

minority culture theatre? By what means, to return to Maufort's premise, have ideas about dramatic realism been disseminated differently in Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, and what, precisely, are these countries' relationships to modernist stage realism? Maufort occasionally broaches such topics but, regrettably, he only partially explores contexts that could have developed his analysis into fully contrastive readings.

These limitations aside, the breadth of material that Maufort covers is impressive, and if the author's methodology does not quite fulfill his aims, *Transgressive Itineraries* surely helps set the direction for future studies of its kind. ❁



ROBERT CUSHMAN

Fifty Seasons at Stratford.

Toronto: McClelland & Stewart/ Madison Press, 2002. 224 pp.
Illus. Hardcover.

MARTIN HUNTER

Romancing the Bard: Stratford at Fifty.

Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2001. 304 pp. Illus. Hardcover.

RICHARD OUZOUNIAN

Stratford Gold: 50 years, 50 Stars, 50 Conversations.

Toronto: McArthur & Company, 2002. Hardcover.

PAULA SPERDAKOS

It is probably safe to say that no one who was involved in the founding and early days of the Stratford Festival of Canada could ever have imagined that not only would it survive to celebrate its fiftieth anniversary season in 2002, but also that it would develop into what some consider Canada's flagship cultural institution.

Fifty-five seasons after its founding, there can be no doubt that the story of the Stratford Festival is—resoundingly—a success story: the theatre's phenomenal growth will attest to that. Since 1953, some 22,000,000 tickets have been sold to over 20,000 performances. The budget for the 2007 Stratford Festival was \$53,923,000. During the six weeks of its first season in 1953 (it was originally meant to run for four weeks but had to be extended to accommodate the overwhelming demand for tickets), 68,000

people had attended the two plays, Shakespeare's *Richard III* and *All's Well That Ends Well*, in a purpose-built auditorium covered by the second-largest tent in the world. In 2007 fourteen plays, four by Shakespeare and the other ten running the gamut from two spectacular musicals—*Oklahoma* and *My One and Only*—and classics such as Wilde's *An Ideal Husband* and Albee's *A Delicate Balance*, to one-person shows, to edgy contemporary works such as David Edgar's *Pentecost*, were offered in four theatre spaces; during the close-to-seven-month season, some 500,000 tickets were sold to more than 699 performances. The economic impact on the town of Stratford and on the region as a whole of these attendance figures is prodigious: \$125,000,000 in 2007. Tom Patterson's dream of revitalizing his home town has come true to an astonishing degree.

In the years leading up to the fiftieth anniversary season, the Festival initiated a number of renewal and building projects, and, so that an even wider audience could be accessed, lent its support or cooperation to a variety of celebratory activities and events. The lobby and façade of both the Festival Theatre and the Avon Theatre were renovated, as was the interior of the Avon, and in 2002 the 260-seat Studio Theatre—carved out of the Avon's paint shop—was opened to serve as an experimental venue trying out new plays and seldom-seen classics. For example, a production of Corneille's *The Liar* was offered there in 2006, and in 2007 Derek Walcott's *The Odyssey* was presented. During the 2001 season, the National Film Board of Canada took its cameras backstage to film "Offstage/Onstage: Inside the Stratford Festival"; and then in the late spring and summer of 2002, CBC-TV aired "Stratford Gold," an eight-hour, thirteen-part interview series conducted by Toronto *Star* theatre critic Richard Ouzounian who spoke with fifty of the actors, directors, designers and musicians who have been connected with the festival over the years. In order to "preserve [...] for posterity" more of the over seventy hours of interview footage than could be shown on television, these interviews were then published under the title *Stratford Gold: 50 Years, 50 Stars, 50 Conversations*.

Stratford Gold, "the story of the Stratford Festival as told by the people who were there," is an entertaining and occasionally illuminating "read," but, unfortunately, in allowing both laziness and his familiar anti-scholarly bias to rule him once again—"no historians need apply, please, no critics or commentators," (1) and producing a work that has neither an index nor any particular concern for chronology, Ouzounian undercuts the usefulness of his book to

the posterity for which he claims he put it together. The fact that the book was re-issued in paperback in 2003 would suggest that this does not seem to have hindered sales, however.

The two other commemorative books that were published to coincide with the fiftieth-anniversary celebrations—*Fifty Seasons at Stratford* and *Romancing the Bard: Stratford at Fifty*—attempt to be definitive in a way that, admittedly, the lightweight *Stratford Gold* does not.

The fact that *Fifty Seasons at Stratford*, written by the theatre critic of the *National Post*, Robert Cushman, was commissioned by the Stratford Festival, is evident in a number of ways, not least of which is the attractiveness of its design and the lavishness with which it is illustrated; more than 250 full colour and black-and-white photographs, design sketches, drawings and paintings, taken from the Festival archives, make this a very handsome book indeed. Furthermore, the choice of Timothy Findley (1930-2002) as the author of the Foreword not only puts the Festival's official stamp of approval on the project, but also reflects a characteristic feature of its history: continuity. Novelist Findley, most recently associated with the Festival as a playwright (*The Stillborn Lover*, 1995; *Elizabeth Rex*, 2000; *The Trials of Ezra Pound*, 2001) was an actor in the inaugural 1953 company: in his Foreword ("Golden Years") he describes the excitement, the challenges, and the sense of accomplishment of those early days, and movingly wishes "Bon voyage" to "this wondrous fleet of theatres."

In his Preface, Cushman promises that *Fifty Seasons at Stratford* "deals, either in passing or at length, with virtually every Festival production." One is reminded of the method used in *Stratford: the First Thirty Years*, that invaluable two-volume history of the Festival written by critics John Pettigrew and Jamie Portman, who between them had seen every production under discussion. That the Englishman Cushman, who moved to Canada in 1987 and only began seeing "everything at Stratford" in 1999, was anticipating some criticism himself for writing a book which is essentially a chronological and analytical account of the Festival's fifty-year production history is illustrated in his somewhat defensive tone when he points out that, "I spent the first forty-odd years of my life in Britain; there's nothing I can do about that now," and that, as a result, "I have had to write reviews of productions I never saw [...] greatly aided, of course, by the reviews of critics who *did* see the shows."

In his Acknowledgements at the end of *Romancing the Bard: Stratford at Fifty*, Martin Hunter thanks his "good friend Richard

Monette [then Artistic Director of the Festival] for supplying a vast amount of information and much encouragement.” Like *Fifty Seasons at Stratford, Romancing the Bard* begins with a foreword written by a playwright whose association with the Festival epitomizes the continuity of its history: Dan Needles, author of the highly successful *Wingfield* series of plays and son of Festival veteran actor William Needles (who, like Timothy Findley, was also a member of the 1953 company). Dan Needles talks about his earliest memories of Stratford, “from those halcyon days of the mid-1950s,” and points out that “No one has yet attempted a journalistic history of the Festival based on conversations with the people who made it happen and drawing from a long personal association with the institution. At least, not until Martin Hunter’s *Romancing the Bard*.” Hunter’s purpose in writing the book, Needles asserts, is to help us “to understand better the history of a great institution.”

In his Introduction, “The Insubstantial Pageant,” Hunter speaks of his work “at different times as actor, stage manager, director, producer, playwright,” but ultimately identifies himself as “a compulsive audience member,” who, though never a part of the Festival, has “experienced it from its beginnings through to the present.”

Although these two books cover much of the same ground, they are organized quite differently, according to the particular perspective that each author brings to the story of the Festival.

Cushman’s *Fifty Seasons at Stratford* is organized into eight chapters, corresponding to the regimes of each of the Festival’s eight Artistic Directors: Tyrone Guthrie (1953-1955); Michael Langham (1956-1967); Jean Gascon (1968-1974); Robin Phillips (1975-1980); John Hirsch (1981-1985); John Neville (1986-1989); David William (1990-1993); and Richard Monette, for whom 2007 was the last of his thirteen seasons as Stratford Festival A.D. (In June of 2006 General Director Antoni Cimolino made known the Festival’s new plan for artistic leadership: in future, he will work alongside a team of three Artistic Directors—Marti Maraden, Des McAnuff, and Don Shipley. At this writing, the new artistic team has announced the production line-up for the 2008 season.) In his Preface, Cushman tells the reader that the work of each of these Artistic Directors “has been treated in whatever order seemed most sensible,” but that he has “tried to keep the central story—of an acting company and its members—going throughout.”

Romancing the Bard, Hunter tells us, “is not a detailed chronological history [of the Festival], but a take on various aspects of its

development and achievements” (12). Its twenty-one chapters are organized by subject, with titles like “Vision or Vanity? Design at Stratford”; “Tearing It Apart: The Critics are Heard From”; and “Keep Your Council: Cultural Politics and Economic Realities,” and each is accompanied by Hunter’s descriptions of one or more productions he found particularly memorable: some thirty of these are highlighted and illustrated by 115 black-and-white archival photographs.

Viewing the Stratford Festival as very much a part of world theatre, and particularly of the English-speaking classical theatre, Cushman brings breadth and an international perspective to his critical narrative, most evidently when he points out the historical difficulties and challenges to be found in each play; when he discusses the relative adventurousness or cautiousness in repertoire choices and programming of each artistic director; the backgrounds of each of the imported directors, and the politics of engaging both directors and “stars” from elsewhere; and when he compares his opinions with those of other theatre critics in Canada, the US, and Britain. He is particularly interested in the development over time of the acting ensemble of the Festival, and his description of the personal acting styles and breakthroughs of individual actors is often illuminating. When reporting the fact that “...Stratford had some trouble in building up a bank of young actresses comparable to its young actors,” he makes sure to point out that “Women traditionally fare less well in Shakespearean companies than men—they have fewer opportunities...” (60) Paradoxically, however, when towards the end of the book he cites “seamlessly great acting” as “one of Stratford’s reasons for being” (209), he is referring to Uta Hagen’s performance in Donald Margulies’s *Collected Stories* (2000). The late Hagen’s acting in that play was indeed remarkable, but as the production had originated in New York and was the only play in which Hagen appeared at Stratford that season, it is perhaps a bit of a stretch to classify her as a member of the acting company.

From the very beginning of its history, the Stratford Festival has been distinguished by the extremely high quality of its production values, and one of the most notable features of *Fifty Seasons at Stratford* is to be found in the sidebar coverage of what Cushman calls “the backstage cottage-industry aspects of Stratford’s existence.” Beautifully illustrated, and with titles like “The Making of Soldiers”; “The Art of Transformation”; “The Jewels in the Crowns”; “From Simulated Soup to Imitation Nuts”; “From Head to Toe”; “Such Stuff as Dreams are Made On”; “Our Lofty Scene”;

and “As There Comes Light from Heaven”; these sidebars discuss the remarkable work of the designers and artists responsible for creating the swords and armour, wigs, bijoux, props, hats and footwear, costumes, sets, and lighting for which the Festival is justly famous. Also to be found in the sidebars are many amusing and enlightening anecdotes by actors, directors, designers, and others, reminiscing about their experiences and association with the Festival: as Cushman points out in his Acknowledgements, most of these “celebrity anecdotes” were drawn from Richard Ouzounian’s interviews for *Stratford Gold. Fifty Seasons at Stratford* also includes an extremely useful list of all the productions offered at the Festival between 1953 and 2002, and the Artistic Directors under whose aegis they were presented.

Romancing the Bard is neither as glamorous nor as glossy a book as *Fifty Seasons at Stratford*; it is certainly not nearly as well edited (there is a surprising number of misspellings and typos, and at least one repeated paragraph); and is not as well written. Cushman may adopt an annoyingly lordly tone from time to time; he is occasionally given to verbal overkill, as when, for example, he satirizes the “luckless lovers’ listless letters” of that “unaccountable entertainment called *Heloise and Abelard*” (126), and he can be terribly condescending to individual artists whose work he has no use for, but his is by far the more enjoyable read. Hunter has a tendency toward hyperbole when discussing favorite productions and players, and is given to making patronising remarks and gratuitous cracks, reaching some rather dubious conclusions, and—maddeningly—alluding to events and actions without attribution or sufficient detail. Nevertheless, to my way of thinking at any rate, *Romancing the Bard* is the more valuable book of the two, simply because Hunter is at all times engaged in putting the history of the Stratford Festival into a Canadian context. Although obviously he sees the Festival as standing centre stage in Canadian theatre history, he clearly does not feel, as Cushman does, that Stratford “may be said to have *started* the Canadian theatre” (Preface). It is Hunter’s rather different and more accurate perspective that the creative forces that already existed in Canada were galvanized and, for a time, unified by the founding of the Festival, and *Romancing the Bard* is at its best, and most ambitious, when he places the development and growth of the Stratford Festival against the background of the Canadian theatre as a whole.

Sometimes Hunter’s reach may exceed his grasp, as is the case when, in his chapter called “The Invention of Canadian Acting” he attempts to define a characteristic Canadian acting “style.”

However, his discussion of the role of the director (“Inspired Interpreter or Tyrannosaurus Rex?”) is very useful in describing Canadian actors’ humble response to the “exercise of directorial authority” in the early days of Stratford, and he doesn’t pull his punches in stating that “Stratford’s most significant failure has been in training imaginative, capable Canadian directors of Shakespeare and other classical texts” (160).

Overall, *Romancing the Bard* takes a very practical stance in its analysis of the Festival; Hunter is obviously just as interested in the details of what goes on behind the scenes as what the audience sees on stage. This is particularly evident in “Putting It Together,” one of the book’s most intriguing “essays,” in which Hunter discusses the arduous process Richard Monette had to undergo in planning a season.

Ultimately, however, an inescapable consideration about *Fifty Seasons at Stratford* and *Romancing the Bard* is that they are both “coffee table books,” and are priced accordingly, even when remaindered or heavily discounted, a fact which begs questions about whose coffee tables they are adorning and, more importantly, who is actually reading them. The story that these books celebrate is an exciting, dramatic, and significant one, and all who are interested in the culture of this country ought to be familiar with it. Let’s be proud of the Festival, by all means; but let’s also interrogate its past, its present, and its future, and let’s never forget that there is so much more to the story of the Canadian theatre than the Stratford Festival. ❁