

Look to the Lady: Sarah Siddons, Ellen Terry, and Judi Dench on the Shakespearean Stage



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Look to the Lady examines the careers, talents, and styles of three women who were acknowledged, each in her time, as the greatest interpreter of Shakespeare's heroines: Sarah Siddons, Ellen Terry, and Judi Dench. In the eighteenth century, Siddons was celebrated for playing Shakespeare's tragic women in a heroic, even "sublime" style. Terry, who reigned over the late nineteenth-century stage, had a softer, "beautiful" style and is remembered best for her roles in Shakespeare's comedies. Dench, who still performs, has amassed a more varied résumé than either of her predecessors. Not only has Dench had the advantages of variety offered by film and television roles, says Russ McDonald, but she may also command a greater artistic range. One of McDonald's interests is in the ways Shakespearean performance influences, and is influenced by, critical and popular appraisal of the works. He also discerns parallels and distinctions in the approaches of Siddons, Terry, and Dench to the vocation of acting--specifically to Lady Macbeth and other great Shakespearean roles. Look to the Lady also helps us to better understand the place and function of the theater in British national life and what constitutes "great acting" at various historical moments. Further, by examining across time the varied attitudes of actors, critics, and audiences toward Shakespearean texts and roles, McDonald offers insights into how external forces combine with the inherent appeal of the plays to keep them fresh and new centuries after

they were first written and performed. Throughout, McDonald blends learned commentary on the history and culture of the stage with entertaining details about the appearance, personality, genealogy, and private life of each actor. Including some rarely seen images and drawing on previously untapped reviews and anecdotes, this is a lively introduction to the burgeoning field of performance criticism.