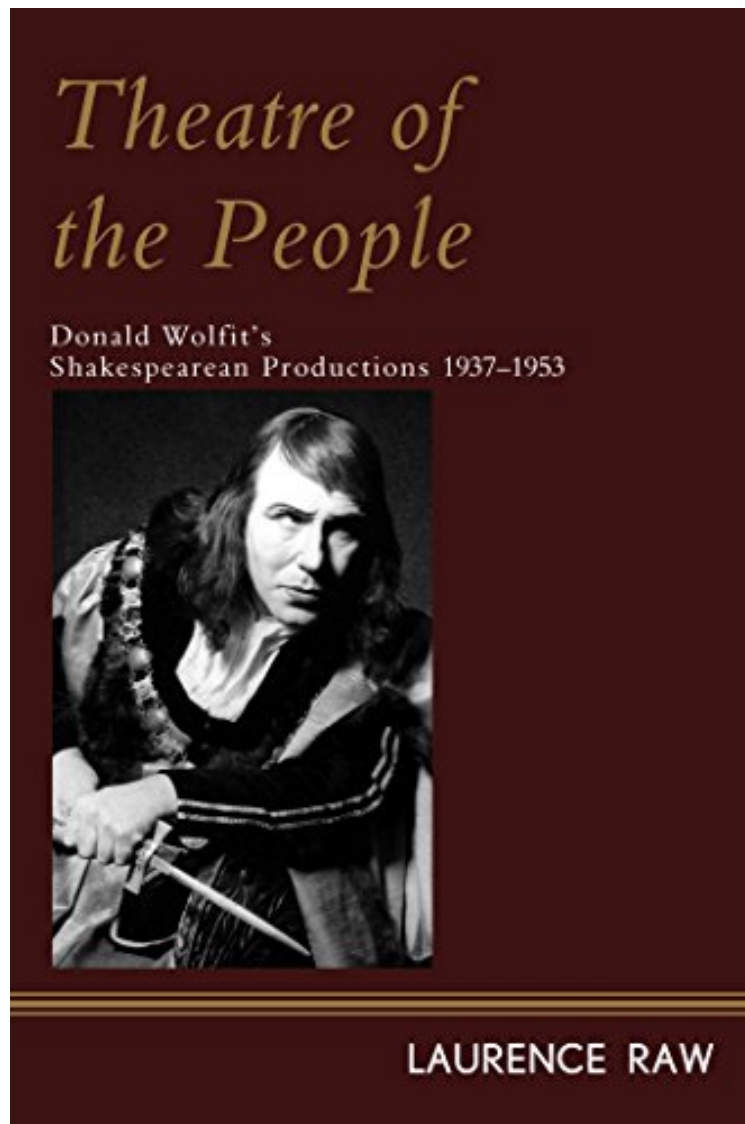


Theatre of the People: Donald Wolfitrsquo;s Shakespearean Productions 1937-1953

Laurence Raw

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Laurence Raw : Theatre of the People: Donald Wolfitrsquo;s Shakespearean Productions 1937-1953 before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Theatre of the People: Donald Wolfitrsquo;s Shakespearean Productions 1937-1953:

Throughout World War II, audiences in the United Kingdom craved entertainment, even during the countrysquo;s

darkest days. During this period, actor-manager Donald Wolfit and his theatre troupe toured Great Britain and Europe; often at great risk. After the war, Wolfit broadened his tour, bringing his brand of Shakespearean theatre to North American audiences. Wolfit believed that theatre should be accessible to everyone, regardless of their socioeconomic origins. It was this quality above all that accounted for his huge popularity throughout the fifteen years of his operation. In *Theatre of the People: Donald Wolfit's Shakespearean Productions 1937-1953*, Laurence Raw looks at this tenacious personality whose determination to serve the nation by performing Shakespeare inspired audiences and fellow actors. Drawing on a series of hitherto unpublished materials—including letters and interviews—this part biography and part social history creates a vivid picture of what life was like for the touring actor during WWII and beyond. Recreating twelve of Wolfit's touring dates throughout Great Britain and North America, this volume also demonstrates theatre's importance as a source of mass entertainment and education, as well as a propaganda tool. Despite Wolfit's popular appeal at the time, he was doomed to remain on the periphery of the theatrical establishment. This book contends that Wolfit deserves to be recognized for his efforts in maintaining public morale during times of stress. *Theatre of the People* will appeal not only to those interested in drama but also to students and scholars of history and popular entertainment in the 1940s and 1950s.

This scholarly but accessible book is one for theatre historians or anyone studying performances of the past. . . . Raw focuses on a major Shakespeare production featuring Wolfit in each chapter. So, for example, in 1945 we find the actor at Grand Theatre Leeds playing Malvolio in *Twelfth Night*. Raw's detailed account of the production includes how it came about, the context in which the show was staged and a great deal of information about the concept of the show including its set, direction and interpretation. . . . Among the other twelve productions discussed Raw includes Wolfit's *Hamlet* at Malvern Festival Theatre in 1937 and his *Macbeth* at Dudley Hippodrome in 1950. For a scrupulously written analysis of Wolfit's Shakespeare achievements you're unlikely to do better. (The Stage) I am so very pleased and gratified that you have drawn, in your biography, a portrait of my father which is so true to the best of the man I remember and recognising his very real contribution to the British theatre, whilst at the same time not glossing over his undoubted flaws. I particularly appreciate the wide context in which you have set his work as a touring actor manager, and was most interested in all the references you quote. (Harriet Graham, daughter of Sir Donald Wolfit) About the Author Laurence Raw teaches at Baskent University, Ankara, Turkey. He is the author of *Adapting Henry James to the Screen* (Scarecrow, 2006), *Adapting Nathaniel Hawthorne to the Screen* (Scarecrow, 2008), and *The Ridley Scott Encyclopedia* (Scarecrow, 2009).