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*Michael A. Morrison*

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**Michael A. Morrison : John Barrymore, Shakespearean Actor (Cambridge Studies in American Theatre and Drama)** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised John Barrymore, Shakespearean Actor (Cambridge Studies in American Theatre and Drama):

7 of 8 people found the following review helpful. The Bard and Barrymore made a potent combination for the glory of the Great Profile's Richard III and HamletBy C. M. MillsThe bard is the genius of the theatre: William Shakespeare (1564-1616). The Barrymore is John (1862-1942). In the 1920s productions in New York and London of Richard III and Hamlet the player from Philadelphia lightened the Great White Way with his superb impersonations of the hunchbacked Machiavellian and the brooding Dane. Michael Morrison's excellent theatrical history of those productionscasts the limelight on both the history of Shakespearean production and the emergence of Barrymore. Barrymore had been known as a light comedian. Yet in Richard III and Hamlet he reached the heights of Shakespearean acting brilliance joining such luminaries as Edwin Booth, Sir Henry Irving and David Garrick in the pantheon of great tragedians. John Barrymore was a rake who died an early death due to his alcoholism and related problems. He was married four times. Following the Shakespearean plays of the 1920s he went to Hollywood to star in such hits as "Twentieth Century"; "Grand Hotel"; "Romeo and Juliet (in the role of Mercutio)": "Counselor At Law" and others. While many films were hits he failed to reach his potential as a Shakespearean actor. Barrymore is important in the Shakespearean stage history of America because:a. He served as a transition figure from the gentle Prince Hamlet tradition of the Victorian theatre to a more Freudian psychological approach.b. He provided audience goers with a more physical and sexual Richard III and Hamlet. John Barrymore seemed to speak the lines as if he had just thought of them for the first time. He added realism to a theatregoers perception of the action on stage.c. He spoke Shakespeare in a less bombastic style than earlier tragedians. He did, however, at times revert to being a ham on stage.d. Morrison shows how director Arthur Hopkins and his stage designer Robert Jones effectively used lighting and European concepts of staging to give Shakespeare a more contemporary impact to Shakespearean productions.e. Barrymore influenced a generation of Shakespearians who would follow him such as Laurence Olivier, John Gielgud and Maurice Evans. Barrymore studied hard to make his transition from light comedy to Shakespeare. He trained his voice; studied the texts of the plays in g depth and worked hard to sober up and keep physically fit during the run of the plays. He would never again be so great as he was in these 1920s productions of Shakespeare. Once he had created his concept of a role Barrymore disdained the hard work of performing the same play night after night. He was quickly bored and eager to move on to a new challenge. Michael Morrison examines in depth each of the scenes in the Barrymore plays. To some this will be tedious but as a lover of Shakespeare I found it to be fascinating. This book cleared up many misconceptions I had about John Barrymore. While clearly a flawed human being he was also a brilliant actor who held his own with the heavyweight actors of his profession. This excellent book deals with the craft of acting and would be a wonderful resource to use in a college classroom devoted to Shakespearean acting.16 of 16 people found the following review helpful. Inspiring HeartbreakingBy A. P. HartelMichael Morrison's book fills a much needed gap in the large Barrymore biographical canon: it tells the story of Barrymore the artist. Many of the other great biographies of the man and family (Margot Peter's THE HOUSE OF BARRYMORE, anything by James Kotsilibas-Davis, to name only two of many excellent others) understandably short-shrift the details found here, in favor of the fabulous "bon mots" and the large tragic arc of his life. Morrison, if it's possible to believe, makes that tragedy all the more heartbreaking by detailing the hard work that Barrymore put himself through to transform himself from a light comedian into the greatest tragic actor of his generation - and arguably the last great tragic actor of the American theatre. The detailed recreations of Barrymore's acting in RICHARD III and HAMLET are facinating. They provide all of us who have come after some small picture of what it must have been like to actually see him on stage. It helps, I suppose, to be familiar with his film work, to have heard at least some of his Shakespearean recordings, in order to fully visualize Barrymore's "flashing, rapier" genius at work - but it's probably not necessary. A must for all Barrymore fans, actors, and theatre lovers, this book is a treasure. But beware, its story could break your heart.7 of 7 people found the following review helpful. Hard Work Pays OffBy A CustomerThis is one of the best books ever written on the performing arts. By focusing in on Barrymore's Shakespearean acting only, Morrison manages to show how a second-rate light comedian turned himself into a great artist by sheer hard work -- and then, horrifyingly, how an artist transformed himself into a clown through laziness and dissipation. Through the use of the actor's playbooks and impressive research, Morrison does the impossible and brings Barrymore's stage performances as Richard III and Hamlet so vividly alive you'll swear you're in the theater watching them (I was holding my breath at the end of "Hamlet"). Along the way there are vivid portraits of the idealistic, progressive theater in the 1920's and, a decade later, the ancestry of today's poisonous and envious celebrity culture. Once you read this book you'll never look at Barrymore the same way again.

John Barrymore's Richard III and Hamlet, first seen in New York during the 1919-20 and 1922-23 seasons, stand as high-water marks of twentieth-century Shakespearean interpretation. Michael Morrison reconstructs these historic performances through analysis of the production preparation, audience response, reviews, and memoirs. Tracing the Victorian and Edwardian antecedents of Shakespearean performance, this book situates Barrymore's distinctive contribution in light of past and ensuing tradition. As well, it provides a biographical sketch of one of the most revered and tragic actors of the twentieth century. "This young artist, profiting by the lessons of tradition...casts it boldly aside and emerges into the rarefied atmosphere of a new art, greater because it is new, stronger because it is built upon an

old foundation." Brooklyn Times, March 9, 1920

.com Toward the end of his life, master actor John Barrymore became an embarrassment: he was a classic drunken has-been who could neither pull it together nor pack it in. But this unusual biography spends most of its pages on Barrymore's golden age in the 1920s and 1930s, describing in amazing pre-videotape detail his performances at the height of his powers, playing what may be the 20th century's definitive Hamlet, along with Macbeth and other classical roles. Michael Morrison draws on books, memories, reviews, and other material to present painstaking line-by-line recreations of Barrymore's most shining performances. "This young artist, profiting by the lessons of tradition...casts it boldly aside and emerges into the rarefied atmosphere of a new art, greater because it is new, stronger because it is built upon an old foundation." Brooklyn Times, March 9, 1920 "Morrison gives a well-researched and detailed look at how Barrymore prepared for, staged and delivered Shakespearean performances that amazed and thrilled critics and theatergoers." Ed Will, Denver Post "Michael Morrison's most readable study vividly recreates act by act the Shakespearean art of one of America's most charismatic and influential modern stage actors." Margot Peters, author of *The House of Barrymore* "Michael A. Morrison, a theatre historian and collector of theatrical memorabilia, attempts to put the record straight, and in doing so gives us the best book about a bygone era I have read in many years, immensely detailed, magnificently illustrated and hugely readable, his researches incorporates eye-witness accounts, critical reaction and personal letters." Peter Hepple, *The Stage* "John Barrymore's image is that of a hard-drinking matinee idol and movie star, but as Michael Morrison shows, during the 1920's he was America's and perhaps the world's-greatest Shakespearean actor." *Book World* "Morrison's meticulously researched and well-written book takes the reader through the before and after of Barrymore's brief but memorable Shakespearean career and brilliantly re-creates his development as an interpreter of Richard and Hamlet." Mary C. Henderson, *Stagebill-The Fox Theater* "...a delightful read.... A perfect gift for anyone who loved Christopher Plummer's `Barrymore'". *San Francisco Examiner* From the Back Cover John Barrymore was an original, capable of electrifying audiences with the subtle force and brilliance of his acting. His dynamic portrayals and the groundbreaking innovations of his production team, the director Arthur Hopkins and the designer Robert Edmond Jones, helped revitalize Shakespearean acting and production in America and Great Britain and changed the direction of subsequent revivals. In this meticulously researched and richly illustrated book, Michael A. Morrison draws upon newly uncovered sources and firsthand interviews with witnesses who knew the actor or saw him perform. Barrymore's historic performances are brought to life through accounts of the preparations, the productions themselves, and the responses of audiences and critics.