

# Introduction

The fundamental mission of Great Britain's Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) is to 'conserve, advance and disseminate the dramatic heritage of Shakespeare,'<sup>1</sup> and in effect to 'speak authoritatively through, for and on behalf of Shakespeare.'<sup>2</sup> A major milestone in the Royal Shakespeare Company's pioneering mission was the formation of The Other Place, the Company's second auditorium and studio venue in Stratford-upon-Avon. The Other Place opened its doors in 1974 and was closed and demolished in 1989. This venue was the site of some of the Company's most adventurous, experimental and controversial work on the Shakespeare canon.

The Other Place was the brainchild of the Company's then youngest and only female director, Mary Ann 'Buzz' Goodbody (1947–75). For her, The Other Place was a utopian vision. Like many of her colleagues working in British theatre during the 1970s, Goodbody dreamt of creating democratic, accessible and popular theatre for the masses. However, her focus differed from her counterparts on the fringe, many of whom viewed classical theatre, and Shakespeare in particular, as the epitome of cultural elitism. Goodbody adamantly disagreed with this view:

Shakespeare's own theatre was a popular art form. Its strength and its richness derived from the social range of its audience as much as from the participants themselves. No one wants to reproduce the conditions of 1599 even if it were possible, but the challenge of closing the gap between the serious theatre and the bulk of society has to be faced, and for the Royal Shakespeare Company its smaller theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon is a start.<sup>3</sup>

With this premise Goodbody created a theatre committed to minimalist and hard-hitting classical productions that challenged current trends in the staging of Shakespeare's plays. For Goodbody the collaborative process of theatre-making was just as paramount as the final product.

As a result, The Other Place was a stimulating, dynamic and creative working environment, and one which provided actors and directors with a release from the pressures of commercial success and sure-fire hits within the Royal Shakespeare Company's structure. This environment functioned as a crucible for the exploration of new and exciting methods of production. Ron Daniels remembered: 'There was a whole new generation of directors and actors, and The Other Place gave us a real pioneering feel, we were part of something bold, brave and new. It all happened at such a crucial time, the right time, in our development.'<sup>4</sup>

For audiences, particularly students and young people, The Other Place ensured an opportunity to experience classical works in fresh and non-threatening surroundings. Goodbody repeatedly expressed her commitment to create a theatre

that was welcoming and accessible to the young – not in an effort to groom them for ‘real’ theatre at some later stage in their lives but rather, as a special audience with their own particular needs: ‘Many young people admit to being “turned off” Shakespeare by reading it in the classroom. What we hope to do is “turn them on” to Shakespeare at that vital time in their lives.’<sup>5</sup>

The essence of The Other Place was that it lacked pretence (see Plate 1). It was an intimate space that rejected gimmickry or spectacle and required a production style that was simple, rough and uncluttered. At the centre of this lay the production ethic fostered by Goodbody that favoured a personal and more socialized approach to the production of classical texts over a more generalized and abstracted treatment. For Goodbody, the art of theatre was a political act. In her work on Shakespeare she advocated a socio-realist philosophy focusing on the familial and personal issues within the texts. She also promoted a communal view of theatre in which ‘performance’ gave way to ‘participation’ – the ensemble of players and spectators forming a community of shared experience. The creation and development of The Other Place, and Goodbody’s influence on the RSC particularly and classical theatrical production generally are her lasting legacies. For many, Goodbody and The Other Place are inseparable topics; one can hardly be mentioned without the other. Neither she nor her contributions to the theatre should be forgotten.

In its 15-year life-span The Other Place, a venue affectionately known as ‘the most productive tin hut in theatre history,’<sup>6</sup> was the site of some of the most formidable and exciting new writing and classical work produced by the RSC during this period. Among these were new works from such writers as Edward Bond, David Edgar, Trevor Griffiths, Vaclav Havel, Doug Lucie, Louise Page, David Rudkin and Timberlake Wertenbaker. The most noted of these new works were: Pam Gem’s *Piaf* (1978), Nick Dear’s *The Art of Success* (1986) and Christopher Hampton’s *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* (1985). However, the works of Shakespeare always remained The Other Place’s central focus. Goodbody found Shakespeare to be a far more political playwright than any modern or contemporary dramatist. Working on his plays was, for her, a more rewarding and politically fulfilling experience than producing what she called, the ‘dry and arid’ works of such modern masters as Beckett and Pinter, for whom Goodbody held only a ‘sort of bemused respect.’<sup>7</sup>

There were 13 Shakespeare productions at The Other Place during the period of 1974–89: *King Lear* (dir. Buzz Goodbody, 1974), *The Tempest* (dir. Keith Hack, 1974), *Hamlet* (dir. Buzz Goodbody, 1975), *Richard III* (dir. Barry Kyle, 1975), *Macbeth* (dir. Trevor Nunn, 1976), *The Merchant of Venice* (dir. John Barton, 1978), *Pericles* (dir. Ron Daniels, 1979), *Timon of Athens* (dir. Ron Daniels, 1980), *Antony and Cleopatra* (dir. Adrian Noble, 1982), *Cymbeline* (dir. Bill Alexander, 1987), *King John* (dir. Deborah Warner, 1988), *King Lear* (dir. Cicely Berry, 1988) and *Othello* (dir. Trevor Nunn, 1989). There appears to be a disproportionate number of tragedies in this list, and it is worth noting that no predetermined policy regarding the Shakespearean repertoire at The Other Place was established. Production decisions were left to each individual director. The large number of

tragedies seems entirely coincidental. Each production herein has been assessed on the basis of criteria developed from the objectives and ideals set forth by Buzz Goodbody in her mission statement for The Other Place (dated 15 December 1973) and also from her other writings and personal notes.

Unlike films, which can be rewound and reassessed time and time again, theatre is a transitory art. Stage productions only live on through memory and summary. Therefore it is within this realm of fragments and clues that the performance historian must dwell: piecing together traces of a production with the aid of promptbooks, Stage Managers' scripts, directors' notes, musical scores, programmes, videotapes, audience surveys, interviews, letters, and critical and scholarly reviews. As theatre is also a communicative and communal art the comments, views, reactions and opinions of those who actually took part in the creative process are indispensable. For example, in Chapter 2, 'King Lear and the Commitment to Education' and Chapter 4, 'Claustrophobic Tragedy and "Close-up" Comedy,' Sheila Allen, George Baker, Pat Friday, Ben Kingsley and Mikel Lambert speak at length about their respective experiences of working with Buzz Goodbody on her productions of *King Lear* (1974) and *Hamlet* (1975). Their fascinating and provocative details provide vital and profound information on Goodbody's education policies, directorial methods and rehearsal techniques.

Grouping the plays in terms of genre has proved a far more fruitful method of collation than surveying them chronologically. The volume is therefore divided into five discrete but equal parts. Chapter 1, 'New Beginnings and Methods of Change,' briefly outlines the history of experiment and development within theatre in a broad sense and within the RSC in more specific detail from the so-called 'overnight revolution' of 1956 to the early 1970s. This chapter covers the transformation of The Shakespeare Memorial Theatre into The Royal Shakespeare Company in 1962 under the direction of Peter Hall and his co-directors Michel Saint-Denis and Peter Brook. Intensive experimentation and cross-fertilization of classical theatre with the avant-garde and other new writing flourished at the RSC during this period and was continued by the next generation with Trevor Nunn, Buzz Goodbody and others. There is particular emphasis in Chapter 1 on Goodbody's life and early work. A full outline of her mission statement, 'Studio/2nd Auditorium Stratford 1974,' is given at the end of this chapter.

Chapter 2, 'King Lear and the Commitment to Education,' details the first season at The Other Place and describes in detail Goodbody's commitment to and involvement within the local academic community including her work on *King Lear*. This chapter also contains a discussion of Cicely Berry's innovative production of *King Lear*, an entirely different though equally thought-provoking educational project using the same text.

Next, Chapter 3, 'Late Plays and "Neglected Classics,"' summarizes the production work on the three so-called Late Plays or Romances, as well as *Timon of Athens*. Chapter 4, 'Claustrophobic Tragedy and "Close-up" Comedy,' then offers an examination of the treatment given to the four tragedies and The Other Place's only Shakespeare comedy, *The Merchant of Venice*. This chapter also considers the relationship of theatrical space and dramatic genre that prompted the

conclusion that success with Shakespeare at The Other Place was determined by the director's production method and approach, rather than textual genre. This concept is explored further in Chapter 5, 'Approaches to History,' which contrasts the directorial methods of Barry Kyle and Deborah Warner in their treatment of The Other Place's two Shakespearean history plays, *Richard III* and *King John*.

Each chapter records the past, a brief, shining moment in the long history of the Royal Shakespeare Company – one of theatre history's brightest stars. In doing so I have attempted to trace and record a history of the practical and theoretical ideology of The Other Place, as well as of its first artistic director and her commitment to Shakespeare. The astronomer James Gunn once noted that, when gazing at the heavens, observers tend to enthusiastically, though knowledgeably, over-interpret their observations. The over-interpretation to which Gunn refers is surely a direct result of over-appreciation. Of this fault I wilfully acknowledge guilt. However, in my appreciation and admiration of the life, commitment and achievement of Mary Ann 'Buzz' Goodbody and the dynamic theatre she created, I am not alone. For there are indeed many for whom The Other Place represented and was in fact, 'utopia ... real and actual everyday.'<sup>8</sup>

## Notes

- 1 'Theatre is for all' – Report of the Cork Enquiry into the state of British theatre. Commissioned by the Arts Council of Great Britain (London, 1986). p. 15.
- 2 Shaughnessy, Robert. *Representing Shakespeare: England, History and the Royal Shakespeare Company*. (Hemel Hempstead, UK, 1994). p. 3.
- 3 Goodbody, Buzz. 'The Other Place,' *Royal Shakespeare Company Membership Magazine* [no volume number or dates], in Goodbody family scrapbook.
- 4 Ron Daniels, interview with author, 20 July 1995.
- 5 Goodbody, 'The Other Place.'
- 6 Edgar, David. 'Seeking Ourselves in The Other Place,' *Royal Shakespeare Company Magazine*, no. 2, Autumn 1990. p. 18.
- 7 Stott, Catherine. 'Woman director: Buzz Goodbody talks to Catherine Stott,' *The Guardian*. 27 October 1971.
- 8 Edgar, pp. 20–21.