been remarkable. Articulation of Shakespearean verse is Dench's unique gift to audiences as she internalizes texts and embodies a given role, translating it while sharing an intimate part of herself with each sound and gesture, including the famous crack in her voice (Miller). Alan Riding writes that people admire the actor because of her “good humor, easy laugh, pageboy haircut and casual clothes,” but she credits her television work for facilitating her presence in the public's homes, making the masses feel as though she has been their house guest. Dame Judi somehow manages to maintain a private life in the midst of stardom, yet audiences feel they know her because, in a sense, they do. She has visited their homes, their schools, and their cinemas, touching their hearts, and they are grateful. After five decades of theatrical work with minimal lapses for health and family concerns, both critics and enthusiasts alike credit Dench for the longevity, the volume, and the scope of her work. The only remaining question is what she will do next.

## Appendix A



The Royal Albert Hall

Home of the Central School of Speech and Drama when Dame Judi attended.

Photo by Sarah Currie

Appendix B  
London's Old Vic  
July, 2010



Home of Dame Judi Dench's first professional acting company and the venue for her early performances in *Hamlet*, *Henry V*, and *Romeo and Juliet*.

## Appendix C



Dame Judi as Ophelia

Angus McBean Photograph. © Harvard Theatre Collection, Harvard University.

## Appendix D



Dame Judi Dench as Katherine of France, playing opposite Laurence Harvey  
in the Old Vic's North American tour.

Angus McBean Photograph (MS Thr 581).  
© Harvard Theatre Collection, Harvard University

## Appendix E



Princess Katherine's English lesson  
with Wendy Williams as Alice at the Old Vic.

## Appendix F



Dench's Princess Katherine with Donald Houston as King Henry V and Walter "Dickie" Hudd as her father, Charles VI, King of France, at the Old Vic.

Angus McBean Photograph (MS Thr 581).

© Harvard Theatre Collection, Harvard University

## Appendix G

## ROMEO AND JULIET

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

*Cast in order of appearance:*

Chorus .. .. .	DEREK SMITH
Abraham, servant to Montague .. ..	TOM COURTENAY
Balthasar, servant to Romeo .. ..	LAURENCE ASPREY
Sampson } servants to Capulet { .. ..	MICHAEL GRAHAM COX
Gregory } .. .. .	PAUL HARRIS
Benvolio, nephew to Montague and friend to Romeo ..	PETER ELLIS
Tybalt, nephew to Lady Capulet .. ..	THOMAS KEMPINSKI
Montague } heads of two houses { .. ..	BRIAN HAWKSLEY
Capulet } at variance with each other { .. ..	CHARLES WEST
Lady Montague .. .. .	ROSEMARIE DUNHAM
Lady Capulet .. .. .	SYLVIA COLERIDGE
Escalus, Prince of Verona .. ..	NICHOLAS MEREDITH
Romeo, son to Montague .. .. .	JOHN STRIDE
Paris, a young nobleman, kinsman to the Prince ..	BRIAN SPINK
Peter, servant to Juliet's nurse .. ..	DAVID LLOYD MEREDITH
Nurse to Juliet .. .. .	PEGGY MOUNT
Juliet, daughter to Capulet .. .. .	JUDI DENCH
Mercutio, kinsman to the Prince and friend to Romeo .. .. .	ALEC McCOWEN
A Singer .. .. .	ELRIC HOOPER
Friar Laurence .. .. .	GERALD JAMES
An Apothecary .. .. .	VERNON DOBTSHEFF
Friar John .. .. .	STEPHEN MOORE

*Citizens of Verona, Guards, Kingsfolk of both houses:*

ANN BELL, LAURA GRAHAM, BARBARA LEIGH-HUNT, SARAH LONG, VERNON DOBTSHEFF, KERRY GARDNER, JOHN HARWOOD, GEOFFREY HINSLIFF, WILLIAM HOBBS, ELRIC HOOPER, DAVID TUDOR-JONES, JOHN MCGEE, STEPHEN MOORE, MALCOLM REID, EDWARD VAUGHAN-SCOTT, ANTHONY SINGLETON,

Directed by FRANCO ZEFFIRELLI

Scenery by FRANCO ZEFFIRELLI

Costumes by PETER HALL

Music composed by NINO ROTA

The action of the play takes place in Verona and Mantua

There will be two intervals of ten minutes  
Orchestra under the direction of JOHN LAMBERT  
Dances arranged by FIRMIN TRECUI  
Fights arranged by WILLIAM HOBBS  
Assistant to the director: MASSIMO DI PIETRO

The first performance of this production: 4th October, 1960

Scenery made by E. Babbage & Co. Ltd., and in the Old Vic Workshops. Ladies' costumes by Andrew Sorrie. Men's costumes by Victor Hackett and L. & H. Nathan Ltd. Embroidery decoration and accessories by Phyllis Dobson and Audrey Taylor. Hats and headresses by Patricia Dawson. Shoes and tights by Anello & Davide. Stockings by Bear Brand Ltd. Wigs by Wig Creations. Photographs by Houston Rogers 20 Sloane St. S.W.1

SMOKING IS NOT PERMITTED IN THE AUDITORIUM

## ROMEO AND JULIET

*Franco Zeffirelli writes:*

"When the Old Vic invited me to produce *Romeo and Juliet* my first reaction was to refuse because it is so difficult for a foreigner to believe that any but British or American people would be able to touch their own cultural heritage, especially with Shakespearian tradition.

Recollecting my reasons for accepting, I believe the decision was not dictated entirely by professional considerations but also for idealistic reasons beyond the limits of the theatre. I had worked in England presenting Italian works and the real satisfaction I took back to Italy was simply that I had helped a little towards the better understanding of its culture by the English.

Now I have an even more interesting task—a combination of Italian feelings applied to a masterpiece of the classical English theatre which might prove, if successful, that times have changed in Europe and people of different backgrounds can easily work together for creating a new European conscience.

This is to me far more important than any diplomatic or political manoeuvres.

I know that it may sound presumptuous, but actually I have felt so elated because of the wonderful atmosphere created during the preparation of this *Romeo and Juliet*.

The Company the Old Vic management has called together for this production is far better than I could ever have imagined. They offer all the professional enthusiasm typical of young people still finding themselves, their 'perfectionism' is astonishing, and they are not only remarkable actors but are proving to be indeed the kind of 'new Europeans' I was mentioning before. In our mutual understanding lie all the hopes for the success of this production.

I should be very glad if it could be seen in Italy, and with all modesty I am sure it would be a rewarding example of co-operation."

Romeo and Juliet Old Vic Program (1960-61 Season)

©Royal Victoria Hall Foundation

Accessed from the London Old Vic Archive at the University of Bristol Theatre Collection

## Appendix H

### JUDI DENCH

Born in York in 1934, Judi Dench made her first professional appearance in her home town, playing the Virgin Mary in the York Mystery Plays. This followed three years of training at the Central School of Speech and Drama in London.

She joined the Old Vic Company for the 1957-58 Season and played Ophelia to John Neville's "Hamlet" as well as Maria in "Twelfth Night" and Juliet in "Measure for Measure". She was a member of the American touring company which presented "Twelfth Night", "Hamlet" and "Henry V" during the six months tour of America and Canada in 1958-59. During this tour she played the Princess of France in "Henry V" as well as Maria in "Twelfth Night".

On her return to England in the spring of 1959 she made a number of television appearances before rejoining the Old Vic Company for the 1959-60 Season, to play Phoebe in "As You Like It", the Princess of France in "Henry V", Cecily in "The Importance of Being Earnest", the Queen in "Richard II" (opposite Alec McCowen), Anne Page in "The Merry Wives of Windsor" and Cynthia in Congreve's "The Double-Dealer".

She rejoined the Company for the 1960-61 Season to play Juliet opposite John Stride in "Romeo and Juliet". This production, by the Italian director, Franco Zeffirelli, was a record-breaking one for the Old Vic, and following the Season, Judi Dench went with the Company to Venice to play Juliet at the Venice Festival in the summer of 1961. Also during the Season she was seen as Hermia in "A Midsummer Night's Dream" and Kate Hardcastle in "She Stoops to Conquer".

### Early resume

Appendix  
I



Dame Judi's barefoot Titania with Ian Richardson as Oberon  
in Peter Hall's 1962 R.S.C. production of  
*A Midsummer Night's Dream*

Gordon Goode Photograph © Royal Shakespeare Company  
Reproduced by permission of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust

## Appendix J



Dench playing Titania opposite Paul Hardwick as Bottom in Peter Hall's  
1962 R.S.C. production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

Gordon Goode Photograph © Royal Shakespeare Company  
Reproduced by permission of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust

Appendix K  
First Email from Dame Judi Dench

**Sent:** Friday, May 20, 2011 10:51:29 AM  
**Subject:** Your thesis

Dear Donna Brewer,

I have some replies to some of your questions, but I fear that the answers may not be as full as you would like.

From Judi Dench:

I was at Central the last three years that the school was based at the Royal Albert Hall under Gwynneth Thurburn. The emphasis then was very much on voice and how to use it to best effect - how to project, how not to lose it, and how to breath properly. The school then was very theatre-orientated. When Finty was at Central, the whole emphasis had changed. Television and films had become much more prominent and theatre was almost the poor relation. As a result, I feel that the voice training was neglected.

As for my playing of Ophelia, I really cannot be much help as it was over 50 years ago. I do know that the flowers were not real. There was a superstition in those days that fresh flowers in a theatre were unlucky.

I hope this helps. Best wishes,

S. J.  
PA to Dame Judi Dench

## Appendix L

### Second Email from Dame Judi Dench

Date: Sat, Apr 5, 2014 at 4:53 AM

Subject: Re: Graduate Thesis

Dear Donna -

I thought I had sent you the following from Judi but, from your last message, I obviously did not. Apologies. I hope it helps.

Age of Kings

At the time it was incredibly innovative and when it was all put together I believe it was the first time that anything like it had ever been done. It also employed a great many actors!

When we were filming the scene at Harfleur, a lot of rocks were thrown from the battlements. Unfortunately, one of the actors speared one of the “rocks” on his sword, so everyone knew they were made of polystyrene. The director was not amused!

While working on The Age of Kings, playing the Princess of France, opposite Robert Hardy, at the same time I was playing the same part opposite Donald Houston at the Old Vic. Different moves, different frocks and different cuts. It was quite complicated, and not easy to keep the two roles separate. In spite of all that, I remember it as a very happy time and it was wonderful to have been a part of such an amazing and memorable production.

Good luck with the thesis.

Best wishes,

S.J.

P.A. to Dame Judi Dench

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