



Acting Shakespeare

©2009 eNotes.com, Inc. or its Licensors. Please see [copyright information](#) at the end of this document.

John Gielgud's amiable, chatty, and sometimes wickedly ironic voice permeates this narrative. In recalling his early years at the Old Vic, he candidly remarks that there were whole passages he failed to understand, "but I padded my doublet and wore a false beard and shouted and boomed and seemed to get some sort of result." This sort of refreshing candor comes from the accumulated wisdom of a distinguished career. However, Gielgud's self-skewering remark acts as a disarming prelude to a droll discussion of the American penchant for the fruitless probing of character and the endless exploration of the complexities of motivation—all of which, he suggests, does little to bring the play to the audience. When Gielgud remarks that his friend and much lauded colleague Lawrence Olivier had a fondness for artificial noses that sometimes diminished the effect of his performance, his observation is saved from being mean-spirited by a narrative voice of wry and self-effacing wisdom.

Gielgud's reminiscences have been admirably edited by his longtime colleague John Miller, who has sketched a chronological frame for Gielgud's reflections on his career. Miller outlines the highlights of Sir John's career in an informative introduction. Moreover, he supplies four interesting appendices that provide intriguing tidbits of information. The index of "The Casts" reveals a host of familiar names. In a 1937 production of *RICHARD II*, Gielgud directed himself in the title role, a production and performance that captivated critics. However, he had some reasonably decent talent with which to work: Michael Redgrave played Richard's nemesis, Henry Bolingbroke; Anthony Quayle was double cast as Surrey and a Captain of Welshman; Harry Andrews as Bushey; Peggy Ashcroft as Richard's queen; and Alec Guinness as a Groom of the Stable. What wonderful byplay must have taken place in rehearsal. In a time when ego appears to dominate the arts, Gielgud's reflection that "it is never beneath an actor's dignity to play the smaller parts in Shakespeare" is particularly refreshing, as is this delightful book.

Copyright Notice

©2009 eNotes.com, Inc.

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

No part of this work covered by the copyright hereon may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, Web distribution or information storage retrieval systems without the written permission of the publisher.

For complete copyright information, please see the online version of this work:
<http://www.enotes.com/acting-shakespeare-john-gielgud-salem>