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This study examines some of the major figures involved in the rediscovery of early modern staging conventions. Despite the wide variety of approaches employed by William Poel, Nugent Monck, Tyrone Guthrie, and the founders of the new Globe, I perceive a common philosophical underpinning to their endeavors. Rather than indulging in archaism for its own sake, they looked backward in a progressive attempt to address the challenges of the twentieth century. My history begins with an introduction in which I establish the ideological position of the Elizabethan revival as the twentieth-century heir to Pre-Raphaelitism. The first chapter is on William Poel and urges a reexamination of the conventional view of Poel as an antiquarian crank. I then devote chapters to Harley Granville Barker and Nugent Monck, both of whom began their careers with Poel. Barker's critical writing, I argue, has been largely responsible for the Elizabethan revival's reputation as an academic and literary phenomenon. Monck, on the other hand, took the first tentative steps toward an architectural reimagining of twentieth-century performance spaces, an advance which led to Tyrone Guthrie's triumphs in Elizabethan staging. Guthrie learned from Monck and Barker as these men had learned from Poel. This lineage of influence, however, did not directly extend to the new Globe. The Globe also differs from the subjects of my other chapters because it doesn't represent the effort of a single practitioner but instead incorporates the contributions of a group of scholars and architects. While this approach yielded greater historical authenticity, it also tended to minimize theatrical considerations in the process of playhouse design. This neglect

caused unnecessary difficulties for the actors and directors who would eventually work at the new Globe. I conclude with a Coda that discusses the attempts of contemporary Elizabethanists, like those of the American Shakespeare Center, to offer participatory theatrical engagement as an alternative to the soporific alienation of electronic media. My hope throughout this study is that, by illustrating the imperfect but significant achievements of the Elizabethan revival in the twentieth century, I might urge scholars and practitioners toward continued exploration of early modern staging practices in the new millennium.

ELIZABETHAN STAGING IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY:
THEATRICAL PRACTICE AND
CULTURAL CONTEXT

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER	
I. WILLIAM POEL.....	13
II. HARLEY GRANVILLE BARKER	83
III. NUGENT MONCK	161
IV. TYRONE GUTHRIE.....	213
V. THE NEW GLOBE	313
CODA	385
WORKS CITED	394

INTRODUCTION

Since the late nineteenth century, theater practitioners have frequently sought to recreate the staging conditions of early modern England. The original incarnations of this phenomenon have long been known as the “Elizabethan revival.” Throughout this study, I will use this term to refer to all such efforts at theatrical reconstruction in the modern and postmodern eras. Despite the wide variety of approaches employed by William Poel, Nugent Monck, Tyrone Guthrie, and the founders of the new Globe, I perceive a common philosophical underpinning to their endeavors. Rather than indulging in archaism for its own sake, they looked backward in a progressive attempt to address the challenges of the twentieth century. “The theatrical past” served for them as “a crack in the present through which one could grab at a future” (Womack 81). The original nemesis of William Poel was the extravagantly picturesque style represented by Herbert Beerbohm Tree’s 1900 *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, in which live bunnies scampered through an onstage forest (Kennedy, *Looking* 68). This mode of production was probably doomed with or without the intervention of the Elizabethanists. Inflation, as Poel noted, was “a serious tax on the managerial purse” of producers like Tree (*Monthly Letters* 82). The cost of staging Shakespeare in this traditional mode was soon “double that of a modern play” (Hildy, *Shakespeare* 40), and Tree, who had originally scoffed at Poel’s methods, began to cautiously adopt a similar approach (Bridges-Adams, “Proscenium” 28). Lavishly

pictorial Shakespeare was no longer a profit-making endeavor and by mid-century it survived only in heavily subsidized theaters.

Along with rising costs, an emerging rival medium contributed to the demise of this elaborate production style. “Only a year or two after Sir Herbert Tree had electrified London by producing *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* with real rabbits,” Tyrone Guthrie writes, “D. W. Griffith had made *Birth of a Nation*” (*Theatre Prospect* 18). Alfred Hitchcock claimed that cinema “c[a]me to Shakespeare’s rescue” by making the playwright “palatable” to a public who considered him “dull as dishwater” (449). While the movies may have been a boon for Shakespeare’s reputation in general, they were a catastrophe for traditional producers. The development of motion pictures with sound further wounded the stage. In 1932 Guthrie concluded, “No detached observer can seriously suppose that the big spectacular play has the slightest chance of survival against the big spectacular film” (*Theatre Prospect* 18). From that point onward, the prime objective of the Elizabethan revival was to provide a theatrical experience that film could not duplicate and thereby preserve a relevant place for live performance in the cinematic age.

This quest mirrored the approach of avant-garde practitioners like Jerzy Grotowski, who defined his efforts largely in reaction to the challenge from electronic media. Rather than pursuing what he considered “the wrong solution” to the problem of cinema’s technological dominance by making theater “more technical” (41), Grotowski sought to emphasize the “one element of which film and television cannot rob the theatre: the closeness of the living organism” (42). A similar rationale informed the

architectural solutions proposed by Nugent Monck's Maddermarket Theatre, Tyrone Guthrie's Festival Stage at Stratford, Ontario, and the new Globe. The success of these endeavors has been, to some extent, a victory over cinema. "It shows," says Rory Edwards who played Orleans in the Globe's 1997 production of *Henry V*, that "we haven't completely succumbed to the mechanistic world of film and technology" (qtd. in Kiernan, *Staging Shakespeare* 139).

In its first decades the Elizabethan revival shared a desire to challenge the status quo with other experimental modes of performance. Peter Womack writes that its roots "are effectively the same as the origins of European theatrical modernism" (75). Womack suggests that "the underlying logic, which is seen everywhere in early modernist theatrical theory—in Craig, Copeau, Fuchs, Meyerhold—is that if, as it seems, the theater has taken a wrong turning somewhere, it needs to go back to the beginning and start again: it is the starting again which is, of course, old and new in the same breath." Shakespeare was for this avant-garde "one influential 'beginning'" (Womack 79). A "dialectical" (Womack 82) relationship existed between the Elizabethanists and the broader modernist movement. New visual styles such as post-impressionism facilitated the replacement of the realistic picture-frame stage with a non-illusionist early modern alternative (77). As the Elizabethan revival sought to liberate Renaissance drama, artists like Brecht turned to Shakespeare and his contemporaries as models for "retheatricalizing the theater" (79).

Elizabethanists consistently defined their efforts as forward-looking in their engagement with modernity, but many critics have interpreted the movement as

artistically and politically regressive. William Worthen sees the “return to ‘Elizabethan’ staging practices” (*Authority* 33) as an attempt “to mount an authentic Shakespeare on the stage, a Shakespeare whose authenticity is increasingly measured not with regard to contemporary taste, but in reference to the dramatic text” (32). For Worthen the Elizabethan revival is complicit in a broader critical project which, while claiming to value Shakespeare’s plays in performance, actually reinforces their status as literature. Worthen describes “the idealized description of how a Shakespeare play might orchestrate the conventions of the Elizabethan theatre on the modern stage in order to recover ‘the Shakespeare experience’” (“Deeper” 444) as an attempt to sanctify the author’s intentions. This privileging of the “literary text” over the “performance text” (De Marinis 101) limits theater to an interpretative function by denying it the opportunity to independently create artistic meaning.

The comments of some scholarly advocates of the movement support Worthen’s reading. Muriel St. Clare Byrne claims that “we must thank Poel and Barker, and their devotion to drama first and theatre afterwards” (Foreword xiv). Steven C. Schultz asserts that the early Elizabethanists pursued “Shakespearean intention” and “considered the actor, not totally controlled, but firmly circumscribed; beyond certain limits he could not go” (Schultz 229). Alan Dessen (with tongue in cheek) issues “commandments” to actors working at the new Globe, which include “Thou shalt honor and respect the original stage directions as precious evidence” (“Taint” 136) and “Above all else, thou shalt trust the scripts” (138). These statements suggest that the Elizabethan revival has indeed pursued, as Worthen writes, an “openly rhetorical gesture of fidelity to the text” (*Authority* 64)

which serves to “disqualify the processes that produce meaning in the theatre as legitimate objects for our attention and scrutiny” (“Deeper” 452). Yet while critics like Byrne and Dessen have sought to link the movement to an agenda of literary hegemony, the actual activity of its practitioners rarely has rarely supported this mission.

William Poel, Nugent Monck, and Tyrone Guthrie never showed much concern for the sanctity of Shakespeare’s words or intentions. Guthrie, in particular, was notorious for using early modern plays as points of departure for extra-textual interpolation. Rinda F. Lundstrom describes “textual purity” as “an idea embraced by his pupil, Harley Granville-Barker, but not by Poel” (7). Indeed, Barker is the one major Elizabethanist to whom Worthen’s charges apply, and Barker’s example has led to a perception of the Elizabethan revival as an institutionally conservative phenomenon rather than the revolutionary art form intended by its major practitioners. Poel, Monck, and Guthrie did not seek merely to erect monuments to “Shakespeare” the author, but instead strove equally to create independent theatrical meaning. Many productions at the new Globe, such as Kathryn Hunter’s 2005 *Pericles*, which split the title role “with Corin Redgrave as Pericles the Elder looking back in impotent anguish at the follies committed by Robert Luckay as his younger self” and used “six aerialists to illustrate the story” (Billington, Rev. of *Pericles* 24), continue to demonstrate that Elizabethan staging is not necessarily constrained by the limits of the text.

For some critics the perceived quest for an originary Shakespeare “who inhabits the texts of the plays” (Worthen, *Authority* 33) represents an attempt by Elizabethanists to avoid contact with the material circumstances of contemporary culture. Productions

employing early modern conventions, in this view, use the cultural authority of a universal Shakespeare, frozen in time, to forestall societal change and preserve the interests of ruling elites (Garber 242; Hawkes 142). More particularly, the charge of abetting colonialism has been raised against Elizabethanists from both sides of the Atlantic. North American scholars such as Richard Paul Knowles and Dennis Salter accuse Tyrone Guthrie of following an “imperialist British model” (Knowles, “Nationalist to Multinational” 20) in founding the Stratford (Ontario) Festival. Guthrie’s efforts, according to this interpretation, have made it more difficult for “postcolonial actors” in Canada to achieve an indigenous theatrical identity (Salter “Acting Shakespeare” 114). British critics like John Drakakis and Terence Hawkes see the new Globe, a project spearheaded by the American actor Sam Wanamaker, as an act of “cultural imperialism” (Drakakis 39) which constitutes “the continuation of American foreign policy by other means” (Hawkes 153).

The wide divergence between the intent of the Elizabethan revival and its reception by scholarly opponents is partly explained by the contradictions the movement inherited as the twentieth-century heir of Pre-Raphaelitism. According to Thomas J. Tobin, this “Brotherhood” began in the mid-nineteenth century as “a stunt cooked up by three students at the Royal Academy of Art [John Everett Millais, Gabriel Charles Dante (later Dante Gabriel) Rossetti, and William Holman Hunt] in order to distinguish themselves from their peers and thumb their noses at the establishment” (1). The “aims and ideals” of these young men included “the faithful representation of nature in art; the superiority of Italian and Flemish painting before the era of Raphael; the interdependence

of the literary, plastic and painterly arts; and the need for art to instruct its audience” (Tobin 2). William Gaunt describes the original Pre-Raphaelites as “Knights of Art, born out of their time, who went a-roaming through the spacious but prosaic reign of Queen Victoria, like so many don Quixotes” (9). These “baffled idealists in a material age” battled what they perceived as artless modernity. “They tilted not at windmills but at factories; they fought against dragons which were not the lizards of fable but railway trains, the steel-clad, steam-snorting dragons of the industrial age” (Gaunt 9). As Gaunt's depiction suggests, the Pre-Raphaelites were partly “‘escapists’ who projected themselves into a romantic past.” At the same time, however, “they were reformers of social conditions” (Gaunt 15). This political activism became more pronounced during the “the ‘second wave’ of Pre-Raphaelitism” (Tobin 4) when William Morris, a disciple of Rossetti, sought to “extract socialism from the fourteenth century” (Gaunt 21) by transforming society according to an idealized vision of that pre-industrial age. Gaunt notes that while Morris advocated “a complete change of the social order” he also “loved all things old and hated all things new” and therefore championed “a revolution that looked backwards” (Gaunt 20). This later Pre-Raphaelitism passed on to the Elizabethan revival a seemingly contradictory mixture of nostalgia and progressivism. Throughout this study, I therefore primarily use the term “Pre-Raphaelite” to refer to Morris’s vision.

William Poel’s exposure to Pre-Raphaelitism began when he posed as a child for a portrait by William Holman Hunt (O’Connor, *William Poel*). At age twenty-one, Poel became a stage manager for F.R. (Frank) Benson, a follower of William Morris, and was deeply impressed by Benson’s philosophy (Speaight, *William Poel* 59-60). The early

Elizabethan revival incorporated both the aesthetic and the political aims of the Brotherhood. “Following the lead of the Pre-Raphaelites,” Robert Shaughnessy writes, “Poel promoted a medievalized, vibrantly colorful, stylized-realist art as a way of restoring a lost wholeness of life to an increasingly mechanized industrial society” (36). Nugent Monck also acknowledged the direct influence of Pre-Raphaelitism (Hildy, *Shakespeare* 10), as did George Bernard Shaw (Gaunt 26), who was an ardent supporter of Poel and Monck. By the early twentieth century “Pre-Raphaelitism broke down before the power of the industrial and material society against which it was ranged” (Gaunt 20). Shaughnessy calls William Poel “the last of the Pre-Raphaelites” (17), and he and Monck were the only major figures of the Elizabethan revival directly influenced by the Brotherhood.

While he did not expressly align himself with Pre-Raphaelitism, Tyrone Guthrie shared many ideals with William Morris. Morris cherished the “green and beautiful places” which were “still left in the countryside” and encouraged the continuation of traditional crafts as a way for the rural population to avoid moving to the “great cities,” which he considered “heaps of filth” (Morris 286). Guthrie similarly spent much time and money during the last years of his life promoting the traditional production of jam near his Irish home in County Monaghan as a means to keep the local population from emigrating (Shepard 19). In his youth Guthrie was heavily involved in the “Folk Art revival” which, like Pre-Raphaelitism before it, “aimed to keep alive simple and ancient expressions, in danger of disappearing with the change-over from a predominantly agricultural to a predominantly urban and industrial society” (Guthrie, *Life* 43). Morris

lamented in 1883 that “for centuries, the working-class have scarcely been partakers in art of any kind” (Morris 285). Guthrie likewise believed “that the theatre should not just be an expression of upper-class life in metropolitan cities” (“Modern Producer” 77) and sought with his far-flung theatrical peregrinations to reach a geographically and economically diverse audience. Sam Wanamaker, founder of the new Globe, shared the concern that art had grown too exclusive. He regretted that, since the Restoration, theater had become “the prerogative of the bourgeoisie” and hoped that his Bankside playhouse would make performance accessible for “the working-class” (Wanamaker qtd. in Holderness, “Interview” 21).

Theo Crosby, Wanamaker’s lead architect, resented what Morris called “the rule of plutocracy” (Morris 285) which had no use for honest art but could only “degrade it into an hypocrisy, a sham of real feeling and insight” (286). Crosby denounced “the concentration on ever higher returns” (Crosby 85) of industrial capitalism and shared Pre-Raphaelitism’s “interest in the preservation of beautiful old buildings of the past” (Gaunt 26). Crosby considered these structures to be “reminders of our better selves, our communal responsibilities and of our present slavery to the requirements of the production process” (Crosby 85). Mark Rylance, the new Globe’s first Artistic Director, expressed analogous dissatisfaction with the socio-economic status quo in his intention “to come out roaring, up and down the front line against the corporate takeover bid to sell our souls to the health and safety boys of the pharmaceutical arms trade maniacs” (Rylance, “Global Concerns” 40).

While it shares Pre-Raphaelitism's revolutionary passion, the Elizabethan revival also partakes of the Brotherhood's escapist nostalgia. Frank Benson, the Socialist disciple of William Morris, acted as "Herald" for a reenacted chivalric tournament at 1912's "Shakespeare's England" exhibition. This event, as Marion O'Connor convincingly demonstrates, served the agenda of the participating "ruling class" (O'Connor, "Theatre of Empire" 93-94). Benson's case therefore illustrates how fascination with the past can sometimes overshadow the responsibilities of the present. At times the Elizabethan revival has fallen into this trap. William Poel's inclusion of an authentically costumed audience on the stage of his 1893 *Measure for Measure* (Moore, "William Poel" 26); Tyrone Guthrie's insistence on hand-made period shoes for his 1953 *Richard III* (Guthrie, "First Shakespeare" 14); and the costumers of the current Globe's "strange obsession with urine, onionskins and original underwear" (Schalkwyk 44) — these all display a solipsistic concern with antiquity that has alienated potential supporters.

This occasional self-indulgent archaism, however, should not be allowed to obscure the movement's real achievements. Franklin J. Hildy writes that the Elizabethan revival "has taught us that when we are dissatisfied with the status quo, we are not limited to our own resources to begin new approaches." Instead, Hildy suggests, "we can look back" and learn from the examples of earlier eras ("Why Elizabethan" 116). Not restricted to recovering the past, the movement "has given us invaluable insights into theatre in general" and "expand[ed] the way we think about theatre in our own day" (Hildy, "Why Elizabethan" 117). Politically, the concerns which motivated William Poel one hundred years ago remain relevant today. As Gaunt writes, "The problems the Pre-

Raphaelites faced were not transient, but still exist. The questions they asked may still pertinently be asked. Is society to be one vast soulless machine? Is the production of machinery, ever more powerful, ever more intricate, the end of living? Or are we the victims of a system which we have ourselves created?" (21). Gaunt posed these questions in 1966, and forty years later they are even more appropriate. The Elizabethan revival, which offers a "high-touch" alternative to the "high-tech" paradigm of the twenty-first century, may point a way forward from our current dilemma.

This study examines some of the major figures involved in the rediscovery of early modern staging conventions, but it is not comprehensive. Time and space have not allowed me to address the important contributions of George Pierce Baker at Harvard University or Angus Bowmer at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, and I only briefly discuss the work of Thomas Wood Stevens and Ben Iden Payne. I am also obliged to omit consideration of significant Elizabethanists like Bernard Miles and George Murcell. My history begins with a chapter on William Poel in which I urge a reexamination of the conventional view that Poel was an antiquarian crank. I then devote chapters to Harley Granville Barker and Nugent Monck, both of whom began their careers with Poel. Barker's critical writing, I argue, has been largely responsible for the Elizabethan revival's reputation as an academic and literary phenomenon. Monck, on the other hand, took the first tentative steps toward an architectural reimagining of twentieth-century performance spaces, an advance which led to Tyrone Guthrie's triumphs in Elizabethan staging. Guthrie learned from Monck and Barker as these men had learned from Poel. This lineage of influence, however, did not directly extend to the new Globe. While Sam

Wanamaker offered Guthrie an early opportunity to collaborate in the Bankside endeavor, the director declined because he was affiliated with a rival reconstruction project (Day 37-39). The Globe also differs from the subjects of my other chapters because it doesn't represent the effort of a single practitioner but instead incorporates the contributions of a group of scholars and architects. While this approach yielded greater historical authenticity, it also tended to minimize theatrical considerations in the process of playhouse design. This neglect caused unnecessary difficulties for the actors and directors who would eventually work at the Globe. My hope throughout this study is that, by illustrating the imperfect but significant achievements of the Elizabethan revival in the twentieth century, I might encourage scholars and practitioners to pursue the continued exploration of early modern staging practices in the new millennium.

CHAPTER I
WILLIAM POEL

Introduction

William Poel is a confusing and contradictory figure. Anyone examining the eccentricities of his career easily agrees with Max Beerbhom who wrote, “I confess that Mr. Poel bewilders me” (*More Theatres* 146). Rinda F. Lunsdtrom suggests that some of this confusion “stems from the lack of any study of Poel’s work that directly correlates his theory and practice as they changed through time” (7). Following her lead, I will attempt in this chapter to track the shifting emphases of Poel’s efforts. My goal is to challenge the image of Poel as a failed crank “whose influence was finally better than he was, who was remembered for doing better things than he did” (Moore, “William Poel” 35-36). An analysis of Poel’s actual agenda reveals that he often succeeded in ways that have not been widely recognized by critics. I hope to facilitate a view of Poel’s art that goes beyond its archaist aspects to acknowledge its radical ramifications for both theater and society. Poel’s methods, I will argue, offered an ideological alternative to the capital-intensive industrial paradigm of Herbert Beerbohm Tree and a political response to the equally elaborate totalitarian avant-garde of Edward Gordon Craig. Poel used his productions not merely to reconstruct a distant past but also to instruct his modern audience.

I will begin by examining the current critical consensus, in which scholars have largely failed to consider the revolutionary implications of Elizabethan staging. The conventional wisdom holds that Poel was an antiquarian, an elitist, and a textual purist. His work was, in this view, politically reactionary in its attempt to freeze Shakespeare's plays in time through "museum" productions, which employed the staging conventions of early modern theater to prevent any engagement with the realities of twentieth-century England. Poel's reconstructed Elizabethan stage represents, for many scholars, a physical embodiment of the metaphorical "Sacred Temple of Academic Purity that scholars, critics and teachers have attempted to construct around the canon to protect it from the incursions of contemporary thought" (Marowitz 474). I will argue instead that while there is some evidence of archaism and elitism in Poel's writings and production style, and while he did sometimes, in theory at least, argue for textual fidelity, these attributes are not as dominant as the current consensus suggests.

Next, I will focus on Poel's conflict with the theatrical status quo of his era, represented primarily by Tree, William Archer, and Max Beerbohm. This group shared a positivist mentality, which perceived all technological developments as inherently good. Poel, in contrast, recognized the potential pitfalls of scientific advancement and sought to maintain an outlet for interpersonal communication in a world overrun by technology. This same humanistic emphasis placed Poel in conflict with Gordon Craig, and I will contrast their political and theatrical visions.

To better understand Poel's agenda, I will follow his move toward socialism as expressed through his efforts at theatrical reform. I will then attempt to define Poel's

view of history to determine whether his obsession with early modern politics was merely antiquarian, or if instead Poel used his primarily Elizabethan style to establish historical parallels with contemporary social and political topics, thereby serving a didactic function for his contemporary audience. I will trace what I perceive as Poel's morally instructive efforts in productions of *Hamlet*, *Troilus and Cressida*, and *All's Well That Ends Well*. Finally, I will look at Poel's identification, during the last three decades of his life, with the role of Peter Keegan in George Bernard Shaw's *John Bull's Other Island*. Keegan's almost saintly tolerance and humanism, along with his forceful rejection of speculative capitalism, became Poel's own and found expression in his life and art.

The Conventional Wisdom

Antiquarianism

The problem with reading Poel as an antiquarian is that it obscures his other virtues. Shaw seems to have understood this when he wrote that "Mr. Poel has unquestionably made a contribution to theatrical art . . . [but] he has received little acknowledgement except of the quaint aspects of his Elizabethanism" (Rev. of *The Spanish Gypsy* 521). Yet many of Poel's contemporaries viewed him as an archaist. William Archer, in 1896, found his methods "essentially antiquarian" (Rev. of *Doctor Faustus* 204). Max Beerbhohm wrote in 1899 that "Mr. Poel's aim" was "archeological rather than aesthetic" (*More Theatres* 145). The Birmingham *Post* commented of Poel's 1908 *Measure for Measure* that "it had the interest of the museum rather than the living stage" (quoted in Payne 91), and the *Times* wrote in 1910 that his "style, as everybody knows, is the archaic" (Rev. of *Two Gentlemen* 12). Late twentieth-century critics have

largely inherited this view. William Worthen in 1997 cited Poel's "antiquarian impulses" (*Authority* 157), and Christopher Innes, writing in 1998, equated his approach with "ugly pedantry" (38). The standard twentieth-century critique of "museum Shakespeare" was articulated by the *Times Literary Supplement* in 1905. Poel was "a 'hard-shell' antiquary" who "would stop the clock . . . [and] isolate Shakespeare in the Elizabethan playhouse from the ever-changing life of the world outside" ("Shakespeare as the Sleeping Beauty" 178).

A careful analysis of Poel's theory and practice reveals, however, that historical reconstruction was not his main objective. Rinda F. Lundstrom, one of few critics to consider the broader implications of Poel's oeuvre, writes that he never indulged in "archaism for its own sake" (159) but was instead "always more interested in the content than in the form of his productions" (155). Poel cared more about what his work said to a contemporary audience than how well it imitated early modern practices. He stated this overtly in 1913:

Some people have called me an archeologist, but I am not. I am really a modernist. My original aim was just to find out some means of acting Shakespeare naturally and appealingly from the full text as in a modern drama. I found that for this the platform stage was necessary and also some suggestion of the spirit and manners of the time. (qtd. in Speaight, *William Poel* 90)

Although he speaks of his "original aim," this quotation comes from the middle of Poel's career. It therefore conforms to a perceived shift from greater emphasis on historical accuracy in some of his early work to a later period in which Poel embraced the functional necessities of Elizabethan staging—continuous action, the thrust configuration,

and the absence of scenery within a sparsely functional set—without regard for antiquarian decoration (Lundstrom 137, MacDonald 308).

Some of Poel's productions before 1905 partially justify accusations of pedantry. The most notoriously archaist of Poel's efforts was his 1893 *Measure for Measure* at the Royalty Theatre, in which Poel placed costumed extras on stage to smoke antique clay pipes and otherwise play the role of an Elizabethan audience. J.L. Styan likens this arrangement to "a charade" (*Shakespeare Revolution* 57). Edward M. Moore condemns it thus:

The effect sought after here, it seems to me, puts the whole effort of Poel in a different light, makes his productions appear as cultivated anachronism rather than an attempt at the most effective way to perform Shakespeare. For the audience was asked, in effect, to watch not *Measure for Measure* but a simulated audience watching *Measure for Measure*: Poel's production thus seems in some respects a by-product of the historical-accuracy school, an attempt to see by historical imagination the way Shakespeare was seen by his contemporaries rather than to produce his play in the best possible manner. ("William Poel" 26)

Besides providing an opportunity for antiquarian masquerade, however, the onstage spectators enforced Poel's notion that "in the Elizabethan playhouse audience and actors were one" (Speaight, *William Poel* 83) and illustrated his belief that this early modern precedent might offer the solution to a contemporary theatrical problem.

The placement of audience members in "alternative spatial arrangements" was, Marco De Marinis notes, a concern common to most modern attempts to challenge the naturalistic proscenium format (105). Poel's placement of pseudo-spectators within the playing area of his 1893 *Measure for Measure* therefore relates, however clumsily, to the quest of continental avant-garde practitioners like Antonin Artaud and, later, Ariane

Mnouchkine to redefine the relationship between public and performers. “The common goal” of these efforts was, according to De Marinis, “to favor a more active, engaged, and creative reception by audience members” (105). Later Elizabethanists like Tyrone Guthrie explicitly articulated this same objective, and it likely informed Poel’s efforts at the Royalty. While his experiment would have been more valid if Poel had actually sold tickets for the seats on stage rather than filling them with supernumeraries, one can nevertheless see in this practice a theoretical inquiry beyond the goal of historical reconstruction.

Poel is normally judged by the standards of his Elizabethan Stage Society, an organization founded “with the object of reviving the masterpieces of the Elizabethan drama upon the stage for which they were written, so as to represent them as nearly as possible under the conditions existing at the time of their first production” (Poel, *Shakespeare* 203). Many of the Society’s offerings were staged on Poel’s “Fortune fit-up,” a portable structure designed to recreate some characteristics of an early modern theater. While taking its name from the Fortune playhouse contract, Poel’s simulacrum was primarily “intended to reproduce the Swan Theatre as depicted in the de Witt/van Buchel sketch” (Hildy “Reconstructing” 9). This sixteenth-century illustration was discovered in 1888 and had a tremendous impact on late Victorian scholars. The fit-up contained a *frons scenae* consisting of a balcony above with doors right and left below, as in the Swan drawing. It also, however, contained a central entrance closed by oak doors covered with tapestry curtains (O’Connor, *William Poel* 28), a feature which has no analog in the de Witt sketch (Gurr, “Shakespeare’s Globe” 29). Although the Fortune fit-

up was built for indoor use, and particularly for the stage of the Royalty, it included a roof or “heavens.” This covering extended out from the *frons scenae* half-way down the stage, where it was supported by two eighteen-foot pillars (O’Connor, *William Poel* 28).

A description of the fit-up published at the time of its 1905 auction explains the function of the heavens and stage posts in an indoor theater. This document states that the mid-stage columns were complemented by “a pair of reproduction curtains, each 18 feet high by 9 feet, suspended on brass rods between the pillars, with ropes, pullies, etc.” (qtd. in O’Connor, *William Poel* 28). Poel used a “traverse” curtain hung between these posts to enable the “alternation theory” of Elizabethan staging. In this method, one scene was played upstage of the pillars with the drapery open, followed by a scene downstage with the traverse closed (Hildy, “Reconstructing” 11). This eliminated time for set changes, as it allowed props and furniture to be placed behind the curtain while another scene played in front. Poel actually used very little furniture, and the alternation theory seems primarily to have provided a level of psychological comfort for an audience accustomed to the picture-frame stage. Peter Womack writes that Poel “could not quite bring himself to confront his public with the bare open platform” (76). This style of staging only makes sense for a proscenium configuration. A curtain strung between onstage pillars on a thrust stage will block any downstage action from a large portion of the house, as in the 1998 production of *As You Like It* at the new Globe (Proudfoot 216).

Poel’s adherence to the alternation theory (then prevalent among scholars) prevented Stage Society productions from being “authentically” Elizabethan in a twenty-first century sense. Stagings in early modern halls, such as that of *The Comedy of Errors*

at Gray's Inn in 1895, "afforded conditions which were as close as Poel would ever get to those for which Shakespeare had written his plays" (O'Connor, *William Poel* 37). Yet Poel sometimes used his Fortune fit-up even in such settings. In 1897 he staged *Twelfth Night* in Middle Temple Hall, where the existing "architectural setting" included a wall with doors topped by a gallery which provided the structural features required for Elizabethan staging. Poel nevertheless mounted his "tawdry lathe and canvas fit-up" in front of this authentic early modern oak backdrop, so that he could divide the stage with his pillars and traverse curtain in observance of the alternation theory (O'Connor, *William Poel* 51).

Costuming was one area in which Poel normally achieved a high degree of historical accuracy. During the early years of the Society, when he was comparatively flush with cash, Poel spent large sums to have costumes custom-made from designs "derived from sixteenth- and seventeenth-century paintings and costume-books." O'Connor notes that programs from these years "almost invariably advertise the authenticity of costumes and properties" (*William Poel* 40). Yet even in this period Poel did not hesitate to violate authenticity to achieve theatrical effect. The Mephistopheles in his 1896 production of *Doctor Faustus* wore a hood which "concealed an incandescent light." O'Connor finds this anachronistic "installation of electricity in the hood of a costume for an Elizabethan play" to be an "instructive" indication of the limits of Poel's archaism. "The memorable pictorial aids in Poel's production of *Doctor Faustus*," she

writes, “were not so much those which demonstrably were copied from Elizabethan models as those which exhibit the theatrical imagination of the producer” (*William Poel* 45).

The Elizabethan Stage Society existed from 1895 to 1905, despite sporadic attempts to revive it in later years. Poel’s career as a producer/director, on the other hand, spanned fifty years from his First Quarto *Hamlet* in 1881 to his 1931 *Coriolanus*. Poel’s enthusiasm for historical accuracy changed over time. In 1881 he was not “concerned with attempting to simulate Elizabethan stage conventions at all” (Moore, “William Poel” 22). This is indicated by, among other evidence, the fact that “curtains [were] used seven times for scene shifts and intervals” (Lundstrom 23) during his production of the Q1 *Hamlet*. Poel then passed through a period of comparative antiquarian fidelity with the Elizabethan Stage Society. Jan MacDonald claims, on the basis of correspondence related to Poel’s 1912 collaboration with Martin Harvey, that by this point in his career Poel was “becoming less antiquarian in methods of staging” (308). Lundstrom writes of Poel in the 1920s that “his writing during the period implies a shift toward a conventional, stylized approach to staging and away from archaism” (136). Poel’s later productions, especially his notoriously modern 1920 *All’s Well That Ends Well*, confirm this view.

Poel’s antiquarianism therefore flourished primarily during the decade of the Elizabethan Stage Society. Yet even then he rejected pedantry. “A modern Shakespearian representation,” Poel wrote in 1898, “can hardly have anything Elizabethan about it.” He observed of the Society that “had we persisted in retaining all the original conditions, our representations could have been little more than costume recitals” (*Account* 7) and cited

the group's desire to "keep the past in touch with the present" (12). Their archaism was perhaps largely in the eye of the beholder. George Bernard Shaw and William Archer, for instance, disagreed about the meaning of the Society's efforts. Their respective reviews of Poel's 1896 *Dr. Faustus* illustrate this difference. Archer called the production "a very pleasant and memorable orgie of antiquarianism" (Rev. of *Doctor Faustus* 204), while Shaw felt that it provided instead "an artistic rather than a literal presentation of Elizabethan conditions" (Rev. of *Doctor Faustus* 37). Archer was interested in Elizabethan archeology, and valued the Society only to the extent that it could aid in historical reconstruction. "These performances," he wrote, "lose all their interest when they cease to attempt the reproduction, by diligent study and cautious conjecture, of primitive Elizabethan methods" (Rev. of *Doctor Faustus* 208). Shaw, on the other hand, saw the group's work as pointing the way toward a new paradigm for modern theater:

The more I see of these performances of the Elizabethan Stage Society, the more I am convinced that their method of presenting an Elizabethan play is not only the right method for that particular sort of play, but that any play performed on a platform amidst the audience gets closer home to its hearers than when it is presented as a picture framed by a proscenium. (Rev. of *Doctor Faustus* 36)

These contrasting views of theatrical practice suggest a deeper philosophical divide. Archer was amused by antiquarianism, but his positivist mindset could not accept that "primitive Elizabethan methods" might hold lessons for the modern era. For him, the only value in looking backward was to see how far the world had come. Shaw, conversely, was more sympathetic to the Radical and Pre-Raphaelite viewpoint, which looked upon technological and industrial developments with deep suspicion. The

Elizabethan revival, in its rejection of modern methods, represented for Shaw a viable alternative to the status quo: a “picture of the past,” he wrote, which “was really a picture of the future” (Rev. of *Doctor Faustus* 37).

By judging Poel as an antiquarian, critics have doomed him to failure, owing to the impossibility of absolute historical accuracy. The *Times* noted of his 1893 *Measure for Measure* that there was “a striving after accuracy in various small points of detail, while striking anachronisms obtrude themselves unchecked” (“Shakespeare Under Shakespearean Conditions” 4). Poel, Moore writes, “got worse as he went on” in this regard (“William Poel” 21), and Carey M. Mazer notes that Poel’s later work was “marred by non-Elizabethan eccentricities” (*Refashioned* 70). Beyond the inevitable anachronisms in historical detail lay a greater problem recognized by the *Times Literary Supplement* as early as 1905:

The attempt to restore Elizabethan methods of stage-production has failed because it was necessarily partial; its proper complement was the restoration of the Elizabethan environment, the Elizabethan frame of mind in the spectator. With all the enthusiasm in the world, Mr. Poel could not accomplish that miracle. (“Shakespeare as the Sleeping Beauty” 178)

The *Times* noted a like deficiency in its review of Poel’s 1910 *Two Gentlemen*. “What [this production] cannot reproduce,” the critic wrote, “is the Elizabethan audience with the Elizabethan frame of mind, so that what was originally natural is now quaint” (Rev. of *Two Gentlemen* 12). Almost a century later, William Worthen framed a similar objection. “It is hard to imagine,” he observes, “that we can inhabit the body in ways even approximating those of Shakespeare’s era; although sight, pain, cold have probably

not changed, our ways both of understanding the body and of mapping it into the signifying web of our culture has been radically altered” (“Staging” 23). While Worthen’s language reflects the influence of postmodern theory, the substance of his observation differs little from that of his Edwardian predecessors.

These critiques would indeed be damning if Poel’s primary goal had been antiquarian reconstruction. One can sense instead annoyance with such a pedantic approach in Poel’s rejection of William Archer’s archeological endeavors. Archer had written a lengthy and well-researched article examining some controversies regarding the early modern stage, including the position of the “traverse curtain” (Archer, “The Elizabethan Stage” 459). Poel responded in the *Daily Chronicle*, “When Mr. Archer has discovered the exact position for the traverse, the place for the doors, the height of the gallery, and the depth of the recesses, we shall still be as far removed from a perfect representation of one of Shakespeare’s plays as we were before.” Such archeological detail was useless

unless Mr. Archer is willing first to master the internal construction of the play, to visualize its movement, to realize the characters, and to vocalize their elocution . . . When all this has been done, Mr. Archer will discover that Shakespeare’s play lives and pleases by reason of its own inherent vitality, and that it is a matter of small importance where the traverse is placed or how the doors open. (Poel, “Reply” 8)

My intent is not, of course, to justify sloppy, impatient or tendentious scholarship on Poel’s part. Rather I wish to suggest that, while as a “revival” his movement was

inherently engaged with the past, Poel was concerned primarily with the theatrical effect of his productions, and not their archaist veracity. Elizabethan staging was a means to an end, and never an end in itself.

Elitism

Many of Poel's contemporaries perceived him as elitist. Edward Garnett wrote approvingly that Poel could "accept no stultifying compromise" and therefore "made his appeal to the intelligent elite" ("Mr. Poel" 590). Less sympathetically, Archer claimed that Poel's was "a form of representation which appeals only to the dilettante and the enthusiast" ("Elizabethan Stage Society" 221). Max Beerbohm scoffed at those who believed the methods of the Elizabethan Stage Society "to be the one and only dignified mode of presenting Shakespeare's plays—to be a mode in comparison with which ours is tawdry and philistine and wicked" (*Around Theatres* 259), and Herbert Beerbohm Tree opposed Poel's approach from the position that "there should be more joy over ninety-nine Philistines that are gained than over one elect that is preserved" (56-57).

As in the case of antiquarianism, late twentieth century critics have largely inherited this view of Poel as an elitist from their predecessors. Michael Bristol and Kathleen McLuskie assert that Poel "addressed his work to an intellectual elite" (9). For Mazer, the Elizabethan revival was "a coterie movement with strictly limited impact" (*Refashioned* 84), which "was as elitist as the membership of the private societies which supported it . . . a club of cognoscenti congratulating themselves on their historical insight" (83). These charges of elitism are not entirely unjustified, as witnessed by Ivor Brown's 1927 exhortation: "Let one of the many millionaires who read the *Saturday*

Review give Mr. Poel a theatre for his birthday” (“Salute to William Poel” 91). Yet Poel’s writings also appeal repeatedly to a sense of democratic populism. He longs nostalgically for “Shakespeare’s day,” when “the nobility and groundlings together resorted to the playhouse” (“Responsibilities” 112), and boasts that “English drama sprang from the entertainments of the people, and not from those of the court” (*Playhouse* 6). Poel managed the Old Vic for Emma Cons during its early days. Cons had founded this institution to bring art to the underprivileged, and Poel wrote in the *Daily Chronicle* of his experience at the Vic, “It came home to me, the frightful contrast, the awful difference between the lives of the rich and the lives of the poor.” Ever since that time, Poel claimed, he had “striven to change the dramatic world” in an effort to ameliorate these conditions (qtd. in Shaughnessy 35). Robert Shaughnessy sees in this quotation “a motivating agenda for Poel’s revivalism” (Shaughnessy 35).

Poel’s connection to Modernism might clarify this paradoxical attitude toward elitism. Bristol and McLuskie place Poel among “the first generation of theatrical modernists” (18). He may have intended his 1913 declaration that he was “really a modernist” (quoted in Speaight, *William Poel* 90) more generally, and not to align himself with Pound and Eliot. But his anguish regarding the alienation endemic to industrial society, summarized by Speaight’s observation that Poel “saw that the chronic malady of the theatre was due to the immense, inhuman size of the metropolis where most of its activity was concentrated” (*William Poel* 208), echoes a concern voiced by Modernist texts like *The Waste Land*. On the one hand, Modernism meant “real literature,” aimed at “a cultural elite” (Taylor 245). It sought to protect high culture from

a proliferation of new popular forms, such as sound recording and film, made possible by technological advances. At the same time, a “culture of ‘the people’” was proposed by some Modernists as an alternative to the mass-produced insipidness of commercial entertainment (Bristol 9). Shakespeare became “the elusive point of coherence which might unite ‘the people’ against the dangerous and narcotizing seduction of endlessly proliferating modes of commercial and technological cultural pleasures” (Bristol 19). Simon Shepherd and Peter Womack argue that this conflict between elitism and populism marks most approaches to Shakespeare in the Modern era. It has created “the contradiction which stalks the subsidized classical theater,” in which “Shakespeare always should, and never can, be given back to the groundlings” (Shepherd 118). Poel largely fits into this subset of theatrical Modernism, but he was not typical of the movement in every way. In *No Man’s Land*, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar argue convincingly that Modernism was “a men’s club,” which sought to exclude women from participation in the artistic process (156). Poel, conversely, sought to include women in his theatrical endeavors and frequently cast women in men’s roles, a procedure which “quite lacked Elizabethan precedent” (Speaight, *William Poel* 130). While his motives in this practice were complicated, Poel desired to aid women in their quest for emancipation and equality. In this, he stands apart from the latent misogyny of doctrinaire Modernism as defined by Gilbert and Gubar.

Textual fidelity

The charges of antiquarianism and elitism leveled at Poel have two things in common. They have been made consistently from the Edwardian era forward, and they

have some factual basis in Poel's theatrical practice. The notion that Poel was a textual purist shares neither of these qualities. Poel's writings do contain some pleas for presenting Shakespeare's plays "in their authentic form" (*Shakespeare in the Theatre* 44). These passages, however, almost inevitably relate not to cutting the texts per se but rather to what J.L. Styan calls "that nineteenth century phenomenon of running scenes together out of order, so contrived as to ease the burden on the scene-changers" (*Shakespeare Revolution* 19), a process derided by Shaw as "butchering Shakespeare to make a stage-carpenter's holiday" (quoted in Styan, *Shakespeare Revolution* 26). Poel was less concerned with presenting Shakespeare's texts uncut than he was afraid of having his actors upstaged by elaborate scenography.

Poel frequently wrote of the need to edit early modern texts in performance, noting for instance that "it was often found, in these revivals of old plays, not merely that omissions were necessary, but also some re-construction of the play" (*Account* 9). A study of Poel's practice establishes that he never hesitated to cut, or indeed to re-write, Shakespeare's plays for production. Marion O'Connor writes that "Poel's textual interventions—not just excisions but also transpositions" were "worthy of Shakespearean adapters from Nahum Tate to Charles Marowitz" ("Useful" 24). Contemporary critics recognized this. The *Times* noted in 1900, "All one can say of the text spoken was that it was Mr. Poel's version of *Hamlet*" (Rev. of *Hamlet* 7). John Palmer reiterated this sentiment in 1914, writing of that year's production, "Mr. Poel's *Hamlet*, in a word, is not Shakespeare's *Hamlet*" (139).

Mid-century scholars also did not attribute to Poel excessive fidelity to the plays' literary form. Robert Speaight wrote in 1954 that "Poel had no scruples about discarding as 'superfluous conversation' the most subtle or sublime poetry on the grounds than no one would listen to it" (*William Poel* 173). By 1963, however, Muriel St. Clare Byrne claimed that Poel had been devoted "to drama first and theatre afterwards" (Byrne, Foreword xiv) and "sought nothing less than the authentic Shakespeare, to be found, hitherto, only in the study" (Foreword xi). Byrne's comments come in her writings about Harley Granville Barker and reflect an attempt to read Barker's philosophy backward onto Poel rather than a direct analysis of this earlier practitioner's efforts. This alignment with an agenda of literary hegemony has nevertheless provided a central justification for those postmodern critics who perceive Poel as artistically and politically regressive.

The ideological goal of Poel and the Elizabethanists, according to William Worthen, was to "naturalize a modern system of theatrical signification as a transparent instrument, one that appears to disclose the original practice of Shakespeare's theatre and so the original meanings of Shakespeare's plays" (*Authority* 64), thereby "turning away from the question of how our acts of representation are implicated in the dynamics of contemporary culture," and "effacing the dynamic of cultural change behind the mask of performance" ("Staging" 25). This denial of contemporary material circumstances is accomplished through a fetishistic reverence for the plays as Shakespeare supposedly wrote them. Worthen claims that "the strength and simplicity of Renaissance staging arises from the openly rhetorical gesture of fidelity to the text" (*Authority* 64), which is linked to "a cognate urge to restore an authentic Shakespeare, one who inhabits the texts

of the plays” (33). This appeal to “the author” implicates Poel in the phenomenon J.L. Styan calls “The Shakespeare Revolution.” For Worthen, this is “no revolution at all” (*Authority* 159), but instead “really a covert operation, a restoration in disguise” (158), meaning that its main object has been to maintain Shakespeare as a hegemonic force in the service of an ideologically repressive status quo. Elizabethanists, in this view, have been (perhaps unconsciously) co-opted into a mode of interpretation that unduly privileges Shakespeare’s authorial intent. Worthen chides theater artists and scholars for refusing “to move in a direction charted by Roland Barthes some time ago” (“Staging” 17). Yet William Poel, the driving force behind the Elizabethan revival, moved in just such a direction.

In 1881, Poel staged the First Quarto *Hamlet*. The provenance of this text is notoriously disputed, but what matters to my argument is how Poel understood it. He described the Q1 *Hamlet* in his program as “a deliberate tampered version of the Globe Playhouse copy, reconstructed and compressed with . . . the skill of the actor or stage manager, and not that of the poet or dramatist” (quoted in Lundstrom 54). Poel’s decision to stage this play, which he elsewhere described as “an Elizabethan actor’s cut-down version . . . printed from an imperfect text” (“Shakespeare’s ‘Prompt Copies’” 75), suggests that he willingly embraced the collaborative participation of actors and others in the process of early modern authorship. Poel accepted, in short, the very “death of the author” which Worthen accuses performance critics and Elizabethanist practitioners of refusing to acknowledge. In 1924, Poel staged *Fratricide Punished*, an obscure German adaptation of *Hamlet*, which has even less connection to Shakespeare’s “original text”

than does the First Quarto version. These examples from different decades show that throughout his career, rather than working to “restore an authentic Shakespeare, one who inhabits the texts of the plays” (Worthen, *Authority* 33), Poel chose to stage productions that deliberately challenged this notion of proprietary authorship. Worthen correctly notes that Poel’s writing is full of references to recovering Shakespeare’s intentions. Rinda Lundstrom suggests, however, that while “his search for intentions may seem somewhat ‘fallacious’ . . . it should be remembered that th[is] search was part of the critical tenor of Poel’s era” (159). What Poel claims as Shakespeare’s intentions usually reveal themselves to be, on closer inspection, Poel’s theories about how the plays should be staged. These theories derived their justification not, as Worthen suggests, from fidelity to a literary text, but instead from the trials of theatrical practice.

The politics of authenticity

In recent decades, scholars have implicated Poel and the Elizabethan revival in the phenomenon Marjorie Garber terms “Shakespeare as Fetish” (242), in which an essential, authentic Shakespeare, frozen in time by the use of early modern staging conventions, serves to “naturalize a monolithic and monumental past as a means of governing the representation of the present” (Worthen, *Authority* 186) thereby “participat[ing] in the reproduction of hegemony” (55). Some critics see Poel as complicit in an effort to neutralize Shakespeare’s potential impact by packaging and marketing the plays as banal nostalgia. “The pursuit of authenticity,” Marion O’Connor writes, “may not always end in theme parks, but it does generally seem at least to skirt very close to them” (“Useful” 32). The new Globe is therefore seen as the “1990s

fulfillment of Poel's aspirations in the 1890s . . . reducing drama to a museum piece and performances to a tourist attraction" (Innes 119). Conservative practitioners, among whom these scholars number Poel, seek to "insur[e] that the satisfactions they originally derived from the plays are faithfully duplicated each time those plays are performed" (Marowitz 467).

This interpretation would have puzzled an earlier generation of critics, who saw Poel as a "pre-Raphaelite revolutionary" ("William Poel" *Times Literary Supplement* 453). Poel did not, in fact, advocate a "monolithic" set of theatrical conventions to govern all kinds of performances. "Our own stage-methods," he wrote, "no more fit the Elizabethan stage than would the Elizabethan methods fit the modern stage" (*Shakespeare* 215). Poel's non-Shakespearean productions, and indeed his later Shakespearean ones, demonstrate that he willingly experimented with a wide variety of theatrical forms. Rather than employing an artistically conservative set of unchanging practices to subtly endorse a reactionary agenda, Poel's work instead represented, as Mazer points out, Poel's own Radical political philosophy in which "institutions are . . . neither sacrosanct nor permanent" and "each new set of conditions . . . must be met by corresponding new institutional structures" (*Refashioned* 55). In the remainder of this chapter I will explore the active political engagement of Poel's efforts, which sought not to reinforce the existing power structure, but to transform it.

Poel Versus the Theatrical Status Quo

William Poel's conflict with the theatrical establishment represented a deep ideological divide. Mazer suggests that this division "boil[ed] down to the classic struggle in Edwardian England between the traditions of enlightened Victorian liberalism and the new radicalism" (*Refashioned* 54). Mainstream theater practitioners like Herbert Beerbohm Tree and critics like William Archer and Max Beerbohm embraced a Liberal, positivist ideology, which saw all technological and scientific advancement as inherently good. Poel, on the other hand, was a Radical. As such, he rejected the notion of inexorable evolutionary progress toward a better world. Poel's theatrical methods had political overtones related to both Radicalism and the Pre-Raphaelite movement. As Mazer writes:

The Elizabethan revival, then, was . . . anti-progressive, and as such it was as radical as the political movements that were based on a new definition of institutions and the relation of society to them. Revivalism and radicalism are not unrelated; William Morris, the pre-Raphaelite and "revivalist" of medieval arts and crafts, was a major figure in British socialism. Similarly, the Elizabethan revival was an Edwardian statement about the present and future as well as about the past. (*Refashioned* 55)

Pre-Raphaelitism was formed to combat "the materialistic art of the Industrial revolution." As Franklin J. Hildy notes, "the materialism against which [the Pre-Raphaelites] had protested in the mid-1800s had by the latter part of that century come to dominate the stage" (*Shakespeare* 9). The Elizabethan revival sought to instill the same values in dramatic art which the Pre-Raphaelites had pursued in poetry and painting. George Bernard Shaw overtly connected Poel's theatrical revival to the Pre-Raphaelite

movement when he suggested that “Elizabethan methods” could make it “possible to recover one of those arts as valuable as any of the medieval arts recovered by William Morris” (qtd. in “Shakespeare on the Modern Stage” 8). While Shaw was more intrigued by modernity than Poel, both men shared a concern for the true costs of industrialism and, consequently, a leftist political stance.

Poel developed anti-industrial and anti-capitalist tendencies when he apprenticed as a young man in a firm of building contractors at a time when “London was being transformed (from one of the most beautiful cities in Europe to one of the ugliest) before his eyes” (Speaight, *William Poel* 17). It was at this time, Speaight suggests, that Poel “acquired an early distaste for the ‘City’ and a permanent disapproval of commercial values” (17). Poel’s adult introduction to Pre-Raphaelite thought came in 1884, when he worked as a stage manager for F.R. Benson, whom Poel described as “a disciple of William Morris . . . that apostle of radicalism” (quoted in Speaight, *William Poel* 60). Benson and his troop lived outdoors while on tour, recreating the pre-modern existence of traveling players. This experience had a profound impact. Speaight writes that later in life Poel “had in many respects the character of a medieval craftsman” (*William Poel* 17), and Poel frequently quoted Morris in his pleas for theatrical reform.

Poel’s Pre-Raphaelite ideals, like Tyrone Guthrie’s later connection to the Arts and Crafts movement, were politically ambiguous. Industrialism and mass production, for all their faults, did raise the material standard of living for a large segment of the population. To reject them is therefore, on one level, elitist. It smacks of paternalism for upper class men like Morris, Poel, and Guthrie to preach rejection of technology to the

poor masses, who would use it to improve their lives. One example of this aspect of Poel's anti-industrial bias can be seen in his objection to "the decision of the Charity Commissioners to disturb the peace of Stratford-upon-Avon by the sound of a factory bell" which would "cause discomfort and sorrow to those who travel there in order to worship at the shrine of genius"(Poel, *What's Wrong* 17). That the factory bell might be necessary for the citizens of Stratford to earn their livelihood apparently did not concern him. Whatever its ultimate moral and political value, however, Poel's position challenged the current socioeconomic system. As a consequence, the theatrical powers that he had little use for him.

Herbert Beerbohm Tree's attitude toward Poel was generally dismissive. Tree felt that Poel was "an absolute crank—and an unsuccessful crank to boot" (quoted in Glick 16). Without mentioning Poel by name, Tree outlined the difference between his own methods and those of the Elizabethan revival in a 1900 article for the *Fortnightly Review* titled "The Staging of Shakespeare: A Defense of Public Taste." In this piece, Tree condemned "those who contend that, in order to appreciate [Shakespeare's] works, they must only be decked out with the threadbare wardrobe of a bygone time." Shakespeare must instead "be presented with all the resources of our time," making full use of "those adjuncts which in these days science and art place at the manager's right hand" (53). Tree's repeated use of the word "science" in this article suggests a positivist tendency, as does similar usage by Max Beerbohm (*Around Theatres* 258). Tree then links his theatrical position to a broader philosophical agenda. "Every man should avail himself of the aids which his generation affords him," he writes. "It is only the weakling who harks

back to the methods of a by-gone generation” (59). Tree’s characterization of the Elizabethanists as “weakling[s]” supports Lundstrom’s assertion that a “theatrical form of ‘cultural Darwinism’” informed the accusations of pedantry and antiquarianism leveled at Poel by his positivist opponents (83).

Ironically, Tree adopted some of Poel’s methods late in his career. In 1910, he invited Poel to stage *Two Gentlemen of Verona* at His Majesty’s Theatre as part of an annual London Shakespeare Festival which Tree had organized since 1905. The *Times* review of 21 April suggests that Poel was put on the program as a kind of novelty act designed to show the broad “variety of styles” in which Shakespeare could be staged (Rev. of *Two Gentlemen* 12). Yet Poel’s deep apron configuration and use of direct lighting were surprisingly successful with critics and audiences. O’Connor writes that Tree “took the hint and used front-lighting on a shallower apron for his production of *Henry VIII* a few months later” (*William Poel* 93). Tree was an artist and a businessman, not a philosopher or a political activist. The secondary title of his *Fortnightly Review* article, “A Defense of Public Taste,” indicates that he was more concerned with the practical consequences of Shakespearean staging in the theatrical marketplace than with ideology. Nevertheless, Tree’s appeal to the staging practices of early modern masques may subconsciously betray his politics.

Tree claimed that “Shakespeare intended to leave as little to the imagination as possible, and to put upon the stage as gorgeous and as complete a picture as the resources of the theatre could supply.” He cites the “mounting, scenery, costume, and music” employed in royal “masques and interludes” as evidence of what was possible on stage

during the English Renaissance (61). Stephen Orgel in *The Illusion of Power* and Barbara Lewalski in “Milton’s *Comus* and the Politics of Masquing” have, along with other critics, interpreted the political significance of these masques as bulwarks of royal power. Only the monarch could afford to stage such elaborate ceremonies, and these performances therefore served to celebrate the royal monopoly on wealth and power. A similar concentration of capital was required to produce the elaborate Shakespearean spectacles of Tree and his contemporaries. Rather than supporting the monarchy, however, these modern productions reinforced the power of the industrial elite and their positivist reverence for science and technology. This is not to suggest that either Tree or Inigo Jones were consciously propagandists for the ruling elites of their respective eras. The rulers of each age instead endorsed and supported art which they found ideologically compatible, and marginalized artists like Poel whose work represented a threat to their authority.

Poel had an opportunity to respond to Tree in the same issue of the *Fortnightly Review*. He contested Tree’s use of the royal masque as a paradigm for English Renaissance stagecraft and took Ben Jonson’s side in the quarrel with Inigo Jones (“Staging of Shakespeare” 356), again presaging the political interpretation of the masque developed by Orgel and Lewalski. Elsewhere, Poel developed his own theory of the ideological function of early modern theater, which similarly focused on elaborate staging as an expression of royal power. According to Poel, Elizabeth “looked with suspicion on Shakespeare’s writings” (*What’s Wrong* 5) and established the lavishly produced children’s company at Blackfriars to divert attention from the politically

conscious historical dramas being staged by the Lord Chamberlain's Men, whom Poel saw as partisans of the Earl of Essex. He writes that Elizabeth "succeeded in her object in substituting the 'show' for the reality, and Shakespeare might well break his magic wand in 1611" and withdraw to Stratford (*Monthly Letters* 80-81). Poel's timeline with regard to the Essex rebellion and Shakespeare's retirement does not make much sense. What interests me, however, is his theory that the elaborate staging of the children's company served to support the political authority of the monarch against a revolutionary threat from the bare stage of the Globe. This anticipates the postmodern, ideological reading of the Stuart masques, and suggests a parallel in the early twentieth century. Tree embraced elaborate scenography as a means to endorse the status quo, as had Inigo Jones, while Poel looked to the minimalist aesthetic of the Elizabethan revival as a challenge to that power structure.

Positivist critics attacked Poel with arguments similar to those employed by Tree in the *Fortnightly Review*. Max Beerbohm wrote, "If Shakespeare could come to life again he would give Mr. Poel a wide berth" (*More Theatres* 222). Beerbohm's frequent references to "the science of scenic production" suggest a fetishistic reverence of technology, as does his assertion that the Elizabethan Stage Society "finds in the darkness of the dark ages its natural element." Poel and his followers "love darkness," but "we," Beerbohm assures his readers, "are the children of light" (*Around Theatres* 258). Mazer writes that Beerbohm displays in the following passage "the progressive fallacy of the 'modern,' i.e., traditionalist, school of scenography" through his "equation of pictorial representationalism with mechanized transportation" (*Refashioned* 68):

Good modern scenery would be distracting (at first) to a resurrected Elizabethan, because he never would have seen anything like it. Hansom cabs and bicycles would also puzzle him. But it does not follow that, because modes of locomotion were few and primitive in his day, hansoms and bicycles ought to be abolished. They save us a great deal of time and trouble. Nor have they produced decay in our faculty of walking . . . Even so the developments in modern scenery, which are but a means of quickening dramatic illusion, do not signify that the imagination of the race has been decaying. (Beerbohm, *More Theatres* 232)

More than one hundred years after Beerbohm expressed these sentiments, he has been proved at least partly wrong. Bicycles have done no harm, but later developments in transportation have, indeed, “produced decay in our faculty of walking,” along with other, more serious, unintended consequences. Meanwhile, film and television, the visual descendants of Beerbohm’s “modern scenery,” have almost certainly contributed to “deca[y]” in the “imagination of the race.”

Poel, in contrast, was keenly aware that an excessive emphasis on the visual “threatens the adult with paralysis of the imagination” by urging people to “turn to pictures for the realisation of what they themselves hesitate to visualize” (“Picture Pedantry” 60). He predicted in an article for the *Manchester Playgoer* that this ocular addiction would develop a tolerance, which increasingly sensational technologies would attempt to satisfy. “Humanity, however, can grow impatient of counterfeits, and a picture is not alive,” Poel warned. “Then comes the cinematograph” (“Picture Pedantry” 60). He ends his examination of the tyranny of the eye in modern culture with a rhetorical question which, a century later, seems eerily prophetic. “Is it man’s destiny to regard life as if it were a vast Kaleidoscope, existing for the sole purpose of being looked at, until his brain, wearied by watching the ever revolving machine, becomes incapable of

concentrated and continuous thought?” (62). The predominance of visually-based electronic technologies in the twenty-first century and the corresponding rise in Attention Deficit Disorder suggest an affirmative response to Poel’s query.

William Archer’s attitude toward Poel was more complex than that of Tree or Beerbohm. He agreed that “Shakespeare is horribly maltreated on the modern commercial stage” (“Elizabethan Stage Society” 222) but rejected Poel’s approach as merely “academic” (Review of *Doctor Faustus* 206). He could not accept that early modern staging might offer a meaningful alternative to current theatrical practice. While Archer was intrigued by the archaist aspects of the Society’s endeavors, he believed that “an Elizabethan Playhouse can never be [a] popular institution” (“Elizabethan Stage Society” 225). “It is because,” Archer wrote in the *Theatrical World of 1895*, “I think they are diverting valuable energy into a mistaken channel that I take up an almost hostile attitude toward experiments which, in themselves, are harmless and interesting.” He then offers a curious and oddly gendered metaphor. “Bare-back riding is excellent, perhaps indispensable, practice,” Archer writes, “but it is in the saddle that the accomplished rider ‘witches the world with noble horsemanship.’” (226). He may perhaps have been referring to the enthusiastic but amateurish acting of Poel’s company and to the need to constrain these performers within the “saddle” of theatrical discipline. Archer’s antithesis of “Bare-back” and “in the saddle” might, alternately, refer to the need for Poel and his company to accept the positivist paradigm of the theatrical status quo: to take the bit of science and industry in the mouth of their artistic endeavor (if one is willing to extend the equestrian metaphor) in order to be taken seriously as professionals.

In 1900, an anonymous reviewer from the *Era* was less patient with Poel, and more typical of the critical consensus:

We do Shakespeare a disservice when we refuse to avail ourselves of the means which modern invention has supplied for presenting his works as beautifully and elaborately as possible . . . If he could come to life we are confident that he would choose to be canvassed and appareled in the manner employed at our artistic London theatres rather than in the style of his own time. There is no good end served by reverting to the primitive practices of the early Shakespearian stage. (Rev. of *Hamlet* 7)

Here one sees again what Lundstrom identifies as the “assumption that Elizabethan stage practice was naturally inferior to modern because it belonged to the past” (7), and what Mazer calls the concern “with forward progress of the theatre as a cultural institution; and [the] belief that culture and society can and must progress inexorably forward” (*Refashioned* 55). Unfortunately, society in the twentieth century did not move “inexorably forward.” Instead it experienced a breakdown which almost led to its destruction. In the next section of this chapter, I will explore how the stagecraft of Edward Gordon Craig charted and facilitated this breakdown, and how the humanist aesthetics of William Poel proposed, and continue to offer today, a healthful alternative.

Poel and Gordon Craig

Many narratives of twentieth century theater describe William Poel and Edward Gordon Craig as members of the same theatrical school. Ralph Berry takes such a view when he categorizes alternative approaches to Shakespeare after 1895 as “a long-overdue revolution led by Gordon Craig, William Poel, and Harley Granville-Barker” (“Reviewer” 594). Christopher Innes similarly identifies Craig as “a founder-member of

the new movement that included . . . Poel and Granville-Barker” (3). The phenomenon referred to in these quotes is the eponymous *Shakespeare Revolution* of J.L. Styan, who describes Craig’s “provocative ideas” as having “tallied exactly with the new thinking about Shakespeare” represented by the Elizabethan revival (81). Both Poel and Craig would have rejected this linkage. Mazer has rightly critiqued Styan’s “great creation myth” in which a movement toward non-representational productions of Shakespeare progresses seamlessly from William Poel to Peter Brook (Mazer, “Historicizing” 151). Worthen identifies the problem with lumping so many disparate practitioners into a common definition. “Although the ‘students of Elizabethan dramatic convention’ might be flattered to feel themselves ‘marching in step’ with the avant-garde,” Worthen writes, “it’s hard to believe that the feeling would have been mutual” (*Authority* 159). Yet neither of these critics specifically addresses the injustice done to both Poel and Craig by attributing to them a common philosophy.

Each was careful not to attack the other ad hominem, but Poel’s insistence that he had “no personal feeling against Mr. Craig” (“Mr. Gordon Craig” 12) and Craig’s disclaimer that “those who know Mr. Poel know him to be a man of distinction” (*Theatre –Advancing* 107) suggest that both did protest too much for there not to have been some animosity between them. Of their professional differences there can be no question. Craig wrote dismissively of the Elizabethan revival, “This love of the antique has come into the theatre now and then; it entered into England with William Poel and his Elizabethan Stage Society.” He mocked what he perceived as the archaist sales pitch of the Elizabethanists, ““Lo, the ruins of the sixteenth century! Tickets sixpence; plan and

excavations, two pence extra” (*Theatre–Advancing* 107). Poel for his part described Craig’s logic as “the more of Gordon Craig’s scenery the better, because Shakespeare and his actors are very little good without it” (*Shakespeare* 226).

These two theatrical visionaries both rejected pictorial realism as a means of staging Shakespeare. Craig’s lack of interest in verisimilitude has led scholars like Styan to ally him with the Elizabethan revival, which was also non-illusionary. This reading overlooks the critical fact that Craig was as dependent on spectacle, and on the scientific and economic resources required to produce it, as was Beerbohm Tree. The difference is that Tree used the technological and financial tools at his disposal in the pursuit of realism. Tree’s *Macbeth* “opened with the Witches flying on wires” and his *Tempest* featured a “fully-rigged” ship for Prospero’s return to Milan at the play’s conclusion, which somehow “disappear[ed] over the horizon’s rim” (Speaight, *Shakespeare* 126). Craig employed similar means toward abstract ends. Innes describes Craig’s staging of Hamlet’s first soliloquy in a 1908 collaboration with Konstantin Stanislavski at the Moscow Art Theater:

A light black tulle curtain, or gauze, was stretched directly behind him and cut him off sharply from these [other characters in the preceding scene], giving them a misty effect. On Claudius’s line, “Come away,” this gauze was slowly loosened so that, although the figures remained in place, their outlines were gradually blotted out as if they receded from Hamlet’s thoughts rather than moved off the stage . . . This was so impressive that the scene received an ovation. (152)

Craig’s dependence on elaborate visual effects of this kind had more in common with the positivist theatrical status quo than with the Elizabethan revival. His vision epitomized a theater which ever more valued technology and stagecraft and simultaneously disparaged

the human contributions of actors. As a logical conclusion to this process, Craig wrote that “the actor must go, and in his place comes the inanimate figure—the Uber-marionette” (*Art of the Theatre* 81).

The totalitarian political vision that Craig embraced similarly reflected a society which valued the benefits of industrialism over the contributions of individual craftspeople. Gary Taylor has noted the connection between Craig’s Uber-marionette and the contemporary zeitgeist, describing the early twentieth century as “a world of mass production, mass transportation, mass war, mass unemployment, mass politics [and] mass media,” in which “human beings looked like moving multitudes of puppets” (272). It was an easy leap from viewing people as faceless cogs in a socio-economic machine to denying them basic human dignity. Craig dismissed the value of individual liberty in words that recall the ideologues of totalitarianism. “The whole nature of man tends towards freedom,” he wrote, and therefore “as *material* for the theatre he is useless” (*Art of the Theatre* 56). Craig’s son Edward saw the connection between his father’s vision of theater and his fascist politics. “Mussolini had always appealed to him as a man of genius and a man of power combined,” writes the younger Craig, “a man who controlled everything—rather as he imagined his ‘stage director’ would do in the theatre” (Craig, Edward 337). Taylor reinforces this connection:

Total theatre . . . bore an uncomfortable resemblance to its contemporary, totalitarianism . . . the architecture of light in Albert Speer’s Nuremberg rallies realized the ambitions of Adolphe Appia and Edward Gordon Craig for a theatre composed of abstract planes of mass and light, wholly dwarfing the individual performers. (271)

Not all advocates of elaborate scenography endorsed such extremism, but the authority of Craig's commanding "Artist of the Theatre" (Craig, "A Dialogue" 33) derived largely from mastery of the kind of technologies employed at Nuremberg (Craig, *Art of the Theatre* 258). The acceptance of a mode of theatrical production in which individual performers displayed "willing and reliant obedience to the manager or captain" (172) who controlled these technical means facilitated the replication of this relationship in the political sphere.

Poel objected to Craig on both practical and philosophical grounds. "As an advocate of Elizabethan methods," he wrote, "I have every right to protest against scenery being thrust into Shakespeare's plays." ("Mr. Gordon Craig" 12). Aesthetic concerns also moved Poel to write of Craig that "Shakespeare has long since failed to hold his own against modern staging, and the possibility of bringing more taste, skill, and naturalness into the art of the scene painter does not remove the difficulty, but rather increases it" (*Shakespeare* 222). A few lines later, Poel begins to merge this artistic critique with a deeper moral objection: "the central interest of drama is human, and it is necessary that the figures on the stage should appear larger than the background" (223). The Elizabethan theater, for Poel, was one in which "attention was concentrated on the actor" (*Playhouse* 18). Craig offered instead, in the words of his partisan Christopher Innes, "a vision of theater so radical that it seemed to have no place for the actor at all" (3). Consequently, Poel lamented, "There is no room for man in Mr. Craig's world" (*Shakespeare* 223).

Given Poel's humanistic philosophy and Craig's unfortunate support of fascism, one is tempted to see the founder of the Elizabethan revival as a spotless champion of individual dignity and the creator of the Uber-marionette as a heartless autocrat. Their actual positions are more complicated. Although Poel rejected Craig's approach in theory, S.R. Littlewood's description of Poel's 1914 *Hamlet* as incorporating "Gordon Craig suggestions of vast rectangularities for the Elsinore battlements" (quoted in Speaight 223) indicates that Poel sometimes emulated Craig's style in his later productions. There were also similarities in their directorial style. While Poel argued for the primacy of the actor, he was not always kind to the performers he directed. His dictatorial methods suggest that Poel may have pursued a kind of control similar to that to which Craig aspired. Speaight notes that "for some reason Poel did not think that actors could begin to perform until they were prostrate with hunger" and that he once therefore slapped an actress for eating before rehearsal (*William Poel* 70). According to Richard David, Poel believed "that every speech has one particular 'tune' to which it must go, and no liberty of interpretation is possible" (82). Poel and his actors therefore spent countless rehearsal hours finding these "tunes," or as it was alternately described, "learn[ing] the tones" (Casson, "William Poel" 58). Robert Bruce Loper describes this process in agonizing detail:

Poel rode his hobby-horse of inflection unrelentingly . . . the girl playing Osric in the old Hamlet play *Fratricide Punished* . . . was compelled to recite over and over again the five words the character says when handing over the poisoned cup: 'here is the warm beer.' Poel would have no other reading than a rapid ascent of the scale on the first four words and a drop of 'several semitones' on the word *beer*. In his production of *The Bacchae* in 1908 . . . the chorus was required to

read the lines, in Mrs. Ernest Thesiger's words, 'bleating like goats, Me-e-e-ing on every word! If any one of us lapsed he stopped us and said 'No! No! I must have my TREMULO.'(195)

Poel's "people skills" as a director left much to be desired, but his quirky dietary restrictions and ill-conceived attempts at vocal micro-management demonstrate that he believed the actor, and the actor's voice, to be the center of performance.

Gordon Craig did not share Poel's view regarding the centrality of performers. Instead, according to the *Saturday Review*, he preferred "to dwarf his players by presenting them as frail, drifting, remote figures moving against a lofty and spacious background." The anonymous critic observes that "in Mr. Craig's theatre the actor is a necessary evil." He then condemns Craig's approach, writing that "for Shakespeare Mr. Craig's methods are fatal" because "instead of hanging upon every word that Hamlet says, we are almost surprised that he should speak at all. We should not be much more greatly astonished if somebody in one of Mr. Augustus John's cartoons were suddenly to address us" (Rev. of *Hamlet*, dir. Martin Harvey 4). Such negative response to Craig's efforts suggests that, for once, Poel was on the side of popular opinion in rejecting him. Craig may have been the only major theatrical figure of the period to have experienced less commercial success than Poel. His legacy, however, has been great. Craig was the prime mover behind what Ralph Berry called in 1985 "the rise of the designer," in which productions' technological achievements regularly steal focus from actors and directors ("Reviewer" 595). Twenty years after Berry's observation, the spiritual descendants of Gordon Craig continue to mount elaborately stylized and highly conceptual productions, against which the contemporary proponents of Poel's Elizabethan revival compete with

theatrical offerings that instead emphasize the human contributions of actors. This is the battleground of the real “Shakespeare Revolution,” and the outcome has yet to be decided.

Both Poel and Craig felt the influence of cinema as a new rival. During the first decades of the century, audiences abandoned theaters for movie houses, and live drama “became, conspicuously, a minority taste” (Taylor 274). Poel looked with suspicion on the new medium in the *Manchester Playgoer* piece cited above (“Picture Pedantry” 60). Elsewhere, he asserted the primacy of ear over eye by noting that “at cinema shows a piano is played the whole time” (*Monthly Letters* 95). Yet Poel seems overall to have been slow to recognize the power of film. Ben Iden Payne describes how, near the end of Poel’s life in 1934, he proposed to Payne a scheme of exhibiting “pictures” in a theater on dark nights as a means of raising extra funds. Payne assumed that Poel meant motion pictures but, apparently, this thought had never occurred to him. He was thinking of watercolors (Payne 183-84). Gordon Craig was much more aware of the development of cinema. Taylor compares the jerky movements of figures on the silent screen to “Ubermarionetten,” and suggests that Craig was entranced by the new medium’s ability to “ruthlessly contro[l] point of view” by forcing “every spectator to watch what the camera watched.” Proscenium theater of this era generally “labored to achieve the same singleness of purpose” (Taylor 274). One need only look at *Triumph of the Will* to grasp the political implications of such unanimity in reception. As director Anne Bogart reductively summarizes, “It’s actually easy to make a whole audience feel one thing. It’s also called fascism” (qtd. in Diamond 34).

Poel, conversely, believed passionately in the thrust stage, which he deemed the “most notable feature of the Elizabethan playhouse.” In most of his productions, Poel was forced to work in variously modified proscenium spaces, but he always looked to “a space on three sides . . . to accommodate the spectators” as an ideal (*Playhouse* 9). Thrust, in semiotic terms, produces “open performances” which “leave plenty of interpretive freedom to the audience” (De Marinis 103), because “the same audience member occupying different places on different nights [sees], literally, a different performance” (105). Critics have not generally recognized the ideological implications of Poel’s endorsement of the thrust configuration. In the same article in which she rejects the potential experimental value of Poel’s productions, for instance, Marion O’Connor notes that he valued the forward thrust, or “projection,” increasingly as his career progressed (“Useful” 18). Poel’s 1910 stage for *Two Gentlemen of Verona* extended far more into the audience than had his earlier Fortune fit-up, and his productions after 1920 came even closer to the three-quarter ideal (24). Poel’s later efforts are insufficiently documented because he came to fear that photography would allow his ideas to be stolen (O’Connor, *William Poel* 75). It appears, however, that in one of Poel’s last efforts, a 1927 production of William Rowley’s *When You See Me You Know Me* at the Holborn Empire, he finally succeeded in distributing the audience on three sides of the stage (100). Poel’s use of the thrust stage, which offers democratically diverse points of view to its audience, may have increased over time partly in response to a challenge from the elaborately expressionistic proscenium of Gordon Craig, with its cinematic and totalitarian overtones.

The artistic difference between Poel and Craig can perhaps be summed up by their varying approaches to *Hamlet*. For Craig, this play was a “monodrama,” with all focus on the melancholy Prince who expressed the director’s “autobiographical” interpretation (Innes 163). Poel’s view of *Hamlet* instead “emphasized the importance of the other characters equally with that of the protagonist” (Lundstrom 31). This contrast between individual will and collective harmony can also be seen in their respective politics. “Craig,” Innes writes, “like many of the socially aware but politically naïve avant-garde artists of his time—Ezra Pound, the Futurist Marinetti, . . . —was led by his anti-establishment feelings toward the fascist camp” (136). Poel was no less “anti-establishment” than Craig. What saved him from the seduction of fascism was his commitment to the inherently humanistic aesthetics of the Elizabethan revival.

Theater and Economic Reform

William Poel has a reputation as an elitist dilettante, but he was always deeply affected by the practical economics of theater. As a young man, he toured the provinces as an actor, hauling the company’s props and costumes in a donkey cart. Once on tour he was “forced to part with a pair of trousers to pay his landlady” (Speaight, *William Poel* 35). Born William Pole, he was literally baptized by the material circumstances of theater when “by a mistake in the programme Pole became Poel overnight” (30). Throughout his career, he had little success as a theatrical businessman. Lewis Casson notes that Poel “never made any money, and if ever he came by any he spent it at once on his beloved Elizabethan Stage Society” (“William Poel” 56). Ben Iden Payne sums up Poel’s lack of pecuniary ambition with an anecdote from 1934. “Poel told me,” Payne writes, “that he

now saw the mistake he had made when producing Elizabethan plays other than Shakespeare's. The mistake had been in charging admission!" (Payne 184). He then quotes Poel, "How much money does it draw? Only four or five pounds. That's all you lose and if you make admission free, you are saved all the annoyance of bookkeeping" (qtd. in Payne 184).

Poel was always deeply suspicious of the commercial mind-set of his countrymen, which he saw as poisoning the atmosphere of British theater. He wrote in 1893, "Business is the strongest passion of an Englishman's mind, and art gives way before it with morbid liberality" ("On Acting" 274). In 1891, he derided the cynical manner in which bad plays were "hyped" to an unsuspecting audience. Playwrights, Poel wrote, must "become proficient in the ingenuities of advertisement" because "the opinion of a great body of playgoers can be materially influenced by a little friendly puffing" ("Responsibilities" 111). By 1898, he questioned the "for profit" basis of English theater. "In this country there is a popular belief that everything connected with the playhouse should be self-supporting," Poel wrote, adding that this opinion was "perhaps upheld in any other country except our own, unless it be America" (*Account* 11). After the collapse of the Elizabethan Stage Society in 1905, these occasional critiques of commercialism on the English stage became an obsessive crusade. Poel's main effort from this time forward was toward what Lundstrom calls "the reform of modern capitalistic theatre" (93).

Poel analyzed the problems facing his art in Marxist terms. "No social problem," he wrote in 1914, "can be solved until its economic conditions are understood" ("Trade in Drama" 210). The particular economic factor that was ruining the theater, according to

Poel, was the increasingly speculative nature of theatrical financing. Producers no longer mounted plays in quest of artistic success, or even immediate financial gain. Instead, Poel describes a situation eerily reminiscent of Hollywood in the twenty-first century, where profits are made not through an initial box office release but instead by way of global, “after-market” distribution:

Managers are out to produce revues, farces, and sensational melodramas, because these are the kind of plays which are marketable over the largest area of the world’s surface. And the scramble among the theatrical capitalists is to secure London theatres, because the mediocre play when produced in them obtains a hallmark which increases in value the further away from the place of its original production the play is acted. (*What’s Wrong* 10)

The process of selection Poel describes likewise recalls the manner in which projects are currently evaluated by motion picture studios. “The ultimate decision as to what play shall be put in rehearsal is determined, not, as it is on the continent, by men of the theatre, but by members of the Stock Exchange,” Poel complained. Only if “the name of some actor or author popular on the Stock Exchange” was connected to the endeavor would financing be provided. The play under consideration was “never read” but “only discussed” (9) by the captains of industry who bankrolled theatrical production.

This “wild speculation” drove honest artists out of the theater. Rents rose to unaffordable levels “due to the number of speculators who have come into the ‘industry’ in order to find a fortune-making play” (“Truth” 564). “The root of the evil, therefore,” Poel wrote, “is economic” (*What’s Wrong* 10), and he called for government intervention to remove “the inducement to gamble with plays” (“Truth” 567). There should be “legislation which would prevent the mere speculator from renting a theatre or engaging

a company of actors for a shorter term than a year” (*Monthly Letters* 7) and laws “to protect playgoers from having to put up with rubbish which managers are pleased to label as ‘what the public wants.’” (*What’s Wrong* 10). “After all,” he asked, “is it not a matter of moment for the State to consider if our theatres are merely to exist for the purpose of encouraging stupidity?” (“Truth” 567). As a solution, Poel proposed “Theatres for the People” on the Berlin model (“Trade” 214), which would serve, so Speaight explains, “as an example of how the protest of the depressed proletariat could be ennobled—not stifled—by communion with the greatest minds” (*William Poel* 208). Such theaters would challenge the dominant commercial paradigm in which the stage was “controlled by those who keep from the public the representation of what is best in life . . . solely for considerations of personal gain” (Poel, *What’s Wrong* 9).

I believe that Poel’s proposed theatrical reforms are consistent with the broader Socialist agenda advocated by Shaw and the Fabians. Not all critics agree. Lundstrom suggests that while Poel was in “complete agreement” with Socialist analysis of the challenges facing the theater, his proposed solutions for these and other problems “betrayed a more elitist than socialist stance” (46). She bases this claim in part on Poel’s call for “the assistance of a subvention or of voluntary contributions” to allow theater to “flourish financially” (“Functions of a National Theatre” 164, qtd. in Lundstrom 46). While “voluntary contributions” from wealthy subscribers suggest elitism, a “subvention,” defined by Webster’s as “a subsidy from a government or foundation,” would seem to describe the funding mechanism of most theaters in Socialist societies. More importantly, the quotes Lundstrom uses to support her assertion are all taken from

essays Poel wrote in 1893. They are therefore mitigated by later, more aggressively leftist writings such as those cited in the preceding paragraph.

Poel's attitude toward the theater reflected his broader political views. An examination of these opinions reveals that Poel's agendas for theatrical and societal reform may have been more revolutionary than normally acknowledged. Toward the end of *What's Wrong with the Stage*, Poel quotes the Socialist and Pre-Raphaelite William Morris. "Commercialism," Morris wrote, "has sown the wind recklessly, and must reap the whirlwind; it has created the proletariat for its own interest, and its creation will and must destroy it; there is no other force which can do so" (qtd. in Poel, *What's Wrong* 37). Poel first heard these words when working for Morris's apostle, F.R. Benson, who saw Socialist ideals as an integral part of his theatrical message (Speaight, *William Poel* 60), and Poel's citation implies a similar intention. Speaight writes that Poel "would occasionally take the chair at Fabian meetings" (*William Poel* 238) and shared "the Fabian hatred of avarice" (203). He may never have been, as were Shaw and Harley Granville-Barker, a card-carrying Fabian Socialist (Salenius 2), but Poel was by all accounts a Radical. This meant that he was a member of both a specific political party and a more general protest movement (Wolfe 6). Underpinning Radical philosophy was "a rankling hatred of the Establishment—the established church, its privileges, and the whole system of class privilege and social discrimination" (1). In this orientation, Radicals shared much of the Fabian platform. Poel was likely not as red as Shaw, whom William Wolfe describes as a "born communist" (113), but his advocacy of change extended beyond the boundaries of the theater.

In 1929, Poel refused a knighthood. This made him, at least in one respect, more of a rebel than Bob Geldof. O'Connor writes that Poel said no "lest acceptance of the honor be construed as surrender, a signal that he had picked up the entertainment industry's equivalent of a gold watch and chain" (*William Poel* 96). Poel himself explained his decision in a letter to Robert Speaight as being a protest against those who regarded theater as "solely a business proposition" (quoted in Speaight, *William Poel* 253). The passage refers specifically to Poel's frustrations surrounding the planned reconstruction of the Globe, a project that would not be completed until six decades after his death. It also refers more generally to the evils of commercialism, which Poel felt were ruining both the theater he worked in and the nation where he lived.

Poel and History

William Poel's view of history profoundly impacted his work in the theater. He was greatly influenced by Sidney L. Lee's *The Topical Side of the Elizabethan Drama*, read at the New Shakespeare Society in 1886 and published by this Society the following year. In his 1881 Q1 *Hamlet*, Poel did not greatly concern himself with either early modern theatrical conventions or the broader topical circumstances of Elizabethan England. Lundstrom suggests that it was only after being exposed to Lee's ideas that Poel developed an intense historical focus (42). One hundred years before Stephen Greenblatt, Lee argued for a "conjoint study of Elizabethan history and literature" (4). He suggested that such an approach would yield "revelations of interest not only to professed antiquaries, but to all who devote attention to the humanities" (Lee 5). This implies an objective beyond mere archaism and recalls a traditionally humanistic concern for the

lessons of history. Poel, however, did not always hew to this broader application of Lee's approach. Ironically, the example Lee describes of the pitfalls of too narrowly reading Elizabethan plays within their topical context was one into which Poel would stumble. Lee cautions that students of his method "may be unable to prove any ingenious or partisan theory—may fail to show that Hamlet is identical with Essex." Poel would unfortunately attempt just such an identification in 1914. Lee closes this paragraph, however, with an assurance that the labor of such overreaching scholars would nonetheless "not be in vain" (5). I would suggest that, while Poel sometimes too closely identified Shakespeare's plays with the historical circumstances under which they were written, he also understood the greater benefit of reading these plays' political messages as parables for his own generation.

Lee notes some continuities between Elizabethan society and modern life, as when he writes of Domestic Tragedies like *Arden of Faversham* that "nothing excites the interest, and possibly the indignation, of a civilized nation so much nowadays as a murderous outrage in domestic life . . . it was, is, and probably ever will be so" (20). He is ambivalent, however, about correlating events in early modern plays with the contemporary circumstances of modern audiences. On the one hand, he acknowledges that most people "fail to understand or to appreciate any drama which is not capable of some personal or topical application." Lee noted that "at a time when national feeling is thoroughly alive there is often a popular craving for topical plays, which satisfies itself by forcing a topical interpretation on plays which belong to other categories" (34). Yet he cautions against what he perceives as inappropriate historical identifications, as when an

early nineteenth century audience responded to the anti-papal rhetoric of *King John* as a comment on the “Ecclesiastical Titles Bill” currently under debate (35). Lee’s acknowledgement of such readings nevertheless points the way to modern productions that would use Shakespeare’s plays to construct parallels with contemporary events. This was not Lee’s sole objective, but his essay recognizes the potential for such a didactic approach.

Inspired by *The Topical Side of the Elizabethan Drama*, Poel came to see a deep connection between Shakespeare’s plays and the historical environment in which they were written, a relationship Lee defined as “the harmony that subsisted between the Elizabethan drama and the national life of the era” (34). Lee was primarily concerned with identifying topical references in Elizabethan drama, among which were tributes to Essex. He sparked Poel’s interest when he wrote that “the tragedy of Essex’s life had deeply impressed itself on every Londoner, and [Shakespeare] readily turned to account the sympathies of his audience” (18). Poel became obsessed with the Earl’s role in the power struggle among Elizabeth’s advisers toward the end of her reign. Two weeks before his 1914 *Hamlet*, Poel wrote an article for the *Saturday Review* to argue against many of the stage traditions associated with this play. Poel devotes much of this piece to describing the political circumstances which he believed impacted *Hamlet* and Shakespeare’s other plays of the late Elizabethan period:

Who was to replace the old Burleigh in the confidence of the Queen? Was it to be Essex? Or Raleigh? Or Burleigh’s son—Robert Cecil? The bitter fight for supremacy led to Essex’s death on the scaffold in 1601, and Raleigh’s disgrace in 1603, thus leaving Robert Cecil in power. There was probably no more

unscrupulous intrigue carried on during Elizabeth's reign, and few residents in London could have been ignorant of what was taking place. (Poel, "Hamlet Retold" 73)

Poel linked this political turmoil directly to early modern theater. He even used it to explain recondite texts like the *Parnassus* plays. "The approaching death of Elizabeth, and the question as to who should be her successor," Poel wrote of these student-written works, "so overshadowed all other matters among the ruling political classes and heads of colleges that young discontents were left free to have their say" (*Monthly Letters* 100).

Poel saw Essex as directly influencing Shakespeare's dramaturgy. The Earl, he wrote, "for political reasons, encouraged Burbage and Shakespeare in their presentation of the historical plays" (*Monthly Letters* 78). With the Lord Chamberlain's Men serving as his personal propaganda ministry, Essex initiated a struggle for royal favor, the influence of which could be seen throughout the canon:

But in 1599 the Privy Council tried to prohibit the further representation of English historical plays because they were made use of for political purposes. In the previous year the death of Lord Burleigh had left the Queen without any equally great and disinterested counselor, and all the country was watching the political chess-board with anxiety. . . . Shakespeare must have watched that grim fight with the mind of a seer, and *Troilus and Cressida*, which appeared in 1598, *Henry IV part two*, *Henry V*, and *Hamlet*, are all plays containing disguised references to the times. Then, when the English histories are no longer countenanced, the poet-dramatist turns to Roman history and finds in *Julius Caesar* his opportunity for saying what he thinks about Essex's death. (Poel, "Hamlet Retold" 73)

Like much contextual scholarship before and since, Poel's interpretation is both speculative and reductive. What interests me, however, is the ideological position he

attributes to Shakespeare's works in response to the political circumstances of the Elizabethan era.

Poel saw Shakespeare as taking a stand with Essex against the political status quo. Many of his plays were therefore, for Poel, overtly oppositional. They "represented the revolutionist on the stage in a sympathetic light" (*Monthly Letters* 130), with the "revolutionist" understood as Essex. Poel staged many productions as allegories of the Earl's career and, by his 1931 *Coriolanus*, "reached the point where practically everyone was Essex" (Speaight, *William Poel* 255). The key question, with regard to my thesis, is whether Poel pursued these historical parallels merely as part of an archaist effort to recover the past, or instead sought to use this material to didactically instruct his contemporary audience. Such a moralistic use of history is consistent with Mazer's claim, in connection to the Elizabethan revival, that "history was a mirror in which the Edwardians looked to see an image of themselves" (*Refashioned* 50).

Many of Poel's writings take an aggressively activist stance toward interpreting the past. Such is the case with a 1925 *Manchester Guardian* article objecting to Shaw's *Saint Joan*. Poel begins by claiming that "to a genuine historian the writing of history has responsibilities of a kind that may almost be called sacred." These "responsibilities," however, have little in common with the kind of neutral objectivity to which most modern historians aspire. Poel chastises Shaw for writing an amoral version of Joan's tale in which (quoting Shaw) "it cannot be too clearly understood than there were no villains" (qtd. in "History in Drama" 5). He protests that "the inspirations of the Inquisition cannot be judged impartially to-day" ("History in Drama" 5) and quotes the compassionate plea

of Spanish playwright Martin Sierra, “Turn your eyes away when your brother is dying, and you’re an accomplice in his death” (qtd. in “History in Drama” 5). Poel ends by scoffing, “Mr. Shaw wishes his audience to believe that [Joan’s] death was a necessity and not a crime!” (“History in Drama” 5). Poel wanted nothing to do with a historical method that coldly isolated the factors leading up to a given event. For him, history was a form of didactic storytelling, and its lessons were essentialist.

Poel attributed to Shakespeare the notion that “one touch of nature makes the whole world kin” and asserted that “neither the poet nor his audience considered a play to be the expression of one particular age” (“Poetry in Drama” 699). Further evidence of this universalism can be found in an article Poel wrote for the *Asiatic Quarterly Review* justifying his production of Kalidasa’s Indian “masterpiece” *Sakuntala*. Poel suggested that this “greatest of all Indian dramatists, and our own Shakespeare, are more closely allied as poets and thinkers than is generally allowed by scholars” (“Hindu Drama” 320). Postmodern materialists would likely reject Poel’s suggestion of common bonds between all humanity regardless of local conditions. This position also seems inconsistent with Poel’s views about the role of specific historical conditions in producing early modern drama. One can see, however, in Poel’s early attempt at multicultural theater, the humanistic impulse that inspired it. A similar program of advocacy informed the “historical” settings of Poel’s later productions.

Poel’s political thought changed over time, especially in connection to economic theory. The financial failure of the Elizabethan Stage Society in 1905 led him to question the underpinnings of market capitalism. Lundstrom argues that this growing “interest in

socioeconomics was a logical extension of his historical stance adopted . . . after reading Sidney Lee's essay" (126). Other factors, however, also contributed to Poel's changing politics. The ever more destructive power of modern warfare led him to an increasingly vociferous pacifism. Poel also followed Bernard Shaw in becoming an advocate for women's emancipation. I contend that, in his later productions, Poel used Shakespeare's plays to express positions about these contemporary issues. To defend my assertion, I will closely examine three of Poel's mature productions—the 1912 *Troilus and Cressida*, the 1914 *Hamlet*, and the 1920 *All's Well That Ends Well* — for evidence of a political agenda.

Pacifism and *Troilus and Cressida* (1912)

William Poel clearly documented his commitment to pacifism. In the same piece in which he rejected Shaw's materialist interpretation of the Joan of Arc story, Poel wrote that "the truest definition of evil is that which represents it as something contrary to nature. The strongest objection that can be used against depriving a person of life is that it is an unnatural act and therefore an offence against the living" ("History in Drama" 5). Poel enlisted the posthumous assistance of Elizabethan dramatists in his pacifist crusade. In a letter to the *Times* he claimed that in *Caesar and Pompey* "Chapman denied the right of anyone to deprive another of his life," while reserving the option of suicide as a noble opposition to tyranny. Poel went on to assert, incongruently, that Shakespeare went even further in *Julius Caesar* because this play "did not defend suicide as being an heroic deed" ("The Right to Kill" 15). Poel even claimed that "today Macduff would be called a pacifist, since he refused to strike at Macbeth's conscripted men" (*Monthly Letters* 31).

The carnage of World War I affected Poel deeply. At the war's conclusion he advocated abandoning the Christian calendar and inaugurating 1918 as Year One. "It has become an absurdity," he wrote, "to talk about one man having died to save the world since five million men have laid down their lives for that purpose" (quoted in Speaight, *William Poel* 167). Poel saw the war as an expression of capitalist economic policies, which he increasingly opposed. He wrote of the victory celebration in London at war's end, ironically called a "peace pageant":

A country which has many churches and political institutions heavily endorsed is apt to perpetuate obscurantism among people who are simple and ingenuous. The saddest of all sights is that of a well-meaning race which has become the tool of those who think that nothing matters in the life of a nation but what is of gross and material advantage. To a country so misled there must come a day of awakening . . . As to the Peace Pageant, it is significant that the poorer classes were not largely represented, and that labour men apparently absented themselves. On the other hand, shop-keepers and their wives and children were to be seen everywhere. (*Monthly Letters* 116)

Here one can read Poel's sympathy for the primarily working class victims of the war, along with his contempt for both the ruling classes which had caused the conflict and the bourgeoisie, the "shop-keepers and their wives," who had profited from it. During the war, Poel rejected "the tub-thumping patriotism in vogue" (Speaight, *William Poel* 225). He refused to participate in anti-German hysteria and offended members of the Royal Society of Arts by praising Germany's "People's Theatre" at the height of hostilities in 1915 ("Germany and Shakespeare" 5).

In December 1912, with England already preparing for the inevitable conflict, Poel chose to produce *Troilus and Cressida*. The very decision to mount this play was

something of a political statement. It had been staged in England only once (“excluding,” as Moore notes, “Dryden’s adaptation”) since Shakespeare’s lifetime (Moore, “William Poel” 33, Taylor 245, Wright xx). Besides the single London performance in 1907, the only recorded modern performances of *Troilus* were in Germany in 1898 and 1904 (Wright xx). While he nowhere mentions these Munich and Berlin productions, Poel was keenly aware of recent German theatrical history. Part of his motivation to stage *Troilus* may have been to mitigate war fever by presenting a play that had been rediscovered by England’s current adversary.

Poel’s *Troilus and Cressida* was costumed in the manner of the late sixteenth century. “The Greeks,” Speaight notes, “were dressed as Elizabethan soldiers, smoking the tobacco which Raleigh had just introduced from Virginia, and the Trojans wore masque costumes of Elizabethan design” (*William Poel* 196). This costuming emphasized “the growing political unrest which marked the last few years of Elizabeth’s reign” which Poel felt “could not fail to find expression on the stage” in *Troilus* (*Shakespeare* 111). Yet Poel’s *Troilus and Cressida* was also more modern in style than many of his earlier efforts. The *Daily Chronicle* asserted that Poel’s “lighting experiments” made the production “not Elizabethan” and complained that Poel’s use of carpet and curtains amounted to “the whole thing [being] designed in the modernist of modern ways” (quoted in Garnett, *Troilus* 188). The production also attempted to connect thematically with the concerns of its 1912 audience.

Speaight writes that “we can detect in his liking for the play a tinge of that anti-militarism which was then blowing through the English intelligentsia” (*William Poel*

193). Some of Poel's interpretive choices also emphasized this topical commentary. Poel was careful to point out that, in spite of the production's Elizabethan costumes, he did not see the play as an early modern allegory. "It is not presumed that Achilles is Essex," Poel wrote, "nor that Ajax is Raleigh, nor Agamemnon Elizabeth, or that Shakespeare's audience for a moment supposed that they were" (*Shakespeare* 111). Poel further de-emphasized the parallel with Essex by cutting those "passages which admit reference to the Earl" in the third act dialogue between Achilles and Ulysses (O'Connor, *William Poel* 98). Apparently, Poel did not intend his *Troilus* to serve as belated propaganda for one or another faction at Elizabeth's court. Instead, he used his production to mock the bellicose posturing of early modern courtiers and therefore, by extension, similar braggadocio on the part of pre-war Londoners. Poel cut Troilus's angry speech at the end of the play, and concluded his production with the death of Achilles. Speaight sees in these cuts a "rooted distaste for invective" on Poel's part (*William Poel* 198) and senses in this moment and in the production overall "a plea for pacifism" (233). If so, then Poel's *Troilus and Cressida* was the first of many "anti-war" productions of the play staged in the twentieth century.

The *Times* reported that *Troilus* was to "mark the close of the series of productions of a similar character that Mr. Poel has given for more than 30 years past" ("Dinner to Mr. William Poel" 11), but his career actually continued for another two decades. At a dinner prematurely scheduled to celebrate his retirement, Poel said of *Troilus and Cressida* that it was "the most ethical thing that Shakespeare ever wrote" (quoted in Speaight, *William Poel* 193). The critics of his 1912 production did not agree. The *Times* called it "a strange, uncanny, disquieting affair" and complained of "the

ugliness of it . . . The mincing, detestable Cressida! The moping, ‘degenerate’ Troilus!” (Rev. of *Troilus and Cressida* 10). This was the general consensus of the newspapers, which “proved unusually cantankerous” (Speaight, *William Poel* 201).

A clue to the source of this indignation can be found in Poel’s writings on *Troilus and Cressida*. He emphasized its timeliness, claiming that “the play might have been written yesterday, while the treatment of the subject, in its modernity, is as far removed from *The Tempest* as it is from *Henry V*” (*Shakespeare* 114). The point of *Troilus*, for Poel, was “the false ethics underlying the Troy story, which Shakespeare meant to satirize” (113). These statements taken together indicate that Poel meant for his production to satirize the “false ethics” of his own modern age. Poel claimed of Shakespeare that “the stage in his time supplied the place now occupied by the press, and political discussions were carried on in public through the mouth of the actor” (107). He asserted that in *Troilus* the playwright “comes down from the clouds and says to his friends, ‘Now I will tell you something about your fellow creatures as they are in Elizabethan London’” (quoted in Speaight, *William Poel* 193). As Speaight notes, “In Edwardian London they were not so different” (193). The journal critics picked up on this parallel and resented it.

The one strongly favorable review came from Edward Garnett. While he did not comment directly on the production’s supposed pacifist content, he curiously claimed that it “undermine[d] the overweighted moral verdicts of its masculine commentators.” These male critics, according to Garnett, objected primarily to “Cressida’s fickleness! . . . She is shown us as pinning on her hat, visibly intent on her looks and on her change of fortune,

while Troilus is boring her” (Garnett, *Troilus* 185). Garnett may have hit on the feature that made the production so offensive. If Poel had linked a rejection of masculine military bravado with a challenge to the traditionally submissive role of women, as suggested by Garnett’s description of Cressida’s refusal to be impressed by the blustering Troilus, this would have proved doubly irksome to patriarchal theater-goers. Moore seems to express such angst when he describes as “distressing” the fact that “the greater part of Cressida’s plighting her troth . . . was omitted in order to emphasize the boredom she showed at Troilus’ protestations” (“William Poel” 33). Regrettably, Poel did not write at length about the production’s political content. He did note cryptically however, in a letter to W.J. Lawrence, that he was glad his *Troilus and Cressida* had “set people thinking” (quoted in Speaight, *William Poel* 199).

The politics of *Hamlet*

In 1914, William Poel made his most overt attempt to connect a production to the Elizabethan political milieu. In that year’s *Hamlet*, Gertrude was played as ancient, much older than Claudius. Poel intended her to represent Elizabeth in the final years of her reign. The male characters were made to resemble the various ministers and courtiers jockeying for power in her court. This was not lost on the critics. S.R. Littlewood wrote that “it all came upon one in a flash . . . Queen Bess and old Polonius-Burleigh, and Raleigh and Essex, and all the throng of splendid youth who fought for a moment’s favor at Elizabeth’s own court” (quoted in Lundstrom 115). The *Times* noted that “if you make the Queen elderly you also remind us of Elizabeth, whose hold on affairs had weakened by the time the play was first acted, and emphasize its ‘topical’ element (Rev. of *Hamlet*,

1914 9) . Poel saw Hamlet as “a revolutionary” (quoted in Lundstrom 121), and referred to the play in program notes for his 1914 production as “the revolt of youth” (quoted in Lundstrom 113). In an article this same year for the *Saturday Review*, Poel teasingly hinted that “it would not be difficult to name one or two young noblemen at Elizabeth’s Court who were distinctly of Hamlet’s temperament” (“Hamlet Retold” 7), but the Elizabethan revolutionary whom he had in mind as a model for Hamlet was Essex. Moore writes that Poel “was by this time obsessed with the Essex business” (“William Poel” 33). Poel saw as key to his interpretation the fact that Hamlet “lost the companionship of a noble father to find himself, as the young Essex did, at the mercy of a sanctimonious schemer,” referring to the Earl’s guardianship under Burleigh (“The King in ‘Hamlet’” 5).

Less obvious than the production’s references to the Elizabethan political situation was what, if any, didactic message Poel intended this *Hamlet* to relay to his twentieth century audience. While no critics at the time or since have seen a political agenda in Poel’s 1914 *Hamlet* directly related to the current situation in England, a letter to the *Saturday Review* protesting the production suggests that it touched a very contemporary nerve. Attributed only to “An Actress” this missive announced, “If Queen Gertrude—the ‘Beauteous Majesty’—was intended to suggest Queen Elizabeth in any way whatever, it was an exceedingly poor compliment to that august lady, and would certainly have landed the contemporary producer in a nasty damp dungeon, well deserved.” The actress objected to the “elderly early Victorian rigidity of propriety” with which Gertrude was portrayed (“Protection for Dramatists” 236). The root of the writer’s outrage can

perhaps be seen in her use of the adjective “Victorian.” While the writer may have intended her choice of phrase to refer more generally to a nineteenth-century cultural ideal, this usage might also betray a specific anxiety regarding the late queen. In 1914, the image of Gertrude as an elderly widowed queen habitually marked by “rigidity of propriety,” yet inappropriately engaging in romantic activity, would have sparked memories in much of the audience related to the contretemps surrounding “Mrs. Brown” toward the end of Victoria’s reign. The actress’ exclamation that there was “no scandal about Queen Elizabeth, I hope!” hints at such a connection (236).

Poel described the setting of the play as “a Danish court in which a terrible crime has been committed, and over which an avenging angel is hovering,” where “no one . . . is worthy to rule” and “the kingdom must be taken away and given to a stranger” (*Shakespeare* 157). He felt that “a community that did not expel this ‘canker’ out of its system was bound to have its health-springs poisoned.” Hamlet’s life, Poel wrote for the *Pall Mall Gazette* in 1913, was not “a failure” because “catastrophe was better than corruption” (“The King in ‘Hamlet’” 7). Poel expressed similarly apocalyptic ideas about modern England, which he described as “the saddest of all sights.” He wrote that “to a country so misled there must come a day of awakening” (*Monthly Letters* 116). Poel’s most extensive commentary on the evils of his own age was perhaps his 1920 pamphlet *What’s Wrong with the Stage*. He closed both this piece and his 1913 article on *Hamlet* with the same quote from *Macbeth*, “Things at the worst will cease, or else climb upward

To what they were before” (4. 2. 24-25, qtd. in “The King in ‘Hamlet’ 7; *What’s Wrong* 38). Poel believed things were “at the worst” both in his own society and in the world of *Hamlet*.

Poel’s 1914 production style “was not in the least Elizabethan” (Speaight 223). S.R. Littlewood notes the “darkened auditorium . . . [the] purple-carpeted, soft-trod stair and scene, with heavy velvet curtains,” and even what he termed “Gordon Craig suggestions of vast rectangularities for the Elsinore battlements” (quoted in Speaight 223). These design choices illustrate how little Poel’s later productions conformed to the doctrine of original practices that he espoused during the years of the Elizabethan Stage Society. Many critics see this variance as evidence of unfortunate decline. “Poel,” in this view, “became more eccentric as he grew older” (Hildy, *Shakesepeare* 15). There is no doubt some truth in this. Yet the departure from early modern staging in Poel’s later efforts also indicates that he was willing to experiment with a wide variety of theatrical forms in order to advance his vision of a particular play. At this point in his career, Poel believed that the political and societal influences on a play’s creation were more central to its meaning than were original staging conventions (Lundstrom 126). He also saw a play’s ideological message as transcending any particular set of theatrical practices. I believe that Poel was wrong about this. The medium of Elizabethan staging, in its rejection of expensive staging and technological effects, is its own message. His *Hamlet/Essex* would have been a more effective revolutionary if Poel had used less spectacle to stage the tragedy.

1914 was a time of great societal transformation. The remnants of the Victorian period were about to be swept away. Poel's *Hamlet* captured the essence of this moment by creating a parallel with the late Elizabethan era, during which similar anxiety about social and political upheavals dominated the cultural landscape. One aspect of change in Poel's era related to traditional gender roles. As Gary Taylor notes, "the only victors in World War I were women" (259), who were able to move into new fields of endeavor owing to a shortage of manpower in the war's aftermath. Poel used his 1920 *All's Well That Ends Well* to support women's efforts toward equal rights.

***All's Well That Ends Well* and the emancipation of women**

As in the case of *Hamlet*, Poel believed that *All Well That Ends Well* was inspired by topical events toward the end of Elizabeth's reign. Specifically, he thought that the play reflected the controversy surrounding the Earl of Southampton's secret marriage to Elizabeth Vernon in 1598 (Speaight, *William Poel* 233). For Poel's 1920 production, however, this Elizabethan context took a back seat to *All's Well*'s contemporary relevance. Design elements connected the production's setting to World War I. At least one scene was played in the dark, to create the effect of a military barracks after "lights out" (223). While records of this production are few and lack detail, Poel appears to have abandoned his normal practice of Elizabethan costuming. Instead, characters were dressed in contemporary clothes. Most notably, the king of France was wheeled about the stage in a modern wheelchair by a nurse in a V.A.D. uniform (Moore, "William Poel" 34). This organization, the Voluntary Aid Detachments, was comprised primarily of women who cared for wounded soldiers. As casualties increased the government was

overwhelmed, and the V.A.D. became increasingly essential to the war effort. These female volunteers became symbols of the growing power of women in English society during and after the war (Basford). In *All's Well* the most powerful male figure is dependent on Helena for his well-being (she cures him of a fistula). By adding the wheelchair and the uniformed nurse Poel introduced a second female figure in a position of power. The king could literally not make a move without her. This increased the challenge to traditional gender roles already inherent in Shakespeare's play. The use of contemporary dress further highlighted the topical resonance of this theme with Poel's postwar audience. His 1920 production of *All's Well That Ends Well* expressed Poel's long-standing interest in the emancipation of women.

Throughout his career, William Poel employed what today is called "non-traditional casting" by placing women performers in roles written for men. This puzzled both his contemporaries and later critics, partly because it conflicted with their image of Poel as an antiquarian. While the *Times* in 1910 took this device to represent "the characteristically Shakespearean element of the epicene" (Rev. of "Two Gentlemen" 12), Moore called it instead a "paradoxical . . . inversion of Elizabethan practice" ("William Poel" 32). Speaight considered it a "disconcerting perversit[y]" (*William Poel* 138) and a "weakness" which "quite lacked Elizabethan precedent" (130). Max Beerbohm asked, "That the principal male should be played by a young lady, is that sound archeology?" (*More Theatres* 146). Beerbohm also objected to a more famous contemporary instance of cross-gender casting, Sarah Bernhardt's Hamlet. "Sarah ought not to have supposed," Beerbohm wrote, "that Hamlet's weakness set him in any possible relationship to her

own feminine mind and body” (*Around Theatres* 37). Beerbohm’s identification of “weakness” with “feminine” is typical of the period. It was partly, I suggest, to reject such paradigms that Poel sought to create greater opportunity for women in his theatrical process. Moore notes that Poel’s use of cross-gender casting increased after the dissolution of the Elizabethan Stage Society in 1905 (“William Poel” 32). This supports my contention that Poel’s work became increasingly politicized during this period, if one is willing to grant some polemic significance to his casting procedures. Poel’s assertions that there was “no particular advantage gained in excluding the fair sex from their modern privileges” (“Shakespeare on the Stage” 175) and that “the stage-manager’s choice should depend upon who can arouse most interest in the speaking of the words” (*Monthly Letters* 29) demonstrate that his unusual casting was motivated, at least in part, by a desire to provide equal opportunities for women.

Gender equity, however, was not Poel’s only consideration. His obsession with the musical mix of voices that he perceived as inherent in Shakespeare’s plays also motivated his personnel decisions. Poel explains thus:

Shakespeare . . . contrasts the voices of the speakers, so as to get a sort of orchestral effect out of mere vocalisation. In *Twelfth Night*, if the play is properly cast, the selection of voices will be much as follows: VIOLA (Mezzo-Soprano); OLIVIA (Contralto); SEBASTIAN (Alto); ANTONIO (Basso Profundo); SIR TOBY (Bass); SIR ANDREW (Falsetto); MALVOLIO (Baritone); MARIA (High Soprano); ORSINO (Tenor); CLOWN (tenor). (*Monthly Letters* 94)

Claris Glick suggests that “it was partially this interest in casting by voices which made Poel often use women for men’s parts” (18). Without women, he would have had no altos or sopranos.

Poel's method of vocal coaching, the tedious process of "taking the tones," yielded decidedly mixed results. Speaight notes that "there were moments . . . when the sounds that came to one from the stage seemed equally remote from nature, poetry, or realism. They resembled the bestial agonies of the slaughter-house" (*William Poel* 69). Women may have been more tolerant of Poel's idiosyncratic methods and of the sometimes-unsatisfactory results his techniques produced. The *Times Literary Supplement* wrote in a 1952 retrospective of Poel's career that "he could not persuade actors already fixed in other methods to 'take his tones,' and this led him to prefer amateurs because they were more malleable, and even to put women in men's parts because they would give him more time for rehearsal" ("William Poel" 453). O'Connor similarly suggests that Poel's preference for female performers can "be explained not physiologically but sociologically. The middle-class women who were Poel's amateur actresses . . . had more time free for his exhaustive last-minute rehearsal schedules than had their husbands brothers and fathers" (*William Poel* 64).

Poel was coy about his reasons for casting women in men's roles. He wrote that "a boy dressed up as a girl and a girl dressed up as a girl is, to the eye at least, the same thing" ("Shakespeare on the Stage" 178) and that "the difficulties which arise from differences of figure and sex can to a great extent be overcome by the costumier and wig maker" (*Monthly Letters* 29). Poel sometimes, however, linked his casting practices to dissatisfaction with traditional gender identities as defined by Edwardian society:

On the English stage girls are needed to act the boy lovers; for here young men fail lamentably . . . In the Englishman the necessary quality of voice is wanting to give physical expression to words of love. In real life his lovemaking is comic and

hopelessly unromantic because unemotional. But there are no similar drawbacks in the Englishwoman, whose voice is capable of expressing delicate feeling, while at the same time it is flexible enough to delineate passion, and to indicate the masculine traits of emotion. (*Monthly Letters* 28-29)

Traditional critics have been uncomfortable with this description, as they have been generally with what Barry Jackson called Poel's "abnormalities in casting" (89). Moore writes that "one wishes he had said that he found girls' voices easier to train and more flexible and left it at that" ("William Poel" 32). This unease may be due to the passage's ideological significance. Poel's rejection here of what he perceives as the unexpressive quality of typical English masculinity and his contention that women were capable of embodying traits normally thought of as "masculine" suggest that he may have shared with Shaw the desire to define new boundaries of acceptable behavior for both men and women.

If Poel did participate in the Shavian quest for a redefinition of gender roles, his choice of *All's Well That Ends Well* to address this issue would have met with the Irish playwright's approval. Shaw felt that this play represented an "experiment, repeated nearly three hundred years later in *A Doll's House*," in which the "nobler nature" of a wife is contrasted with the venality of her husband (*Shaw on Shakespeare* 7). He connected the play to contemporary struggles for women's emancipation by noting that

the stock objection of the *Brixton Family Shakespear* to *All's Well That Ends Well*—that the heroine is a lady doctor, and that no lady of any delicacy could possibly adopt a profession which involves the possibility of her having to attend cases such as that of the king in this play, who suffers from a fistula . . . is, fortunately, getting harder to understand nowadays than it once was. (*Shaw on Shakespeare* 8)

Unfortunately, by 1920 Shaw had long ceased critiquing plays for the *Saturday Review*. He did not comment extensively in print on Poel's production of *All's Well*, but in a prefatory "Aside" to Lillah McCarthy's 1933 autobiography Shaw claimed that he had shaken "serious impostures, including that of the whole rotten convention as to women's place and worth in human society which had made the Victorian sham possible. But for that I needed the vigorous artificiality of the executive art of the Elizabethan stage" (Shaw, "Aside" 8). It was typical of Shaw to write primarily of himself in the preface to someone else's autobiography. It was also not uncommon for him to assume credit for the accomplishments of others. Plays like *Mrs. Warren's Profession* clearly challenged "the whole rotten convention as to women's place and worth," but it is not clear how the playwright had ever used the "art of the Elizabethan stage" for this purpose. Shaw had, however, been invaluable in getting Poel's work noticed during his years as a journal critic. Besides writing favorable notices, Shaw had been a major fundraiser for the Elizabethan Stage Society, issuing appeals in print and often contributing from his own pocket (Shaw, *Letters to Granville Barker* 97). The statement in McCarthy's book is cryptic, but Shaw might have seen Poel's *All's Well* as the moment when "the Elizabethan Stage" was used to "shake" current assumptions about gender roles (Shaw, "Aside" 8). If so, he may have felt justified, as one of Poel's major benefactors, in taking some of the credit.

Poel's own writings about *All's Well* complement those of Shaw. "Bertram," Poel wrote, "is no hero, and it is even questionable whether Helena does not compromise her self-respect in wishing to marry him" (*Monthly Letters* 35). Only when Bertram "is

degraded in the eyes of his social equals” does he “realise how dependent he is on a woman’s loving heart to protect him from himself” (36). Regrettably, Poel’s *All’s Well* did not receive the press attention afforded his *Troilus and Cressida* or the 1914 *Hamlet*. It is therefore impossible to measure its political content by the immediate reaction of journal critics. Speaight claims that the production was “a plea for the removal of class barriers where the affections between men and women were in question” and that “for Poel the play had an ethical significance which gave it a place in the history of women’s emancipation” (*William Poel* 233). Moore similarly sees Poel’s *All’s Well* as a “plea” for “the emancipation of women” (“William Poel” 34). The evidence these scholars cite relates to the modernity of the production’s design. This radical departure from Poel’s norm of Elizabethan costuming constituted an attempt to connect the situation of Helena to that of women in the audience, who had only recently been given the vote and who were, like Shakespeare’s lady doctor, striving for acceptance.

Peter Keegan

William Poel expressed his political and philosophical ideals through an identification with the character of Peter Keegan in George Bernard Shaw’s *John Bull’s Other Island*. Poel played Keegan in a 1906 production. Harley Granville Barker (whose name was not hyphenated until after 1918) performed the role in the play’s 1905 premiere but, according to Elmer Salenius, “did not succeed completely” (5). Poel, on the other hand, played Keegan for over one hundred performances (Speaight, *William Poel* 190). It was an unusual thespian triumph for Poel, who never demonstrated any “serious talent for acting” (Speaight, *William Poel* 29). C.E. Montague gave him a rare positive

review for his performance as Angelo in *Measure for Measure* (“Art of Mr. Poel” 243), and his Pandarus was generally well received (Garnett, *Troilus* 190). But even sympathetic observers concede that “Poel’s genius lay in other areas than his acting” (Payne 91). Lundstrom notes that “Poel freely admitted that he considered his voice too weak to be a really good actor” (31). Shaw’s admonition to Barker (who directed the 1906 production) that “all you have to do with *J.B.O.I.* is to keep Poel *shouting*” supports this verdict (*Letters to G.B.* 156).

Shaw and Barker were not sure that Poel would be up to the task. The playwright proposed a number of flexible casting options to cover their bets “if Poel proved impossible as Keegan” (*Letters to G.B.* 66). Yet Poel succeeded because he had been type-cast. Shaw wrote to him at the start of the rehearsal period, “Do not make any attempt to *act* Keegan . . . You need not make up; you need not wear a wig; you need not change your coat” (*Collected Letters* 641-42). With Keegan, Shaw wrote Poel, “You can be more really yourself than you can be in actual life” (642). Poel later confessed to Shaw, “Yes, I admit, that I was Keegan and needed no make-up to publish the fact” (quoted in Speaight 190) and elsewhere wrote, “I satisfied the management because I was Keegan myself and had not attempted to act him!” (“Incompetent Actors” 8).

Peter Keegan is a saintly Irish mystic. A former priest, he was forced to leave the cloth due to the radical spiritual beliefs he developed while administering extreme unction to an “elderly Hindoo.” The “clear-eyed resignation” of this non-believer in the face of death demonstrated to the curate “the mystery of this world.” Keegan came to see Earth as “very clearly a place of torment and penance, a place where the fool flourishes

and the good and wise are hated and persecuted”(Shaw, “John Bull” 183). The function of life was “as the Indian revealed . . . to expiate crimes committed by us in a former existence” (184). Along with this Karmic philosophy, Keegan adopted a respect for all living things, including asses, grasshoppers, and pigs, whom he addresses as “brother” (199). Poel would likely have been sympathetic to this championing of animal rights, as he often rehearsed his productions “in a vegetarian restaurant” (Speaight, *William Poel* 70). Poel produced Kalidasa’s *Sakuntala* in 1899 and 1913 and wrote his piece, “Hindu Drama on the English Stage,” for the *Asiatic Quarterly Review* in the year of this second production. One can see in Poel’s choice of this play and in his sympathetic treatment of Kalidasa in his article something of the fictional priest’s admiration for Eastern culture and philosophy.

Keegan’s transcendental resignation, however, does not prevent him from speaking out against injustice. He recognizes and chastises the imperialistic greed behind the development scheme of the “conquering Englishman” Thomas Broadbent, who plans to swindle local farmers out of their land and enrich himself by spoiling the Irish countryside (Shaw, “John Bull” 196). Poel played Keegan shortly after the collapse of the Elizabethan Stage Society, at a time when his thought and artistic activity were becoming increasingly politicized. His critique of current theatrical business practices echoes the condemnation by Keegan of Broadbent’s development scheme. The key similarity is that both systems were designed to *not* make money in the short term. Poel wrote of theatrical speculators, “What they consider carefully is the amount of capital needed to keep a play running at a London theatre, at a *loss*” until it gained notoriety (“Truth About the Stage”

564). Profit was then made through the international distribution of a play's acting rights, with little consideration for investors in the original production, because "although nine out of ten of these experiments are failures, there are still always fresh applicants waiting at the stage door" (*Monthly Letters* 6). Keegan similarly debunks Broadbent:

When the hotel becomes insolvent your English business habits will secure the thorough efficiency of the liquidation. You will reorganize the scheme efficiently; you will liquidate its second bankruptcy efficiently; you will get rid of its original shareholders efficiently after efficiently ruining them; and you will finally profit very efficiently by getting that hotel for a few shillings on the pound. (Shaw, "John Bull" 200-01)

A "chicken or the egg" quality informs some of the similarities between William Poel and Peter Keegan. Poel did not write extensively about the commercial corruption he perceived in the theater until after playing the part of Keegan. He may therefore have taken some of his talking points from the fictional Irishman. At the same time, essential attributes in Poel's character made him an appropriate choice for the role. Keegan and Poel both illustrated the "vigorous morality" which William Wolfe identifies as the "emotional core of Radicalism" (8). Both were, as Ben Iden Payne wrote of Poel, "idealist[s] and quite indifferent to worldly success" (85).

The Irish mystic and the eccentric theater artist each possessed an unworldly, saint-like quality. When Keegan protests to Patsy Farrell, "Don't kneel to me: I'm not a saint," the peasant responds ("with intense conviction" as per the stage directions), "On in throth yar, sir" (Shaw, "John Bull" 141). W. (William) Bridges-Adams writes of Poel that he had "some attribute of sainthood" (quoted in Styan 47), and Payne suggests that Poel's "face was reminiscent of austere medieval saints" (86). Speaight claims that Poel

was “the nearest approach to John the Baptist that any theatre has either ignored or followed” (*Shakespeare* 132) and elsewhere refers to him as “a *revenant* from some world . . . whose mystery he wore like a cloak” (*William Poel* 183). Lillah McCarthy suggests whose ghostly spirit Poel may have represented when she writes that upon meeting him for the first time she “saw William Shakespeare” (28). Like Keegan, Poel rejected traditional religion for a broader spiritual path linked to an agenda of economic reform. “I am not interested,” he wrote in a letter to his nephew, “in any religion that ignores the ethical and economic conditions of life which create so much injustice and unhappiness in this world” (quoted in Speaight, *William Poel* 227).

While Poel and Keegan strongly resisted greed and venality and were quick to point out injustice, both ultimately resigned themselves to the impossibility of satisfactory change. They were men for whom, as Speaight writes of Poel, “battles are never won, because the victory that [they] strove for was absolute, never to be gained in an imperfect world” (*William Poel* 254). Keegan notes with melancholy before his final exit, “I only make the hearts of my countrymen harder when I preach to them: the gates of hell still prevail against me” (Shaw, “John Bull” 203). Poel expressed a similar sentiment. “I was not born to live in a corrupt age,” he confessed to his nephew, “and when I see all those about me selling their immortal souls for the pure love of silver, I suppose I cannot conceal my disgust and that makes me unpopular” (quoted in Speaight, *William Poel* 239). In 1932, a committee commissioned a portrait of Poel in commemoration of his eightieth birthday. The *Times* announced that “Professor Henry Tonks has agreed to paint the portrait” and solicited contributions to cover its cost (“Mr.

William Poel: A Tribute” 10). Poel at first refused to have his portrait painted. He only consented when Tonks agreed to portray him in the costume of Peter Keegan (Speaight, *William Poel* 264-65).

Conclusion

William Poel wrote that “Shakespeare live[d] as an alien in a philistine world” (*What’s Wrong* 17). While there is little in the biography of the self-made gentleman from Stratford to suggest such an identification, it describes rather well Poel’s own position. His ascetic temperament led him to reject the lavish pictorial realism of Herbert Beerbohm Tree and the equally elaborate expressionism of Edward Gordon Craig in favor of the minimalist aesthetic of the Elizabethan revival. While he looked to the past for answers, Poel did not slavishly pursuing antiquarian reconstruction. Instead, he embraced the key early modern elements of a thrust configuration, continuous action, and a (comparatively) bare stage to reject the technologically complex and capital-intensive theatrical status quo. In Poel’s alternative paradigm, as John Gielgud noted, “all the hectic research for novelty—the atmospheric heights and depths and ingenuities of designers . . . all this would no longer be possible, nor even matter any more” (quoted in Speaight, *William Poel* 275).

Poel’s artistic agenda had a political aspect, as it challenged the positivist mindset which underpinned industrial capitalism. The inherent humanism of the actor-centered Elizabethan revival also protected Poel from the seduction of fascism to which many of his fellow Modernists succumbed. This opposition to conservative and far-right ideologies belies the reactionary status often attributed to Poel and the Elizabethan

revival by postmodern critics. Poel was deeply committed to understanding the influence of political and socio-economic factors on both early modern plays and their modern productions. This led him to scrutinize the shortcomings of twentieth century England. He strove passionately to reform the theater and society of his era, and his legacy should reflect this effort.

CHAPTER II

HARLEY GRANVILLE BARKER

Introduction

Harley Granville Barker and Nugent Monck were almost exact contemporaries. Barker was born on 25 November 1877 (Purdom 2), and Monck less than three months later on 4 February 1878 (Hildy, *Shakespeare* 6). Their lives, however, ended very differently. Monck survived until 21 October 1958. Shortly before, in June of that year, he staged *Elizabethan Patchwork*, a performance comprised of scenes from John Lyly's *Campaspe* and Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus*. This was Monck's last production in a career that lasted fifty-eight years (151). Barker died twelve years earlier on 31 August 1946. At the time of his death, he had been largely retired from work in the theater for over three decades. By the end of his life, writes his biographer C.B. Purdom, Barker "was suffering from delusions and was very unhappy" (275). "One day in the last months," Purdom writes, Barker "said to a friend who was with him, 'I feel my life is useless'" (277). In the following two chapters, I will examine the forces that shaped the lives of Monck and Barker to such different ends and consider their very different contributions to the Elizabethan revival.

William Poel directly influenced both Barker and Monck. Barker played Richard II for The Elizabethan Stage Society in 1899 and, according to Purdom, this was his "first notable success" as a performer (21). In its review of this production, the *Times* called

Barker a “well-graced and intelligent actor, with gifts especially fitting him for romantic drama” (Rev. of *Richard II*, dir. William Poel 11). Nugent Monck first worked for Poel when he played the role of Fellowship in the Society’s 1902 revival of *Everyman* (Hildy, *Shakespeare* 7). Monck went on to stage manage many of Poel’s productions including, probably, a 1903 *Edward II* in which Barker played the lead (Hildy, “Reviving” 27). The position of “Stage Manager” entailed more responsibilities than it does today, and Monck was instrumental in instituting the advances in staging that proved so influential in Poel’s 1910 *Two Gentlemen of Verona* at His Majesty’s Theatre (Hildy, *Shakespeare* 12).

In very different ways, Monck and Barker advanced Poel’s ideas throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Barker’s Shakespeare productions at the Savoy between 1912 and 1914 were highly influential although, as I will argue, they had only a tangential relationship to the ideals of the Elizabethan revival. After his retirement from the stage, Barker advocated early modern staging practices in his *Prefaces to Shakespeare*. These writings, rather than Barker’s practical example, helped inspire later Elizabethanist practitioners including Tyrone Guthrie. Monck built a playhouse on a modified Elizabethan model in Norwich, with no proscenium and limited seating right and left of the stage. There he mounted all of Shakespeare’s plays (the first modern producer/director to do so), along with hundreds of other classical and contemporary works. Monck was hampered by the faulty scholarship of his time regarding historical accuracy, but he nevertheless conclusively demonstrated over his decades at the Maddermarket that it was possible to successfully produce Shakespeare’s plays without the elaborate scenic devices of the proscenium stage. It was at the Maddermarket that

Guthrie first saw Shakespeare presented in such a manner (Guthrie, *Life* 84). Monck's practical example, along with Barker's theoretical arguments, inspired Guthrie's initial experiments in early modern staging.

Monck's example similarly encouraged many other theater practitioners to explore alternative approaches to Shakespeare including, as Franklin J. Hildy writes, W. Bridges-Adams, Robert Atkins, Barry Jackson, and Harcourt Williams. Yet Monck's contribution has not been widely recognized by later scholars. Part of the problem may be that, as Hildy notes, not all artists were "so frank in confessing their debt as Tyrone Guthrie," who freely acknowledged Monck as a mentor (Hildy, *Shakespeare* 121). Harley Granville Barker also inspired many of these same directors and, in most accounts, Barker's impact has been viewed as predominant to the point of overshadowing and, indeed, obliterating that of Monck. J.L. Styan, for instance, lists as having "been touched by [Barker's] vision" the same people Hildy describes as disciples of Monck: Barry Jackson, W. Bridges-Adams, Robert Atkins, and Harcourt Williams (*Shakespeare Revolution* 106). But Styan makes no mention of Monck's parallel influence in his brief discussion of the Maddermarket (124-25). Elmer Salenius similarly writes that Barker's "methods were followed at the Old Vic, by Barry Jackson at the Birmingham Repertory . . . and by the New Shakespeare Company at Stratford under W. Bridges-Adams." Salenius notes that "Tyrone Guthrie acknowledges his indebtedness to Barker in his Shakespeare productions in the elimination of realistic scenery and the use of a permanent 'structure,' with the actors close to the audience, with no cuts and no pauses for scene changes" (22) but does not mention that Guthrie, in his autobiography, cites

Nugent Monck's 1930 production of *Love's Labour's Lost* as his immediate inspiration for adopting these practices (Guthrie, *Life* 84). Guthrie himself overlooks Monck later in *A Life in the Theatre*, when he writes of Shakespeare on stage in the twentieth century, "Then came William Poel and after him Granville-Barker, who between them revolutionized British, and thence American, ideas of Shakespearean production" (204).

My point is not merely that Monck deserves more credit than he has received for promoting early modern staging practices. Rather, I wish to suggest that by emphasizing Barker's influence scholars have advanced a literary rather than a theatrical vision of the Elizabethan revival, justifying the ideological charges leveled against this movement by some postmodern critics. Unlike Poel, Monck, and Guthrie, Barker saw Shakespeare's text as sacrosanct in performance, giving credence to William Worthen's assertion that the "strength and simplicity of Renaissance Staging arises from the openly rhetorical gesture of fidelity to the text" (Worthen, *Authority* 64). Barker, especially in his early writings and in his productions at the Savoy, seemed at times obsessed with maintaining every word of what he took to be the text as Shakespeare wrote it. In 1910, he chastised Max Reinhardt for cutting the text of a German-language *Comedy of Errors* in Berlin. "Certainly it is not the play as Shakespeare wrote it," Barker laments. "Much of its flashing rhetoric has gone . . . and as it is to me the play's most fascinating quality I cannot forgive Reinhardt for its loss." Barker warns that if the Teutonic director "tries his inventive powers upon *King Lear* I shall do my best to assassinate him publicly" ("Theatre in Berlin" 6). Performed in German, this *Comedy of Errors* was already "not the play as Shakespeare wrote it." Shakespeare's "flashing rhetoric" had been sufficiently

transformed by translation as to render illogical the strict agenda of textual fidelity which Barker advocated. Similarly, rather than cut obscure jokes from *Love's Labour's Lost*, Barker in his 1927 *Preface* to this play proposes “a glossary in the program” and even suggests “a preliminary lecture,” before rejecting this idea because “it would leave the actors with too hard a task turning classroom back to theater” (*Prefaces* 4: 1).

The other leading figures in the Elizabethan revival all took a far more liberal attitude toward editing and adapting early modern plays to suit the needs of performance. William Poel did not share Barker's excessive respect for the text, leading Marion O'Connor to compare Poel's approach to those of Nahum Tate and Charles Marowitz (“Useful” 24). Nugent Monck cut the entire first act of *Pericles* from two productions of the play (Hildy, “Reviving” 387) and took such liberties with his 1946 *Cymbeline* at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre that on the evening of that production's premiere Monck “thanked heaven that the author was well dead and so could not be waiting for him that night” (quoted in Hildy, “Reviving” 384). Tyrone Guthrie, displaying a similar lack of reverence for the received text, interpolated original lines “in undistinguished but unpretentious blank verse” and an extended scene of non-textual comic business into several productions of *All's Well That Ends Well* (Guthrie, “Dominant” X1). Yet because Barker wrote so much, and because his writings have been taken as representative of the movement as a whole, the entire Elizabethan revival has been tainted with the charge of excessive fidelity to a literary “Shakespeare.”

Barker's literary bent is evident in his non-Aristotelian emphasis on character over plot in dramatic interpretation. This preference is apparent in his critical writings. In

Barker's theatrical practice it manifests itself in adherence to a psychologically realistic approach to acting based on the offstage history of dramatic characters. J. M. Barrie parodied Barker's typical advice to actors as, "I want you to come on like a man whose brother has a chicken farm in Gloucestershire" (qtd. in Dymkowski 150). Margaret Webster's anecdote regarding a friend's experience with Barker describes a similar method:

At the first rehearsal of May's first entrance in *The Madras House* he told her: "From the moment you come in you must make the audience understand that you live in a small town in the provinces and visit a great deal with the local clergy; you make slippers for the curate and go to dreary tea-parties." She realized the value of these admonitions. But she was used to working through the lines; and the line, in this case, was "How do you do?" (Webster quoted in Salmon 106)

Barker seems to have thought of dramatic characters as bringing on stage with them the kind of psychological and biographical baggage carried by the people one meets in modernist novels. There are, of course, advantages to this approach. The American "Method" is largely based on it. Psychological realism is of only limited value in approaching Shakespeare, however, whose characters have no life offstage. An actress who seeks to realistically describe Hermione's life story between her apparent death in Act One and her resurrection in Act Five, for instance, only courts frustration. Just as Barker's criticism was often plagued by the kind of excessive character analysis famously mocked by L.C. Knights in "How Many Children had Lady Macbeth?", his novelistic approach to acting often confused rather than edified the performers with whom he worked.

Barker wrote in the Introduction to his *Prefaces*, “The text of a play is a score waiting [sic] performance” (*Prefaces* 1: 5). This is typical of those kinds of performance criticism which, William Worthen asserts, “avowedly locate performance . . . as supplemental to the designs of the text” (Worthen, “Deeper” 444), thereby valuing the authorial intent of a dead playwright above the creative contributions of living actors and directors. Cary M. Mazer sees this philosophy as having enabled an unequal partnership between academic critics and theater practitioners, which served to reduce the power of performance. “For one brief period of time, in the mid-twentieth century,” Mazer writes, “directors *did* define the script as a ‘score’ waiting to be ‘realized’; no wonder that scholarly score-readers felt that they could finally communicate with them” (Mazer, “Historicizing” 164). Among the major proponents of the Elizabethan revival, however, only Harley Granville Barker embraced this particularly literary vision of theater. Poel, Monck, and Guthrie all valued more highly the role of directors and actors in creating theatrical meaning. Guthrie went perhaps furthest in this regard. James Forsyth summarizes Guthrie’s attitude as “the first thing a producer had to do was to decide what the play was about, and the last person to consult should be the author” (Forsyth 219). “I would lay any money,” Guthrie said in a 1952 Lecture to the Royal Society of Arts, “that Shakespeare had only the vaguest idea of what he was about when he wrote *Hamlet*” (quoted in Forsyth 219).

Barker’s literary prejudice earned the enthusiastic praise of critics like Muriel St. Clare Byrne, who boasts that “First and last . . . Barker was absolute for the integrity of the text” (Byrne, Foreword xxii). For Byrne, Barker’s commitment to Shakespeare’s

authorial intent overshadowed his advocacy of Elizabethan staging. Indeed, the value of Barker's work was to be found in his rejection of such theatrical matters:

By not campaigning against the proscenium arch and by not espousing the cause of the Elizabethan theatre or the open stage or his own experimental stage, Granville-Barker did the theatre a great service . . . he gave producers and actors the fundamental task of studying the texts to discover the author's intentions, instead of giving them a new toy to play with, before they were ready for it *or* it for them. (Byrne, Introduction xxxvii)

Byrne also attributes this anti-theatrical bias backward from Barker to Poel. "We must thank Poel and Barker," she writes, "and their devotion to drama first and theatre afterwards" (Byrne, Foreword xiv). Poel, concerned primarily with the life of plays on stage, would likely have rejected such thanks. But Byrne is led to her conclusion partly by Barker's own emphasis on what he portrays as the literary quality of Poel's work. He writes little about Poel's concerns regarding staging, and instead typically refers to his predecessor's respect for Shakespeare's language. Barker wrote for the *Daily Mail* in 1912 that he was "grateful" to Poel, "who taught me how swift and passionate a thing, how beautiful in its variety, Elizabethan blank verse might be when tongues were trained to speak and ears acute to hear it" (rpt. in *Granville Barker and his Correspondents* 528). When Barker did write of Poel's staging methods, he was generally dismissive in a manner that recalls the critiques of William Archer and Max Beerbohm. "I don't go as far as Mr. Poel," Barker told the *Evening News* in 1912, "I think his method is somewhat archaeological" (qtd. Kennedy, *Granville Barker* 151).

In this chapter, I will evaluate the contributions of Barker to the recovery of early modern staging conventions. I will begin by providing some biographical context in an

attempt to discern the ideological underpinnings of his work. I will then analyze Barker's Shakespeare productions including his 1904 *Two Gentlemen of Verona* at the Court Theatre and his 1940 *King Lear* at the Old Vic as well as his more famous efforts at the Savoy. I will argue that Barker's productions prior to 1915 had only a tenuous connection to the principles of early modern staging advocated by Poel, and that the 1940 *Lear* was his most "Elizabethan" effort. I will then examine Barker's *Prefaces to Shakespeare* and other critical writings. In some of these, particularly those written prior to 1930, Barker advocates an adherence to early modern practices which he had not applied to his work at the Savoy. I will trace what I perceive as attempts by some scholars to attribute the ideas of Barker's *Prefaces* retroactively to his Savoy productions, thereby defining them as more Elizabethan than was actually the case. I will examine the gradual migration from Barker's early intention stated in the Introduction to *The Players Shakespeare* series of "presenting the plays from the point of view of their performance upon the stage," so that "the prefaces themselves may best be thought of as the sort of address a producer might make to a company upon their first meeting to study the play" (rpt. in *More Prefaces* 43), toward the cerebral character-based criticism that dominates his later essays. I will explore how this shift corresponded to Barker's increasing distance from the realities of theatrical production and his growing identification with the literary establishment.

Biographical context

Some scholars (and many of Barker's theatrical colleagues) have tied the unhappiness of his final years to Barker's decision to abandon work as a theater practitioner in order to become a man of letters. "His true place of work was as producer

and dramatist, and he deserted it,” Purdom writes. “When he shut himself out of the theatre he lost his vocation, and died as an artist” (285). “It was a profound pity,” W. Bridges-Adams lamented in funereal terms of Barker’s decision to leave the stage, “He was not yet forty” (Bridges-Adams, *Lost Leader* 13). Lewis Casson, who co-directed *King Lear* with Barker at the Old Vic in 1940 on one of the few occasions when he came out of retirement, suggests that Barker’s mortal passing was inevitably anti-climactic. “His death was a heavy loss,” Casson writes. But he adds, “to us of the theatre . . . the blow fell thirty years earlier when he gave up the struggle, threw off the dust of battle and became a mere professor” (Casson, “Foreword” viii). G.B. Harrison expresses even more dismay, and places Barker lower on the academic food chain, when he writes that the “genius who produced *Twelfth Night* had degenerated into a Visiting Professor” (230). While the sense of sadness and betrayal on the part of Barker’s fellow thespians is understandable, it does not tell the whole story regarding his retirement. Barker’s withdrawal from the theater coincided with his second marriage to a wealthy woman who required that he abandon the boards. Ralph Berry therefore observes, “What looked like a sellout to some stage people might well appear plain common sense to an objective observer. And, I think, to Barker” (“Two Great Originals” 376).

Many show folks lamented Barker’s move from stage to study, but some later critics celebrated this choice. Byrne for instance lauds Barker’s decision by proclaiming, “The writer by vocation had kept his appointment with fate” (Byrne, Foreword xiv). Barker had apparently long planned to give up the theater for a scholarly career. Felix Aylmer writes that Barker once “in mid-Atlantic . . . confided to a fellow-passenger,

John Drinkwater, that he had early planned his life to consist of ten years acting and ten years production, the balance to be devoted to writing” (31), and Christine Dymkowsi suggests that by the time of his retirement “Barker himself was quite ready to exchange directing for a writing career” (140). Barker had never been completely comfortable working for an audience. He was forced onto the stage at a young age by his mother, a variety performer who “gained a living as a reciter and bird-mimic” (Purdom 3). Purdom writes that Mrs. Barker “brought her son, Harley, with her, teaching him to recite, and he appeared on the platform in a sailor suit,” adding that “he must have hated this life” (4). While not as desperate as the early career of Edmund Kean, Barker’s experiences as a child performer left him with a life-long bitterness regarding the need to please a fickle public. In a 1937 article written for the BBC to protest cinematic adaptations of Shakespeare, Barker indulged in the following digression:

If an audience can be a stimulus to the actors facing it, it can also be a very demoralizing. It expects to be entertained, and the actors soon sense its boredom when it is not. And if the best they can do is not entertaining it, they are tempted to try something a little worse; and if this fails, to lower and lower their standards until the biggest idiot there cannot fail to appreciate what they are doing. I fear that more good actors have been ruined by bad audiences, and by subservience to them, than have been improved by good ones. (Barker, “Alas” 426)

He wrote to Helen Huntington shortly before their marriage, “I do believe that my present loathing for the theatre is loathing for the audience. I have never loved them” (qtd. in Salmon 123). Emphasizing a broader disillusionment, Somerset Maugham wrote of Barker in *The Summing Up*, “I felt in him a fear of life which he sought to cheat by contempt of the common herd. It was difficult to find anything he did not despise” (qtd.

in Purdom 16). These sentiments do not suggest the gregarious *joie de vivre* generally considered a prerequisite for a happy life in the theater.

Barker had, in his early years, a populist vision of theater and a commitment to socialism. He joined the Fabian Society in 1901 (Salenius 2). As a member of the Court Theatre company, Barker worked in a hotbed of political activity. Jan McDonald writes that, for the Court actors, “the will to reform the theatre went hand-in-hand with a will to reform the lot of the actor in society and, indeed, society as a whole” (80-81). Dennis Kennedy notes of this group that “some were Fabians, some Suffragists, some (following Barker’s lead) became involved in the reform of the Actor’s Association. They combined a socially aware conscience with a vital interest in the theatre” (*Granville Barker* 33). Barker at this time believed “that theater can be a force for the improvement of society” (Salenius 2). He wrote in 1922 that “one would like to see every theatre . . . a popular theatre, crowded with all sorts and conditions of people . . . the drama has always tended to be a democratic art” (Barker, *Exemplary* 284). Evidence of this populism can be seen in Barker’s admiration for the people attending Jacques Copeau’s Paris *Twelfth Night*, which he reviewed for the *Observer* on 1 January 1922. “It is a very mixed audience,” Barker wrote, “workmen, students, some foreigners, a taste of literary and learned Paris, a sprinkling of fashionable Paris. But they have coalesced in enjoyment of the play” (rpt. in *Shakespeare in the Theatre* 194). The spectacular style of Barker’s Savoy productions can partly be explained by his desire to bring Shakespeare to a broader audience.

Barker’s most ambitious attempt at popularizing classical drama was also his last. This was the 1915 American staging of two tragedies by Euripides, *Iphigenia in Taurus*

and *The Trojan Women*, at a number of college football stadiums “including the Yale Bowl” (Leiter 28). One’s first reaction on hearing of these productions is to consider how much times have changed, for such an endeavor would be inconceivable today. In reality, the project was just as outlandish in 1915 as it seems a century later. There was little opportunity for subtle performances in such venues. “The choreography,” Leiter writes, “had to be as striking as possible because of the dimensions involved. Similarly, as can be discerned from the available photographs, the gestures of the principal players had to be extremely expansive and nonrealistic merely in order to communicate across the vast spaces” (30). The stage included a huge *Skena* one hundred feet wide and forty feet high, in front of which lay a circular playing space one hundred feet in diameter (Kennedy, *Granville Barker* 182). The actors’ task was made even harder by the poor acoustics of such a vast and unforgiving performance space. Athena as *dea ex machina*, appearing on top of the stage-house, had to use a megaphone to be heard (183).

The attendance figures of 10,000 for the opening of *Iphigenia* at the Yale Bowl and of 60,000 total attendees for all eleven performances seem at first to indicate popular success. These audiences, however, consisted largely of public school students on organized visits. In New York, for instance, “graduating students from all city high schools were required to attend” (Kennedy, *Granville Barker* 184). These adolescents did not particularly appreciate the epic wonder of Greek tragedy performed outdoors in a sports stadium. Lionel Braham, who played Thoas and Poseidon, was a particular target of abuse from the sophomoric crowd due to his “booming voice and outlandish appearance” (184). Adults also had difficulty taking the proceedings seriously. Kennedy

notes that “when the sun dropped below the rim of the Yale Bowl, hundreds of men rose to put on their overcoats, accompanied by multiple titters and jests about the seventh-inning stretch” (185). Barker’s effort to bring Greek tragedy to the American masses failed financially, a setback which according to Kennedy “contributed to his decision to leave the stage” (185). A greater motivation for Barker’s retirement, however, was his second marriage to the wealthy American Helen Huntington. She wanted Barker to give up the theater, and he willingly agreed.

His new marriage also apparently led Barker to renounce his socialist and populist ideals. According to George Bernard Shaw, Helen “finished [Barker] politically . . . to her all socialists were infamous guttersnipes” (from an unpublished letter, qtd. in Salenius 111). Shaw’s statements on the matter cannot be completely trusted, as he deeply resented being cut off from Barker by his second wife. Barker’s self-interest as a new member of the moneyed class may more simply explain his desertion of the Left. Eric Salmon writes that “Barker’s socialism has been the subject of ribald comment from time to time, especially in the light of his marriage, after the divorce from Lillah McCarthy, to an American millionairess” (79). While Salmon goes on to assert that Barker nevertheless maintained a progressive social conscience, he seems to have adjusted quickly to life as a member of the economic elite. Despite his early socialism Barker was really, Purdom writes, “a conservative at heart” (192).

Evidence of a reactionary tendency appears as early as 1919, when Barker suggested in a *Times* piece titled “Reconstruction in the Theatre” that the amateur dramatic movement should be encouraged as a means to stave off proletarian revolt.

Without such an outlet, Barker writes, the “people” will be forced to “expres[s] themselves catastrophically, in strikes, [and] in revolution” (11). By the end of his life, Barker had become rather crotchety in his conservatism. In his 1945 *The Use of the Drama* Barker still advocated (as he had in 1922’s *The Exemplary Theater*) public funding for the arts, but his reasoning was now that of a wealthy man who feels oppressed by the welfare state. Government support was needed because “the sources of private munificence are being so rapidly dried up by the suction of the tax collector” (Barker, *Use* 3). Barker also displays in this piece an unsettling suspicion of “political democracy.” “Now, on a small scale,” he writes, “in a simply organized world, the unalloyed democratic doctrine doubtless works out well enough.” But Barker claims this philosophy cannot function “on a large scale, in a complex world” (24). Later on, he is even more pejorative. “Democracy, as it is today,” he proclaims, “can hardly be called the last word in civilization” (89). Barker provides ammunition for those who see the study of English literature in general and Shakespeare in particular as a means of cultural imperialism when he conflates the scholar’s task with that of the allied forces in World War II. “Our fight,” he writes, “has been a fight for the future of Christian civilization.” Most disturbingly for a twenty-first-century reader, Barker likens himself and his scholarly colleagues to “a band of Christian Knights [who] would gather for such another eight hundred years’ struggle as expelled the Moslem from Spain” (88).

Barker’s political position is difficult to pin down and seems to have shifted over time from left-leaning socialism to reactionary conservatism. The nature of his sexuality is also open to question. While he was very publicly married two times, Eric Salmon cites

Norman Marshall's unpublished assertion that "Barker was not interested in women at all and that his natural leanings were homosexual." Salmon suggests that Marshall's "terms of personal friendliness" with Barker gave him valid grounds for this conclusion (Salmon 235). If one accepts Marshall's interpretation, comments regarding Barker, such as Bridges-Adams's suggestion that his "delicacy . . . was too easily disgusted" (*Letter Book* 39) take on new meaning. If Barker was a closeted homosexual, this might help explain his odd stance regarding the playing of women's roles in Shakespeare. Barker insisted that the key to understanding these parts was recognizing that they were written to be played by boys. This made the plays, Barker claimed, void of sexual passion. He wrote of Shakespeare in the Introduction to the *Prefaces* that "Feminine charm . . . was a medium denied him. So his men and women encounter upon a plane . . . which surpasses mere primitive lovemaking." Barker therefore oddly saw *Antony and Cleopatra* as "a tragedy of sex without one single scene of sexual appeal" (*Prefaces* 1: 15). Barker was somewhat obsessed with this topic and addressed it in most of his major writings. Never, however, does he explore the possibility that the presence of boy actors on the Elizabethan stage may have itself been erotically charged. Tracey Sedinger, for instance, suggests that the indeterminate nature of the transvestite boy-actor allows the spectator "the experience of desire in its purest form" (74), unhindered by the constraints of hetero-normativity. Sedinger writes that "crossdressing is the theater in which sodomitical difference in played out" (79) in the early modern era, with "sodomy" defined broadly as "a category denoting nonreproductive erotic acts" (75). Barker's unwillingness to explore the homoerotic dimension of transvestite performances on the early modern stage combines

with his vehement denial of heterosexual passion in Shakespeare's plays to suggest, perhaps, conflicted feelings on Barker's part with regard to his own sexuality. Granted, Barker was writing at a time when such matters were not within the purview of mainstream scholarship. His treatment of this theme, however, is nevertheless puzzling.

Barker does not advocate casting boys or men in women's roles as Nugent Monck did with the Norwich Players before World War I (Hildy, "Reviving" 138) and in Egypt during this conflict (129). While Barker believed that "much could be said for the restoring of the celibate stage," he was willing to allow women performers to participate if they accepted the following restriction: "Let the usurping actress remember that her sex is a liability, not an asset" (*Prefaces* 1: 15). An actress playing Shakespeare must, Barker wrote in his 1923 Introduction to the *Players' Shakespeare* series, "leave prettiness and its lures at a loss," and "indeed leav[e] sex and its cruder emotional values out of account altogether" (rpt. in *More Prefaces* 56). In 1934 he dismissed the contributions of female performers by claiming that "the charms of the actress of today are superfluous, nor has room been left for their exercise." Barker concluded, "To tell a woman to begin her study of how to play a woman's part by imagining herself a boy may seem absurd, but this is the right approach nevertheless" ("Shakespeare's Dramatic Art" 54). Barker appears at times preoccupied with constraining female behavior on stage. This anxiety creeps into his descriptions of Shakespeare's female characters, as when he writes that "Cleopatra, spider-like, sits spinning a new web" into which Antony will fall (Barker, *Prefaces* 3: 10). This fear of women may be an expression of the typically modernist misogyny identified by Gilbert and Gubar, coupled with a particular unease that Barker likely felt in

a position of economic dependence on his wealthy second wife. He seemed under siege when he wrote in 1926, “There were no women to act upon Shakespeare’s stage. Was the artistic loss so great? One gallantly says ‘Yes.’ In these gynarchic days who dare say otherwise?” (Barker, “Stagecraft” 710). Barker’s restrictive attitude toward women diverges sharply from the tolerant practices of William Poel, who sought to increase female representation in Shakespearean theater by casting actresses in roles written for men.

Like Nugent Monck, Harley Granville Barker worried that the theater was being overwhelmed by technology and spectacle. In his theoretical writings, Barker often argued for an austerity similar to that which Monck applied in his Norwich productions. “The best basis for any production is a bare stage” (Barker, *Exemplary* 214), he asserted in 1922. Later in this same essay he added, “Far better four boards, creaky and unscrubbed as a stage for our passion than that it should be choked by a collection of bric-a-brac” (202). Barker wrote in 1926 that “the most importance difference of all” was that “our stage is the stage of visual illusion; Shakespeare’s appeal was primarily to the ear” (Barker, “Stagecraft” 707). As had William Poel some years earlier, Barker used the quarrel between Ben Jonson and Inigo Jones to make his point:

Scenery has indeed been known to interest the audience far more than ever the actors could manage to. And no less a person than Ben Jonson saw this danger ahead when he satirically warned the dramatist: “Paining and carpentry are the soul of Mask. / Back with your peddling poetry to the stage.” Our stage descends, we must remember, rather from the theatre of the masks than from that for which Shakespeare wrote. (Barker, “Stagecraft” 718)

Barker was particularly wary of mechanization. “Man and machine,” he wrote in the 1927 Introduction to his *Prefaces*, “are false allies in the theatre, secretly at odds; and when man gets the worst of it, drama is impoverished” (1: 7). Barker collaborated in 1913 on a short play with Dion Clayton Calthrop, titled *The Harlequinade*, which expressed the futuristic vision of a theater destroyed by technology, in which plays are produced by a “Factory of Automatic Dramaturgy” (Calthrop 75) and performed by gramophones without the use of live actors (79). Elmer Salenius wrote in 1982 that the “amount of truth in this fantastic prophecy made in 1913 is amazing Barker and Calthrop were uncomfortably close to accuracy in their prediction” (74). Advances in computer graphics in the two decades since Salenius’s observation make *The Harlequinade* seem even more prescient.

While Barker warned against excesses of technology and visual spectacle in theory, in practice he often succumbed to these perceived evils. His productions at the Savoy sometimes resembled what Barker would deride in 1932 as “megalomaniac projects for vast stages, dotted with strange symbolic structures, weird lights flashing and weird music sounding, and a few actors crawling dejectedly around. Shakespeare and his play a mere peg on which to hang the whole pretentious trumpery” (“Associating” 27). As Samuel Leiter notes, “Barker’s use of curtains, drops, and scenic units” at the Savoy “was actually quite complex” (34). Typical of avant-garde stagecraft in the first decades of the twentieth century, Barker’s scenography was partly a reaction to cinema. Gary Taylor suggests that Barker’s pseudo-mechanized golden fairies in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* appealed to the visual sense of an audience accustomed to the flickering images of

performers on the silent film screen. Taylor also sees in Barker's seamlessly instant scene shifts at the Savoy an attempt to compete with the quick cutting of film (274). This was a quality Barker's work shared with the efforts of Poel, Monck, and Guthrie. The Elizabethan revival generally strove for cinematic speed of scene-changes in a way that traditional stagecraft could not. Unlike these other practitioners, however, Barker employed a mechanized fly system to achieve this end, thereby enlisting one kind of technology to combat another.

Barker's Shakespeare productions

Granville Barker's first staging of Shakespeare was *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* at the Court Theatre in April 1904, in which he also played the role of Speed. This production was traditional in its realistic stagecraft. The *Era* noted on 16 April 1904, "The comedy is adequately staged, the sets representing Julia's garden and the terrace of the Duke's palace in Milan being specially worth of note" (Rev. of *Two Gentlemen* 12). The *Times Literary Supplement* in its review of 15 April makes no mention of setting or stage configuration, which suggests that they were unremarkable. Kennedy writes that this *Two Gentlemen* was "a long way from Barker's later Shakespeare revolution at the Savoy. He did not hesitate to trim the text and adjust scenes to simplify set changes as was the custom" (*Granville Barker* 20). By this point in his career Barker had acted in two revivals for William Poel which were staged in the Elizabethan manner, but chose not to take this approach at the Court. If he had wanted to employ such unconventional practices, Barker might have been hindered by the circumstances of the production, which was bankrolled by J.H. Leigh as a vehicle for his wife, Thyrsa Norman. Barker

accepted the engagement because Leigh allowed him to simultaneously stage matinees of Shaw's *Candida* (Salmon 99). Without full creative control, Barker apparently viewed *Two Gentleman* as a journeyman endeavor, which he conventionally staged in exchange for the opportunity to pursue more experimental work.

In contrast to his conservative work at the Court in 1904, Barker adopted a radical approach in the three Shakespeare productions he directed at the Savoy between 1912 and 1914, in which he flouted realistic conventions. Early modern staging practices were not, however, his principal inspiration. In a published letter to *Play Pictorial* in November 1912, Barker wrote, "We shall not save our souls by being Elizabethan" (rpt. in *Granville Barker and his Correspondents* 530). Rather, because "realistic scenery won't do, if only because it swears against everything in the plays" (529), the task at hand was to "invent a new hieroglyphic language of scenery" (530). Barker's Savoy productions owed as much to the New Stagecraft of Gordon Craig, whom Barker's costume designer called the "greatest genius and inspiration the theatre has had in our time" (Rutherford 21), as to the Elizabethan revival of William Poel. Karen Greif suggests that when "Barker and his designers began working out their 'new hieroglyphic language of scenery,' they found their cue in Gordon Craig's theories of stage design" (130). Bridges-Adams notes that in Barker's set for *The Winter's Tale* there "were acknowledgments to Craig . . . in a setting of tall white pylons against a limitless expanse of white," and suggests that Barker's rejection of strict Elizabethanism was

motivated by practical marketing concerns. “If Barker had set up an Elizabethan Stage at the Savoy,” Bridges-Adams writes, “there were not Poelites in London to keep him going for a week” (*Lost Leader* 8).

Some scholars have nevertheless exaggerated the Elizabethanism of Barker’s Shakespeare productions. The three-tiered stage structure used at the Savoy is sometimes likened to an early modern platform stage. The upper level of this structure, according to Kennedy, “created a raised acting area similar to the Elizabethan ‘inner stage’” (*Granville Barker* 124), which “could be used as an Elizabethan discovery space” (*Looking* 73). Purdom similarly asserts that this level was “used as something like the inner stage of an Elizabethan theatre” (140), and Byrne claims that the upper stage “provided an acting area which could be used for set or furnished scenes in much the same way as the Elizabethan inner - or rear- stage” (“Fifty Years” 8). In fact, there is no meaningful similarity between the highest tier of Barker’s Savoy configuration and the modest curtained alcove seen today in historically accurate reconstructions like the new Globe and the Staunton, Virginia Blackfriars Playhouse.

In Elizabethan theaters, the “discovery space” is located under a balcony. The balustraded space above therefore becomes the spectator’s focal point, and the curtained area beneath is relegated to a secondary, though still important, stage position. There was no balcony at the Savoy, so Barker’s upper level (four steps above the stage floor) drew greater focus than does the discovery space at the current Globe or Blackfriars. More importantly, Barker’s upper tier was many times larger, and could therefore accommodate the kind of elaborate sets that have no place in Elizabethan staging. Mazer

describes Barker's upper level as delineated by a "false proscenium a few feet upstage of the real one" (*Refashioned* 136). Photographs reveal that this border came in only a few feet from the true proscenium at either side (191), making Barker's upper level far wider than even the most exaggerated contemporary estimates of what had constituted an Elizabethan "inner stage." The under-balcony of Monck's Maddermarket Theatre, for instance, was 13 ½ feet wide (Hildy, *Shakespeare* 45), less than half the breadth of the upper tier of Barker's configuration. Rather than a discovery space designed to expose a specific image such as the witches' cauldron in *Macbeth*, Barker's upper stage could, and did, house entire built sets such as Olivia's garden in *Twelfth Night* (Mazer, *Refashioned* 191). Barker himself clearly did not see his upper stage as an Elizabethan discovery space, and instead placed a portable version of this small, curtained alcove downstage on the apron, in front of the proscenium, for the revelation of Hermione's statue in *The Winter's Tale* (Kennedy, *Granville Barker* 127).

William Archer's approval of Barker's Savoy productions further indicates that these were not significantly Elizabethan. Archer was a harsh critic of Poel's efforts, which he dismissed as antiquarian, but wrote to Barker regarding the Savoy *Midsummer Night's Dream*, "On the whole I was charmed: the spirit is right, the decoration right, 99 details out of 100 absolutely right" (*Granville Barker and his Correspondents* 59). The only aspect Archer objected to, "the soliloquies spoken at the audience," resulted from Barker's use of a downstage apron, the only truly Elizabethan feature of his Savoy configuration (60). Four steps below the upper level was a main stage that extended to the fixed proscenium arch. Two steps below this, Barker built "a curved apron out over the

orchestra pit and into the stalls, wider than the arch, and twelve feet deep in the center,” which “allowed at least some of the intimacy between actor and audience so important in Barker’s view of Shakespearean performance” (Kennedy, *Granville Barker* 125). Mazer concurs that “the rapport between audience and actor on the platform stage, and the spatial difference in the actor’s presence on the apron and the main stage” were elements of Elizabethan practice that Barker recreated in his Savoy productions (*Refashioned* 135).

Some observers appreciated Barker’s intention and felt that the intimacy created by the apron was the most significant feature of his Savoy staging. John Palmer wrote in his review of *The Winter’s Tale* for the *Saturday Review*, “The value of Mr. Barker’s revival—apart from the acting—rests almost wholly upon his production [or projection] of the stage into the auditorium . . . How gloriously effective, for instance, upon an Elizabethan stage is the aside” (391). Shaw said in an interview with the *Observer* on 29 September 1912 that Barker

apparently trebled the spaciousness of the stage, though the actual addition consists only of a strip formerly occupied by the orchestra and the front rows of the stalls. To the imagination it looks as if he had invented a new heaven and a new earth. Instead of the theatre being a huge auditorium, with a picture frame at one end of it, the theatre is now a stage with some unnoticed spectators around it. (qtd. in Bartholomeusz 149)

Yet even these favorable commentators admitted that the intimacy and perspective created by Barker’s apron stage had been largely overlooked by contemporary observers. Shaw lamented that most critics “never noticed the change.” He claimed this was because “it was so right that they took it as a matter of course” (qtd. in Bartholomeusz 149), but Palmer was probably closer to the truth when he suggested that spectators were distracted

by the outlandish visual effects. “Critics seem for the most part,” Palmer wrote, “to have spent their time in an unprofitable inspection of Mr. Rothenstein’s [later Rutherford’s] costumes and Mr. Norman Wilkinson’s decoration” (Rev. of *Winter’s Tale* 391). These sets and dresses were so stunning that the costumes for *The Winter’s Tale*, which evoked “exotic Eastern influence” (Hunt, “Granville-Barker” 47) and “suggested at times the decorative flavor of a mythical Byzantium” (Bartholomeusz 140), were placed after the production in public exhibition “at the Grosvenor Gallery, 51A, New Bond Street” (“Dresses for ‘The Winter’s Tale’” 9).

Barker’s intention was to merge the intimacy of the apron with the scenic possibilities of the picture-frame stage. He sought to create Elizabethan immediacy downstage, while simultaneously maintaining elaborate visual imagery on his set’s upper level. As George C.D. Odell writes, “the huge apron . . . was used as a place for posing actors in effective groups; the part behind the proscenium was used for whatever ‘decoration’ was required” (467). Norman Marshall suggests that Barker’s imperfect attempt to merge thrust and proscenium meant that “all through the evening the audience [we]re jolted to and fro between two separate theatrical conventions” (*Producer* 150), and Mazer calls Barker’s “Savoy double stage” a “dismal failure, perhaps the result of a confusion of goals” (*Refashioned* 136). The public paid far more attention to design elements than to human performances. “People who would have blushed to speak of going to His Majesty’s to see the scenery,” Bridges-Adams writes, “spoke without shame of going to the Savoy to see the décor” (*Lost Leader* 10). Actors on the apron forestage were literally upstaged by the complex sets and decorations. Kennedy suggests that

critics were distracted by the “outlandish décor” and therefore “failed to notice the significance of the stage alterations” (*Granville Barker* 125). He elsewhere concludes that many “spectators found that the new scenography did exactly what Barker had condemned about the old: it interposed itself between the play and the reception” (Kennedy, *Looking* 79).

Barker vented frustration at the furor provoked by the Savoy designs in his response, from the *Play Pictorial* letter, to a journalist who had expressed reservations about *Twelfth Night*:

I know where your critical, next-morning conscience pinches, not over the acting, not even the costumes, but over that confoundedly-puzzling scenery . . . I ask you, when you yourself are trying to set down something important, to have your handwriting admired, or to be tripped over a mistake in syntax—what are your feelings? (rpt. in *Granville Barker and his Correspondents* 529)

Barker apparently viewed the visual elements of his productions as peripheral. To focus attention on such matters was as foolish as to analyze a writer’s penmanship rather than the words he wrote. Barker did not grasp that a public trained to appreciate the spectacular splendor of Beerbohm Tree would naturally consider the ocular content of the Savoy revivals to be of paramount importance. Barker was not, of course, personally responsible for everything that appeared on stage at the Savoy. As Mazer notes, he “did not wish to curb the designer[s’] creativity” (*Refashioned* 139), adding that “it remains to be seen how well they served him” (141). Bridges-Adams suggests that it “was on his designers” that Barker “had to rely at least for the visual harmonising of the show. And Albert Rutherston and Norman Wilkinson contrived such prodigies of invention that in

this strenuously anti-scenic Shakespeare they tended to run way with it” (*Lost Leader* 10). Barker came to regret the stylistic choices of his Savoy productions, and rejected visual excess in his later writings. “Barker’s distrust of décor, as expressed in the 1920s,” Mazer writes, “is profound” (*Refashioned* 132).

Barker’s efforts at the Savoy have been idolized by many later scholars. This is in part because most critics writing after 1950 had not seen the productions, and instead sought to reconstruct them through the lens of Barker’s *Prefaces to Shakespeare*. While Byrne may be correct that “but for the productions the *Prefaces* might never have been written” (Byrne, Foreword x), the relationship between the two is not what she assumes. Byrne believes that Barker learned how to stage Shakespeare at the Savoy. I suggest that what he learned instead was how **not** to stage Shakespeare, at least according to the standards Barker advocated in his critical writing. Byrne frequently associates these productions with staging principles which Barker expounded only later in the *Prefaces*. A minute but telling example comes when she claims that Barker “allowed only one break in the action” (Byrne, Foreword xi). In reality, the Savoy production of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* contained two intervals which, in commission of the cardinal sin for which Shaw and Poel had condemned Beerbohm Tree, were scheduled not for audience comfort but to facilitate scene changes. The initial pause came after the first Mechanicals’ scene, when “though less than 400 lines of the play had passed, Barker took a five-minute break.” After this he “ran the entire night in the wood uninterrupted” (Kennedy, *Granville Barker* 163). This allowed stagehands to erect Titania’s ornate bower. Before

the final scene, Barker again “allowed a fifteen-minute interval and provided a new set” for *Pyramus and Thisbe* (166).

Barker’s reputation as a producer is far greater than his practical accomplishments warrant. Brian Pearce writes of “the way in which Barker champions can distort theatre history in order to exaggerate the originality of his work” (397). Pearce then offers, in relation to the Savoy *Winter’s Tale*, an intriguing theory as to the origins of the inordinate praise which Barker has earned from certain critics:

How do we account for the enormous popularity which this production has enjoyed among scholars? Perhaps one answer might run like this: “The popularity of Barker’s production of *The Winter’s Tale* has more to do with the aesthetic prejudices of present day Shakespeare studies than with the actual originality of Barker’s interpretation, which is one which happily conforms to the established values of modern scholarship. Barker . . . gave the text in its entirety, proving conclusively that it could be performed as it was written. It is the sort of production which leaves the scholar untroubled. He can return to the text with full confidence in its autonomy . . . Barker’s production was not really an interpretation at all, it was merely a filter for Shakespeare’s text, for his genius, conclusive proof that scholars, with artistic leaning, can sometime produce plays. (Pearce 407)

Pearce wrote this in 1996, and the consensus of “present day Shakespeare studies” may have shifted by that date beyond the conservative attitude he describes. Pearce’s observation nevertheless supports my assertion that the adulation bestowed on Barker by critics like Muriel St. Clare Byrne stemmed from Barker’s refusal to cut the plays in performance and from his concomitant reverence for Shakespeare as a literary icon. Postmodern critics (perhaps including Pearce himself) have rejected this text-driven paradigm and instead value the creative input of theater practitioners over the authority of the playwright. These critics have charged the entire Elizabethan revival with excessive

fidelity to the authorial intentions of Shakespeare. This accusation, however, only has significant validity in relation to Barker, whose conflation of his agenda with that of the Elizabethan movement has fostered this misunderstanding, as has the amalgamation of these disparate viewpoints by critics like Byrne. When Byrne writes, “The Poel-Barker reforms had one aim: for the theatre they sought nothing less than the authentic Shakespeare, to be found, hitherto, only in the study” (Foreword xi), she is only half-correct. This was Barker’s aim, but never Poel’s.

In the remainder of this section, I will look in detail at each of Barker’s Savoy productions to analyze the limits of his adherence to early modern staging practices and the consequences of his literary approach to Shakespeare in performance. I will also examine the 1940 *King Lear* at the Old Vic, which Barker co-directed with Lewis Casson.

The Winter’s Tale

The Winter’s Tale, which premiered in September of 1912, was Barker’s first Shakespeare production at the Savoy. Rather than Elizabethan methods, it featured what George C.D. Odell described as “modern staging with a vengeance” (466). *The Winter’s Tale* was a financial failure and ran for only six weeks (Kennedy, *Granville Barker* 136). Critical response was mixed, but tended toward the negative. The *Times* on 23 September gave the production a qualified endorsement, calling it “distinctly amusing” and pronouncing, “On the whole we like it.” The review approved of *The Winter’s Tale*’s eclectic mix of styles, which it defined as “Post-Impressionist Shakespeare”:

The busbies and caftans and deep-skirted tunics of the courtiers come from the Russian Ballet, and the *bizarre* smocks and fal-lals of the merrymakers at the sheep-shearing come from the Chelsea Arts Club Ball. Warriors are stuck all over with plumes, and look like fantastic and expensive toys. At Hermione's trial the officers of the court wear comically exaggerated birettas . . . the whole scene suggests Beaumarchais . . . Leontes reclines upon a seat which is frankly Art Nouveau. The Bohemian peasants are genuine Thomas Hardy . . . Yes, there is no other word for it save the word that in popular usage denotes a special kind of artistic assault on conventionalism; it is Post-Impressionist Shakespeare. (Rev. of *Winter's Tale* 7)

The *Times* notice took exception, however, to some of the more extreme visual elements. It described the wigs worn by Hermione and Leontes as a mixture of "Shakespeare and the fuzzy-wuzzy Tahitians," which was "really too Post-Impressionist for us." The review dismissed the shepherd's cottage as "a model bungalow from the Ideal home Exhibition with Voysey windows," which "strikes us as a joke, and not a good one," and derided the costumes in the Bohemia scenes as "superfluously, wantonly, ugly." The anonymous critic acknowledged one Elizabethan aspect of Barker's staging, the "set speeches" addressed "directly to the audience," and defined this as "the proper method, of course, of the old 'platform'." But he also correctly dated the production's practice of "the act-drop occasionally descending upon the actors when they are speaking" to "the theatre of the restoration" and not to Shakespeare's age (Rev. of *Winter's Tale* 7).

Other reviews were less tolerant of Barker's catholic vision. The *Athenaeum* wrote on 28 September that "Mr. Granville Barker, in a distressful striving after the artistic, has achieved that mingling of discordant, ill-related elements, that impossible jangling of different keys, which can never be far removed from vulgarity." This notice

also acknowledged the intent, and the failure, of Barker's attempt to merge thrust and proscenium:

We gladly admit that in the device of extending the boundaries of the stage so as to provide a fore-space with side exits, he has rendered distinct and original service to the interpretation of the play. Indeed, that part of the action which takes place in front of the drop scene . . . is generally recognizable as Shakespearian, which is more than can be said of much of the remainder.

The *Athenaeum* critic specifically rejected the "country revels" of the Bohemia section, which he felt "ha[d] no claim to consideration." "Mr. Barker," the review concludes, is "strangely capable of being wearisome" (Rev. of *Winter's Tale* 351). Not impressed by the originality of Barker's methods, J. T. Grein in the *Sunday Times* dismissed the Savoy *Winter's Tale* as "an orgy of new ideas grafted on classic soil" and as an exercise in "snobbist slavery" (7). As Palmer suggested in the *Saturday Review*, most of the journal critics focused largely on the production's scenic and costume effects. Descriptions of spectacle similarly dominate other first-hand accounts. "The first appearance of Miss Lillah McCarthy under a tremendous gold umbrella was so stunning," Bridges-Adams wrote years later, "that I cannot remember as much of her Hermione as I would like to" (*Lost Leader* 10-11).

Barker's confusing pronouncements regarding his visual style make the task of analyzing his design choices more difficult. "As to scenery," Barker wrote in the Introduction to his acting edition of *The Winter's Tale* published at the time of the Savoy production, "I would have none of it" (rpt. in *More Prefaces* 24). The apparent contradiction between Barker's stated position and the elaborate scenic effects described

in reviews is partly explained by a distinction between “scenery,” which Barker rejected, and “decoration,” of which he approved. Unfortunately he was maddeningly vague about these two categories. “The difference,” he wrote, “is better seen than talked of” (rpt. in *More Prefaces* 24). Bartholomeusz explicates as follows: “What did Barker mean by decoration? He was not using the word in its popular sense . . . Decoration for Barker was not illustration, or the mere play of fancy, but the revelation of an inner world behind the visible surface of reality” (Bartholomeusz 145). Kennedy suggests that from “Craig, Barker learned that the alternative to realistic scenery was ‘decoration’ to establish and control mood” (*Granville Barker* 151). Despite this perceived non-illusionist intent, Barker’s settings were frequently more illustrative than many scholars have acknowledged.

Some commentators have downplayed the visual spectacle and comparative realism of the Savoy *Winter’s Tale*. Barker’s advocates, for instance, have consistently underestimated his reliance on built sets. The Bohemian shepherd’s dwelling, a full-scale building which Kennedy nevertheless refers to as “metonymic” (*Looking* 73), has been particularly minimized in later accounts. It provided, according to Bartholomeusz, “only a hint of the representational” (143). A house on stage is more than a hint, and photographs reveal this structure to have been as realistic as anything used at His Majesty’s (Kennedy, *Granville Barker* 130). Yet Greif describes it as “simply a cut-out shepherd’s cottage with a wicker fence, set against an unadorned back-cloth” (126). A photograph of Hermione’s first entrance (Kennedy, *Granville Barker* 128), which shows her descending beneath that giant gold umbrella onto a stage filled with what looks like a

three-piece sectional of richly upholstered furniture and a coffee table topped with a giant fruit basket, suggests that the Sicily scenes were also more elaborate and more representational than has been suggested by these later critics.

Baker did not personally supervise all visual aspects of the Savoy *Winter's Tale*. Purdom writes that Barker “gave relatively small attention to the décor of his productions,” which he left “mainly to the designers” (168). “In saying he would have no scenery,” Purdom suggests, “Barker left the *décor* in Norman Wilkinson’s hands, and thus appeared to be giving more emphasis to the queerness of the setting than in fact he intended” (141). But as director (or producer, as the position was then called) Barker had some control over *The Winter's Tale*’s design. His published letter to *Play Pictorial* suggests that Barker’s logic regarding production decisions was more traditionally realistic than has been recognized by his partisans. With regard to the infamous pastoral abode, Barker admits that the “cottage of the shepherd was much blamed” by critics, but asserts that “the play demanded a cottage; to be put in conventional surroundings, and therefore a conventional cottage” was required (rpt. in *Granville Barker and his Correspondents* 530). Barker’s use of “conventional” here refers not to the practices of the non-localized Elizabethan stage but instead to the representational paradigm of Tree and Irving. His position on this issue seems at odds with Barker’s stated rejection of scenery and confirms the confusion and contradiction sensed by Mazer, who writes that the Savoy productions “were often miscalculated and self-contradictory, more so than adulatory theatre historians . . . have been willing to admit” (*Refashioned* 123).

Another example of Barker's involvement in the design of *The Winter's Tale* reveals, perhaps, a biographical anxiety that informs much of his career. Salmon notes, "We do not know where Barker went to school or, indeed, whether he had any formal education at all" (8). Dymkowski writes that "having had little formal education, he . . . seems to have felt more respectable as a writer" (140), and Purdom attributes Barker's literary aspirations to the fact that "in his youth the profession of actor was looked down upon, while that of writer was esteemed" (192). In the Introduction to the acting edition of *The Winter's Tale*, published at the time of the Savoy production, Barker describes how he and his costume designer, Albert Rothenstein, arrived at one element of the visual concept:

I suddenly thought and said to Rothenstein, "Giulio Romano! There's our pattern designer recommended in the play itself." It's little I know of Giulio Romano. Ought I to confess that Rothenstein could remember little more? But Giulio Romano was looked up, and there the costumes were much as we had forethought them. (rpt. in *More Prefaces* 24)

This passage describes the aspirations of two working-class theater practitioners eager to ascend into the bourgeois world of "high culture." Barker's shame at the "little" he and Rothenstein knew is erased by the facility with which the cultural icon can be "looked up."

In 1923 these two would collaborate on a literary project, the *Players' Shakespeare* series, for which Barker wrote prefaces and Rothenstein (by then Rutherston) served as art director. This was to be a collector's edition of Shakespeare's plays. Each play would get its own volume, which would be lavishly illustrated and for

which Barker would provide a preface. This was exactly the kind of graphically enhanced book Poel objected to in his “Picture Pedantry” essay. *The Players’ Shakespeare* ultimately had little impact. The project failed, largely because the artwork did not justify the excessive cost of the volumes. As in the case of the Savoy *Winter’s Tale*, Barker appears to have been done in by collaboration with visual artists whose work he could neither understand nor control. “As to those diagrams of Rutherston’s,” Barker wrote to William Archer about the series’ artwork, “they puzzle me and I’ve had nothing to do with them” (*Granville Barker and his Correspondents* 91). By the time of *The Players’ Shakespeare* series, both the director and the designer had changed their names in quest of upward mobility. Rothenstein Anglicized his patronymic to the gentlemanly “Rutherston,” and Harley adopted the scholarly hyphenate “Granville-Barker” (for simplicity’s sake I have consistently used the unhyphenated version of his name, even when referring to later events). As Ralph Berry writes, “He adopted the hyphen in 1918, around the time when he married Huntington money and effectively withdrew from active stage work . . . The hyphen bears all the symbolism of this change” (“Two Great” 376). The onset of Barker’s professional identity crisis is, I believe, suggested by the excited awe he expresses in his discovery of Giulio Romano.

One non-scenic element that provoked extensive comment at the time of the Savoy *Winter’s Tale* was the rapidity with which the actors spoke Shakespeare’s lines. Response to this was more uniformly negative than to the design choices. Grein wrote that, because of the extreme speed of delivery, “Not a soul, unfamiliar with the play, could follow its drift and pace,” and that consequently the audience “saw something of

the Bard but they *heard* him not” (7). The *Daily News* complained of the “spiritless gabbling” of the performers (qtd. in Greif 125), and Arnold Bennett wrote in his journal, “Quite half the words [were] incomprehensible” (248). Barker deliberately intended this galloping pace of speech. He said in a 1914 interview with *The New York Times*, “In the matter of speed I am adamant. It is my protest against all the pomposities of Shakespearean elocution and ‘classical’ declamation” (“A Talk About the Stage” 9). Cathleen Nesbitt, who played Perdita, claimed that Barker “had this mania for speed” (qtd. in Elliot 52) and wrote that he believed “at moments of great emotion the audience does not have to understand or even hear some of the playwright’s words” (Nesbitt 63). *The Winter’s Tale* partly justifies the notion that literal comprehension is not a prerequisite for theatrical success. Stephen Orgel writes that the play is “syntactically and lexically often baffling” (“Introduction” 7). The jealous ranting of Leontes in Act One, for instance, defies cognitive intelligibility but nonetheless affects the audience. The “intensity” of his speech makes it clear “that Leontes is wildly jealous” (12), even though his language defies “a plain prose paraphrase” (10). I would suggest, however, that to achieve this effect these speeches must be spoken at a pace which allows the public to hear the words, even if the text makes no literal sense. Overly rapid delivery of such passages frustrates auditors like Greif and Bennett, who believe they could cognitively understand the lines, if only these were spoken more slowly. When the actors do not rush, the public feels freed of the burden to “keep up” with an incomprehensible text.

Byrne ties the extreme speed of delivery to Barker’s desire to avoid cutting the play. “Granville-Barker presented unabridged texts,” she wrote in 1949. “For this to be

possible, in what was, after all, an evening's entertainment and not a test of scholarly endurance, the whole tempo of production had to be speeded-up" (Byrne, "Fifty Years" 8). Actors can certainly eliminate unnecessary pauses and "act on the line" in order to pick up a performance's pace while maintaining, and even improving, intelligibility. Barker's method, however, seems to have been more extreme. It was as if in order to present a full text he willingly compromised the public's ability to receive the play's language. Kenneth Branagh, I would argue, did the same thing in his cinematic *Hamlet*, in which the filmmaker retained obscure passages (such as the reference to the "little eyases") but had them delivered at such blinding speed that there was little opportunity for interpretation from the actors or comprehension by the audience. This reflects a defeatist attitude with regard to a modern audience's capacity to understand Shakespeare. Edmund Gosse, who attended the Savoy *Winter's Tale*, expressed such a pessimistic viewpoint in a letter to Lillah McCarthy. "You are extremely right in talking all this so fast," he wrote, because "no audience could possibly understand every line (however slowly given)" (qtd. in McCarthy 160). Barker employed an "eat your vegetables and you'll get dessert" approach to textual fidelity. He asked the audience to listen to an uncut text played at an incomprehensible speed, in compensation for which he offered the elaborate spectacle of the production's sets and costumes. *The Winter's Tale* thereby created a textual monument for literary cognoscenti while at the same time attempting to appease the masses with stunning scenic effects.

Many later scholars have blamed contemporary observers for their inability to appreciate Barker's work. "Most reviewers of the time," Kennedy writes, "were

conservative in their dramatic tastes, and should not be completely trusted about challenging innovation” (*Granville Barker* 133). Moore claims that the “fact of the matter is that the better critics had no trouble understanding the verse” at the speed it was spoken (“Introduction” 13). J.L. Styan suggests that “the critics groped for points of reference” but did not realize that the “extravagance and eccentricity, of course, was planned for the release of the imagination into the world of artifice” (*Shakespeare Revolution* 87). Mazer, however, attributes the failure of *The Winter’s Tale* to the indeterminacy of Barker’s approach. He writes of the staging for Leontes’s court:

The palace set, which served for virtually every interior scene in the first half of the play, consisted of a rectangular colonnade of pillars, between which were hung curtains. The curtains were rearranged, and the furniture was changed or reset, to suggest a variety of locales within the palace . . . The pillars and curtains were not a neutral unlocalized façade; but Barker asked his audiences to imagine that they could define both a generalized palace and several specific localities within it. Barker could not decide whether he was creating a space or a room, and so created contradictory results. (Mazer, *Refashioned* 144)

This attempt to have it both ways by employing “‘scenic’ Shakespeare conventions of the traditional nineteenth-century theater even in the process of inverting them” (Pearce 404) left critics and audience unsatisfied. Barker’s approach to acting was similarly equivocal. He built an apron to provide intimacy with the public, but did not trust his players to hold the spectators’ attention. Instead he forced these performers to speak at a pace that defied comprehension and upstaged them with overpowering visual devices.

Twelfth Night

G. Wilson Knight wrote that “*Twelfth Night* was the best” of Baker’s Savoy productions (*Shakespearian* 221). It was a popular and financial success, running for 137 performances (Moore, “Introduction” 15). Unlike *The Winter’s Tale*, *Twelfth Night* was generally well received by critics, who perceived it as more mainstream than Barker’s previous effort. The *Times* wrote on 16 November that in “his production of *Twelfth Night* Mr. Granville Barker sets out chiefly to please rather than, as in the *Winter’s Tale*, chiefly to make us ‘sit up.’ There is no deliberate challenge now to the scoffer, no flaunting eccentricity, no obvious search for quaintness for its own sake” (Rev. of *Twelfth Night* 10). The *Illustrated London News* on 23 November likewise found *Twelfth Night* “more conciliatory” than its predecessor (Rev. of *Twelfth Night* 780). The *Times* review praised “Mr. Norman Wilkinson’s ‘decoration’,” which it described as “simple, flat, [and] conventional” unlike the more experimental set for *The Winter’s Tale*. In direct contrast to criticism of the earlier production, the *Times* claimed that although the players “say virtually all that Shakespeare set down for them to say, they do not gabble it; they can all—or all that matter—be distinctly heard” (10). This last comment was echoed by P.C. Knody in the *Observer*, who wrote on 17 November that “the complete absence of torrential speech may help to dispel the notion that ‘gabbling’ is to be a rule at all the Savoy productions of Shakespeare” (qtd. in Dymkowski 52).

Critics at the time generally felt Barker had modified his methods for *Twelfth Night* to make this production more palatable. They believed, as Mazer writes, that Barker had “taken their advice and toned down the juvenile eccentricities of his earlier

production” (*Refashioned* 145). Many later scholars rejected this view. The conventional wisdom by 1980 was that *The Winter’s Tale* served “to break the critical ice,” preparing critics and audience for what was essentially more of the same in *Twelfth Night* (Greif 131). “What had appeared disconcertingly radical and modern in September,” Greif writes, “in November was hailed as ‘a breath of fresh air’.” She adds that “the principles of staging remained the same, but this time Barker’s ideas were more readily accepted” (131). Christine Dymkowski similarly asserts that this “revival was actually no different from the first; it seems in fact that audiences and critics found themselves unconsciously won over to Barker’s methods once their initial shock had passed” (46); and Moore writes that the “critical about-face when *Twelfth Night* opened two weeks after *The Winter’s Tale* closed substantiates the integrity of what Barker was doing” (“Introduction”14). The Savoy *Twelfth Night*, however, represented a greater compromise with popular expectations than these remarks acknowledge.

One reason that scholars have not viewed *Twelfth Night* as acceding to the demands of contemporary taste is that it opened so soon after *The Winter’s Tale* was withdrawn from the evening bill (matinee performances continued through the end of November). Two weeks does not at first seem time enough for Barker to have significantly altered the methods of his second production, even if he had so desired. Preparations for *Twelfth Night* began, however, during the six week run of *The Winter’s Tale*, and Barker notoriously worked his cast and production staff very long hours. Cathleen Nesbitt wrote of her work at the Savoy, “We rehearsed until three or four o’clock [in the morning]—there was no Equity in those days” (qtd. in Elliot 52). Barker

had sufficient opportunity during this period to change the play following *The Winter's Tale* from *Macbeth* to *Twelfth Night*. Felix Aylmer, a bit player in the first two Savoy productions, wrote in a 1967 reminiscence, "We rehearsed *A Winter's Tale* [sic] and *Macbeth* through the summer," but "*Winter's Tale* was not a financial success, and *Macbeth* was dropped. Some of the sets had been made, and I later found myself in Birmingham playing in one of them which had become the Ogre's castle in *Puss in Boots*" (33). Besides stimulating speculation as to what Barker and Wilkinson would have made of this "Ogre's castle" in performance, this shift in program suggests that Barker also had time to alter his style of production and make it more acceptable. He later claimed in a *New York Times* interview that he had chosen *The Winter's Tale* as a sacrificial lamb, which he knew would be devoured by the critics as they grew accustomed to his methods. "We shall have to throw one play to the wolves," Barker claims to have said when planning his Savoy season (qtd. in "A Talk About the Stage" 9). But his decision to change the second play from the challenging *Macbeth* to the popular *Twelfth Night* demonstrates that Barker was more deeply affected by the negative response to *The Winter's Tale* than this cavalier quotation implies.

Those critics who argue that *Twelfth Night* made no concession to popular taste attach little significance to Barker's decision to offer this play instead of *Macbeth*. Greif and Dymkowski do not mention the aborted *Macbeth* in their accounts of Barker's Savoy endeavors. Moore mentions *Macbeth* only as having been scheduled for production after *Twelfth Night*, when it was scrapped in favor of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* because Henry Ainley proved unavailable for the title role ("Introduction" 15). Kennedy similarly

moves mention of the Scottish tragedy to his section on *Midsummer*, although he acknowledges that *Twelfth Night* replaced *Macbeth* because “*Winter’s Tale* proved sticky at the box office” (*Granville Barker* 158). These scholars may have simply viewed the proposed 1912 *Macbeth* as too insignificant to merit discussion in their writings on the Savoy *Twelfth Night*. To consider it, however, is to recognize that Barker chose this latter play in response to critical and financial pressure. This pressure, I believe, also resulted in a move toward greater localization and realism in the production’s set design.

Many scholars have stressed the minimalism and non-representational quality of the Illyrian garden which formed the central set of Barker’s *Twelfth Night*. Hugh Hunt writes, “Instead of the traditional garden setting with its grass and shrubs, there were one or two cut-out trees with some formal steps” (“Granville-Barker” 47). Styan describes a setting of “pale green yew trees with box hedges in a topiarian arrangement [which] reminded spectators of a child’s Noah’s Ark toy-box” (*Shakespeare Revolution* 91). He then, without irony, describes *Twelfth Night* a few pages later as a “production unimpeded by detail” (95). Kennedy states that only “one full-stage set was built, showing Olivia’s formal garden, and it was even more non-illusionist than the sets for the previous play” (*Granville Barker* 145). Elsewhere, he describes this environment as

formalized and overly symmetrical; it was a manifest critique of the lush illusion of Hawes Craven’s set for *Tree*. No grassy steps here or pictures of topiary, only architectural components and hard geometrical shapes, an exercise in Cubist geometry. The box trees of the script were represented by two futurist space needles. (Kennedy, *Looking* 75-76)

In contrast to the descriptions of Hunt, Styan, and Kennedy, Olivia’s garden was actually quite representational.

Tying the design of Barker's *Twelfth Night* to traditional Edwardian stagecraft, Mazer claims that the production's main set had much in common with Beerbohm Tree's realistic style. He asserts that it was "the same ubiquitous 'Olivia's Garden' for which Tree had built his unstriking terraced garden. Barker's set was equally permanent; the other built scenes were placed before it or inserted into it." These other settings, for Mazer, were equally representational. "The 'kitchen' scene was a small tapestried room," Mazer writes, "the prison was a simple grate with curtains on either side" and "the final scene was placed before a gate to Olivia's property." Mazer concludes that a "case could be made in support of the conjecture that Barker thoroughly intended, in his production of *Twelfth Night*, to ape the success of Edwardian fashionable drawing-room comedy, such as was playing elsewhere in the West End. This would practically explain the production's popularity" (*Refashioned* 145). The photographic record supports Mazer's analysis. While Greif claims that the configuration for the midnight carousal used the "simplest essentials" to "suggest the outlines of a room" (133), the photographs she reproduces (135) show that this setting and the design for Olivia's reception of Cesario used realistic furniture to recreate the kind of "fourth-wall" ambiance familiar to early twentieth-century audiences. Eric Salmon argues that the director lacked "the courage of his convictions" and that the *Twelfth Night* set represented "a compromise on Barker's part" (210). The compromise was a successful one, however, providing Barker with the only unqualified popular and critical success among his three Savoy productions.

The Savoy *Twelfth Night* was abstract but, as in the case of pop-art in the 1960s, Barker's set reassured his spectators by providing them with recognizable, though

distorted, objects. The trees in Olivia's garden, which Kennedy describes as "futuristic space needles" (*Granville Barker* 145), were still identifiably trees and therefore served the traditional Victorian function of localizing theatrical action. The shepherd's cottage may have been more representational, but Olivia's garden formed the backdrop for a larger portion of its respective play, and the extensive use of furniture brought *Twelfth Night* even further than *The Winter's Tale* from the Elizabethan ideal of a bare platform stage. Instead of advancing the cause of non-localized staging which he would later champion in his *Prefaces*, Barker's *Twelfth Night* represented a retreat toward the traditional stagecraft of the theatrical status quo.

This production gave Barker an opportunity to explore some of his ideas regarding women players in Shakespeare. The "breeches part" of Viola/Cesario was a perfect testing ground for his notion that women in Shakespeare should act like boys. Lillah McCarthy wrote that Barker insisted on having Viola "played as a leading man," which she initially found to be a "big strain." "During rehearsal," she wrote in her autobiography, "I must have stressed too much the poetry of the part, and by so doing let Viola betray the woman in her. The producer would not have it so. I must play the man." Eventually, she struck a balance, managing "at last to make Viola steer clear of the shallows of sentimentality and safely pass the hard rocks of extreme mannishness" (McCarthy 161). While McCarthy's performance was successful, there is something odd about Barker's attempt to contain his wife's femininity on stage. This effort to manipulate her behavior did not end with their marriage. When McCarthy wrote her autobiography, Barker threatened legal action and "made it clear that there should be no reference

whatever to himself anywhere in the book” (Purdom 191). This accounts for McCarthy’s odd references to her ex-husband as simply “the producer.”

While Barker may have attempted to control Lillah, she nonetheless had a great deal of influence in the theatrical process. According to Purdom, she “did much to make up [Barker’s] deficiencies” and “looked after him in the theatre” (143). Nesbitt writes that McCarthy sought to curtail Barker’s interminable digressions in rehearsal: “Sometimes Lillah would say: ‘For heaven’s sake, stop *interrupting*, you never let us get to the end of a scene. You’re inhibiting us’” (52). Apparently, only Lillah could bring these sessions to an end. “*How* we rehearsed,” Nesbitt writes, “sometimes until 3 or 4 a.m. Then there would come the moment when Lillah would walk on in the middle of the scene, with a cup of broth or milk or cocoa, and say, ‘That’s enough now, Harley’” (50). Nesbitt, who later worked for Barker during his sporadic returns from retirement, also describes the second Mrs. Barker performing a similar function. “There would come a voice from the dress circle, ‘Lunch time, Harley!’ And Harley would drop everything and disappear,” Nesbitt recalls, adding, “We all resented that mysterious ‘Helen’” (177-78). Purdom writes that “Barker always in all he did had to depend upon someone” (143). This someone was usually a woman, and Barker’s resentment toward this dependence may have led him to seek compensation by obliterating femininity from the Shakespearean stage.

A Midsummer Night’s Dream

Like his production of *Twelfth Night*, Barker’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, which opened at the Savoy in February of 1914, was a popular success. It ran for ninety-

nine performances (Moore 15) but many critics did not like it. While Lillah McCarthy later claimed that the “press was unanimous in its praise” (175), actual contemporary reviews were largely unfavorable. As in the case of *The Winter’s Tale*, observers objected to the production’s elaborate and abstract design. The *Era* wrote on 11 February that *Midsummer* was “too bizarre, too grotesquely imaginative even for a dream; in fact, at times it becomes dangerously akin to a nightmare” (Rev. of *Midsummer* 13). John Palmer, who approved of both *The Winter’s Tale* and *Twelfth Night*, felt that this time Barker had ruined the play with his staging. He wrote for the *Saturday Review* on 14 February, “I would have been quite happy in Mr. Wilkinson’s forest had it not been for the unfortunate coincidence that Mr. Barker’s company of players were therein trying to present a play purporting to be by William Shakespeare.” Palmer had read Barker’s early Preface to *Midsummer* (published in the 1914 Acting Edition), and concluded from this essay that the director “really loved and understood Shakespeare as a practical dramatist writing for a stage and an audience.” After seeing the production, however, Palmer wrote that “the play now running at the Savoy, though it be almost everything by turns, and nothing long, is never Shakespeare’s ‘Dream.’” For Palmer, Barker’s *Midsummer* represented “Shakespeare being slaughtered to make an intellectual and post-impressionist holiday.” The playwright, he wrote, “never had a chance” (Rev. of *Midsummer* 202). These comments are instructive when compared to the writings of later scholars like Byrne and Styan, who have portrayed the Savoy productions as a triumph of literature as performance. The *Illustrated London News* of 14 February similarly sensed a disconnect between Barker’s stated reverence for the text and the production’s emphasis

on outlandish décor. “This mistake of audacity in Messrs. Barker and Norman Wilkinson’s scheme is the more vexing,” the *ILN* reviewer wrote, because “we are given the whole text of the play” (Rev. of *Midsummer* 449).

Desmond MacCarthy, who reviewed *Midsummer* for the *New Statesman* on 21 February, eventually endorsed the production, but had to see it twice to get over the scenic elements. He suggests that, as in the case of *The Winter’s Tale*, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*’s design caused more comment than Barker would have wished. He noted, “I am sure (the newspaper criticism confirms this) that the majority of the audience thought as much about scenery at the Savoy Theatre as ever did an audience at His Majesty’s. It was a different kind of scenery, but just as distracting to most people” (rpt. in MacCarthy, *Drama* 11). MacCarthy wrote that on his first visit he “did not think Mr. Norman Wilkinson’s scenery beautiful,” and instead felt “that it was distracting and not in harmony with the spirit of the play.” He enjoyed *Midsummer* “a great deal more the second time,” however, and wrote that the “merits of this production came out clearer when surprise at the scenic effects . . . has subsided” (10). The fact that MacCarthy required repeated viewings to arrive at a critical judgment suggests that the visual effects were more of a hindrance than an aid to comprehension.

The mixed reaction in London was replaced with outright scorn when Barker restaged *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* in New York in 1915. George G.C. Odell attended the 16 February performance at Wallack’s Theatre and described the setting of Titania’s bower thus:

The fairy scene was built up to a round mound in the middle of the stage, and covered with bright green velvet carpet. Just above the mound was suspended a large terra-cotta wreath of flowers that would have been the envy of a German pastry cook, and from it depended a veil of white gauze, lighted within by vari-colored electric bulbs, hanging at irregular lengths. At the back and sides of the stage fluttered curtains of chintz or silk, designed to suggest forest branches. Like forest branches they waved vigorously in the breeze, so that one felt disposed to ask some one to shut the windows in heaven in order that the trees might not blow out so violently into Titania's bower. (467)

Odell was sympathetic to Elizabethan staging. "Anyone who has imagination," he wrote, "can get the poetic illusion by seeing these things acted on a bare stage or on a stage hung with curtains or with just a conventional unchanged setting." But he saw no connection between this minimalist aesthetic and Barker's production. "No human being, however," he continued, "can be expected to be anything but worried and annoyed by pink silk curtains that are supposed to be the roofs of houses, or green silk curtains that are supposed to be forest trees" (468). While he is perhaps unnecessarily cantankerous, Odell correctly notes the difference between Barker's elaborate methods and the simplified approach of practitioners like Poel and Monck.

More harsh in his criticism than even Odell, William Winter wrote of Barker's New York *Midsummer* that it was a "nauseous admixture of mental decadence and crotchety humbug," which "reveal[ed] a deplorable proclivity for frivolous and fantastic innovation" (281-82). Winter was near the end of his life in 1915, and would die two years later at age eighty-one. His comment that *Midsummer* "should be made to move with ease and celerity through a sequence of handsome scenes" (295) and his complaint that because of the apron stage "illusion was destroyed" (284) betray Winter's allegiance to the traditional stagecraft of an earlier generation. Nevertheless Barker's lack of a

coherent philosophy of staging gives some credence to Winter's assertion that the "pretence that Granville Barker's productions show *any advance* in the producer's art is preposterous. At their best . . . they indicate nothing higher than a commercial purpose to profit, if possible by ministering to a craze for 'something different,' merely because it is different" (294).

The outrageous portrayal of Oberon, Titania, and their followers suggests that novelty for novelty's sake may have been one of Barker's goals with *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The costuming of these fairies was the feature which attracted the most attention from both proponents and detractors. The *Times*, which liked *Midsummer*, thought the fairies its most brilliant element and began a review of 7 February, subtitled "Golden Fairies at the Savoy Theatre," with their description:

Is it Titania's 'Indian boy' that has given Mr. Barker his notion of Orientalizing Shakespeare's fairies? Or is it Bakst? Anyhow, they look like Cambodian idols and posture like Nijinsky in *Le Dieu Bleu* . . . they are all gold . . . One with a scimitar stalks like the black marionette, with *his* scimitar in *Petrouchka*. Evidently the Russian ballet, which has transformed so much in London, has transmogrified Shakespeare . . . One might perhaps have had misgivings about the thing in advance . . . But the thing turns out to have been an inspiration.

The *Times* critic quickly dismisses the production's other elements. Of the four lovers, for instance, he writes that if "they escape being bores, they may be said to have succeeded. We are not sure that the men did altogether escape." He then returns to his favorite topic. "But it is not of these one thinks in the end," the reviewer writes of the lovers' inadequacies. "The mind goes back to the golden fairies, and one's memories of this production must always be golden memories" (Rev. of *Midsummer* 8). Not all

observers were smitten with Barker's fairies. The *Illustrated London News* wrote that they looked "neither pretty nor poetical," and seemed "the invention of calculated eccentricity and of the resolve to do something new at all costs" (Rev. of *Midsummer* 449). Odell grumbled that by "the aid of their bronze you could tell at a glance whether any person in the play was a fairy or a mortal, and as Mr. Barker evidently had no faith in Shakespeare or the imagination of the audience, this was an advantage" (468). Moore, who generally argues for the success of the Savoy productions, concedes that Barker "always insisted that any kind of scenery, scenic decorations, or settings were wrong if they called attention to themselves at the expense of the text, and his gilded fairies certainly seem to have done so" ("Introduction" 16).

Many contrasting descriptions of these fairies have been offered at the time and since. Norman Marshall, without specifying his sources, cites contemporary press reports which referred to them variously as "'nickel-plated sprites,' 'lacquered leprechauns,' 'peroxidised pixies,' [and] 'tawny Hindus'" (qtd. in *Producer* 157). Several observers noted the fairies' mechanical movements including MacCarthy, who refers to them as "ormolu fairies, looking as though they had been detached from some fantastic, bristling old clock" (*Drama* 11). Some later scholars also emphasize this quality. Leiter, for instance, describes them as "robot-like beings" (37), which suggests that Barker may have sought to create the same kind of futuristic fantasy he had explored in 1913's *The Harlequinade*. Perhaps perceiving a similar connection to Craig's "*uber-marionetten*" as that advanced by Gary Taylor (274), Dymkowski describes the fairies' movements as "jerky" and "puppet-like" (60), and Moore writes that they "moved consistently like

marionettes, the effect being that of otherworldly creatures” (“Introduction” 16). Hugh Hunt, while acknowledging the fairies’ similarity to puppets, identifies them principally as “spirits connected with some vaguely Eastern folklore” (“Granville-Barker” 48). Photographs (Dymkowski 64-65) reveal a mixture of Middle Eastern, Himalayan, and Indian elements in the fairies’ costumes. Surprisingly, no postcolonial scholar has yet attempted to read Barker’s fairies as an expression of imperial anxieties in early twentieth-century Britain.

All accounts of the fairies agree that they were “golden,” a description literally achieved by Barker and his production team. “The makeup was gold leaf,” Kennedy writes, and “applied from small sheets with the fingers” (*Granville Barker* 160). Lillah McCarthy recalled that “it cost a shilling each time the gilding was done and, for economy’s sake, the elves had to keep their faces golden between the matinees and evening performances” (175). No better example illustrates the chasm which separated Barker’s approach from that of Nugent Monck. Monck, like Poel before him, rejected extravagant expense in his stagings of Shakespeare. Barker, on the other hand, covered his performers with money.

Barker’s attempts to merge representational and abstract scenography were as confusing in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* as they had been in *The Winter’s Tale*. Norman Marshall writes that the production employed “an incongruous mixture of styles. The palace of Theseus was comparatively realistic—a solidly built affair in black and silver. The forest scenes on the other hand made no attempt at realism” (*Producer* 156). Trevor Griffiths describes the pains Barker took to establish the play’s locations visually:

The action thus moved from the white silk curtains with conventional gold design, which represented the palace, to the salmon pink curtains of the carpenter's shop, with steel blue masses supposed to represent the roofs of the city, and thence to the non-naturalistic wood . . . From the wood the scene returned to the carpenter's shop and ultimately to the palace, where the fairies reappeared to mingle with the solid columns and blend the fairy and mortal worlds against a star-spangled backdrop. (79-80)

Far from employing an unlocalized stage, Barker's *Midsummer* was therefore highly specific, if not representational, in its semiotics of place. Kennedy for his part describes "some concessions to atmosphere," but seeks to minimize their connection to the realist tradition. He writes that the mound built for Titania's bower was "green (but not grass)" (*Looking* 77). While this distinction rightfully separates Barker's *Midsummer* from the verdant staging of Beerbohm Tree, Kennedy glosses over the fact that any set built to signify a specific location is a concession to realism or, at least, a departure from the Elizabethan ideal of a bare stage.

A Midsummer Night's Dream was Barker's last Shakespeare production at the Savoy. Even with long runs for *Twelfth Night* and *Midsummer* Barker was losing money, and his budget depended on philanthropic support. With the outbreak of war in 1914 this source of funding evaporated (Purdom 155). Barker went to New York and attempted a failed season at Wallack's Theatre, which included a remounting of *Midsummer*. The two Greek tragedies he staged outdoors in various American college football stadiums also lost money. Barker despaired deeply and wrote to Gilbert Murray, "One feels about once a day that the trenches would be a welcome relief to the crass anxiety of it all" (qtd. in Purdom 171). Barker pronounced in 1912, "We shall not save our souls by being Elizabethan" (*Granville Barker and his Correspondents* 530). Yet he may have come to

feel that he had lost his soul through his Savoy attempts at theatrical compromise. In 1917 Barker published a short story set in New York titled "Souls on Fifth." The narrator wanders the streets of Manhattan in a state of despondency similar to Barker's own during this period. This storyteller is possessed, Barker writes, of "forty years growing contempt for the human race" ("Souls" 60) and calls his life "a black and hollow thing, a wasted thing" (73). The narrator magically becomes able to converse with the dead souls of New Yorkers, who float up and down Fifth Avenue. One of these, the soul of a woman who died young, suggests the solution Barker was to pursue for his own troubles. "The height of one's ambition . . . in making a second marriage," she advises the narrator, is to be "quite sufficiently happy" (70). Another deceased soul, that of a minister, tells a story of self-betrayal which perhaps parallels Barker's experience at the Savoy. The clergyman had come to Fifth Avenue with the intent of turning his materialistic congregation toward a more spiritual path. "But looking back," the minister says, "I see quite clearly now what happened. I had set out to convert Fifth Avenue," but instead, "it was Fifth Avenue converted me" (63).

***King Lear* 1940**

Following his Savoy productions, Barker did not stage Shakespeare for twenty-five years. He nevertheless greatly influenced Shakespearean production during this period through his scholarly writing, particularly his *Prefaces*. Chastened by his unsuccessful attempt at compromise with representational staging at the Savoy, Barker advocated a stricter adherence to Elizabethan conventions in his critical essays than he had ever followed as a director. Before withdrawing from the stage in 1915, Barker

frequently dismissed the importance of early modern practices. “There is no Shakespearean tradition,” he wrote in a 1912 letter to the *Daily Mail*, “At most we can deduce from a few scraps of knowledge what Elizabethan methods were” (rpt. in *Granville Barker and his Correspondents* 528). Nor did he hold great reverence for the architecture of Shakespeare’s theater. “I do not care to go in for an exact reproduction of the Elizabethan stage,” he told *The New York Times* in 1914. “It is archeological and unattractive” (qtd. in “A Talk About the Stage” 9). By 1923 he attached greater importance to early modern staging, writing in the Introduction to *The Players’ Shakespeare*, “If I am asked whether, with all the scene devising and designing in the world, we shall do better for Shakespeare than he did for himself upon his own plain stage, backed by a curtain and an inner room, surmounted by a balcony, I will answer that I doubt it, and do rather more than doubt” (rpt. in *More Prefaces* 54). He wrote of this same “plain stage” in his 1927 Preface to *King Lear* that a producer “cuts from [its] anchorage at his peril.” Attempts to devise as an alternative some “atmospheric sort of background, which does not positively conflict with the play’s stagecraft,” such as Barker had essayed at the Savoy, would likely not “be worth the risk and the trouble” (Preface to *Lear* lxxviii).

Barker’s writings helped convince Tyrone Guthrie (along with Guthrie’s visits to Nugent Monck’s Maddermarket Theatre) to adopt Elizabethan methods at the Old Vic in the 1930s. Guthrie wrote that he “had read Granville-Barker’s Prefaces to Shakespeare” (*Life* 120) and therefore decided to “have no scenery except a ‘structure,’ which would offer the facilities usually supposed to have been available in the Elizabethan theatres”

(121). His admirers made many efforts to draw Barker out of retirement to direct an Elizabethan production. For years Barker refused. He replied to one such request from John Gielgud in 1937, “As to me—oh, no I have put it all into books now . . . I doubt if I’d *be* any good as a producer any longer—other reasons apart. I doubt if I’ve energy and patience left” (*Granville Barker and his Correspondents* 416). In 1940, however, Barker agreed to return to active work for an Old Vic production of *King Lear* featuring Gielgud in the title role.

Barker’s Preface to *King Lear* has been particularly influential. In it he refuted the argument, advanced since the time of Charles Lamb, that *Lear* was impossible to stage. Barker has since been given much credit for restoring the play to the theatrical canon. T.C. Worsley, for instance, wrote in a 1953 *New Statesman and Nation* review of a Stratford production of the play starring Michael Redgrave, “From being the least acted and least popular of the great Tragedies *King Lear* has recently been accepted into the repertoire as if it had never not had its place there. We owe this perhaps as much to Granville Barker as to anyone” (Worsley 100). The 1940 production was an attempt to put Barker’s critical ideas about the play into action on stage. The program announced that the performance was “based upon Harley Granville Barker’s Preface to *King Lear* and his personal advice besides” (rpt. in *Granville Barker and his Correspondents* 424-25). The *Manchester Guardian* in its review of 17 April acknowledged this connection. “In the very first sentence of his famous preface to ‘King Lear’,” the *Guardian* critic wrote, “Mr. Granville-Barker declared it to be his business to justify the tragedy’s place

in the theatre.” The reviewer saw the Old Vic *King Lear* as an extension of this agenda. “In this production,” he announced, “this claim is vindicated at almost every point” (Rev. of *King Lear* 6).

While Barker was lured out of retirement partly by the urge to incarnate his ideas about *Lear*, there were other exigencies. London was at war, and the blitzkrieg raged. Cathleen Nesbitt (who according to the *Times* played a “darkly envenomed Goneril”) writes that the Old Vic “had been badly damaged by fire and bombs,” and that *King Lear* was staged “in aid of the rebuilding fund” (Nesbitt 177). Soon after the production, the theater was destroyed by other air raids and rendered unusable for the duration. William French suggests that Barker’s “sense of the Nazi threat to civilized values surely affected his decision” to work on the production (47) and asserts that the opportunity to “reinstate *Lear*, a play he drew strength from, upon the English stage through a great actor, one in whom he had great faith, and a group of talented and trusted stage friends, at a momentous time in European history” proved to be “an irresistible temptation” (52).

Barker nevertheless restricted the extent of his involvement. While the *Manchester Guardian* claimed that it “was Mr. Granville-Barker himself who supervised this production [and] ordered each movement and intonation of it” (Rev. of *King Lear* 6), Gielgud recalls that “Barker refused to have his name officially announced as director, and only agreed to supervise some rehearsals, using his own preface to the play as a foundation” (*Stage Directions* 51). The time Barker devoted to the production was limited. Lewis Casson and Tyrone Guthrie held rehearsals “for some days” before Barker’s arrival from France (52). Gielgud writes that Barker then “worked with actors

for ten days, but he left after the first dress-rehearsal and never saw a performance with an audience” (51). In spite of these constraints, Barker was still effective. As demonstrated during the two-week interval between *The Winter’s Tale* and *Twelfth Night*, he was capable of achieving significant results in a short period of time. Gielgud notes that the actors “were constantly dismayed . . . by the high standards [Barker] continually demanded of them, and by the intense hard work to which he subjected them without showing any appearance of fatigue himself” (53).

For many years scholars did not grant much significance to the 1940 *King Lear* at the Old Vic. G. Wilson Knight called it “a half-hearted collaboration with Lewis Casson and John Gielgud” to which Barker “was unwilling to give his name” (“Producer” 794). Purdom wrote that the production “had a mixed reception . . . There was little of the real Barker quality, for the production was uncertain and confused, also very slow” (263); and Styan noted disappointedly that there was “no extravagant stagecraft, no revolutionary vistas. By this time the revolution had marched on” (*Shakespeare Revolution* 105). In recent decades, this *Lear* has received more recognition. Kennedy, for instance, writes that Barker’s “hand helped make the performance one of the most successful revivals of the play in the twentieth century” (*Granville Barker* 156). Extremely favorable reviews in the *Manchester Guardian* and the *Times*, which called the production the “first genuine theatrical occasion of the war” (Rev. of *King Lear*. *Times* 4), support Kennedy’s view. I would disagree, however, with one aspect of this favorable interpretation of Barker’s last theatrical endeavor. Kennedy writes that Barker “had lost nothing of his genius for the stage despite the years of disuse” (*Granville Barker* 156). French similarly suggests that

Barker “returned to the spatial arrangement of the 1912-14 Savoy productions, employing the principles he had forged then” (49). I would instead suggest that Barker’s work at the Old Vic in 1940 represented a radical departure from his earlier efforts at the Savoy, and that this change in methods was one cause of *King Lear*’s success.

In this production, Barker for the first time employed an approach consistent with the principles of the Elizabethan revival. Dymkowski writes that the “stage made use of a permanent set.” While there was also “a variable backdrop at the back of the stage” (Dymkowski 145), photographs illustrate that, with the exception of scenes staged in a fairly representational tent during Act Five, the settings were unlocalized and unadorned (160). Unlike its reviews for the Savoy productions, the *Times* notice made no mention of *King Lear*’s settings, costumes, or other visual effects, suggesting that these elements did not attract undue attention to themselves or upstage the actors (Rev. of *King Lear* 4). The application of Elizabethan methods may have been due partly to the fact that Lewis Casson, Barker’s principle collaborator and the production’s titular director, had previously worked with William Poel. The Old Vic had intermittently experimented with Elizabethan methods since Robert Atkins built an apron out from the proscenium in 1920 and opted to replace most painted scenery with neutral draperies (Rowell 104). Guthrie’s use of a permanent set during the 1933-34 season also helped acclimate the Old Vic to early modern methods. This predisposition combines with Barker’s limited involvement in the production to raise the question of how much of its Elizabethanism can be directly attributed to his influence. But Barker’s 1927 Preface, which argued that the test of

Lear's performability must be made "in the strict terms of [Shakespeare's] stagecraft" and "in no other" (Preface to *Lear* xi), was unquestionably a major source of this *King Lear's* early modern style.

Barker worked with the cast for less than two weeks and returned home to Paris before opening night. Gielgud wrote that "it seemed something of a disaster that he did not feel free to stay and guide us to the end, either to final victory or defeat" and attributes Barker's early departure to the director's temperament. "I suppose he was no longer prepared to face the tedious anxieties of the last days before production," Gielgud observed. "I think he had ceased to care about the reactions of audiences or the opinions of dramatic critics. The actual working life of the theatre with its petty involvements no longer concerned him" (Gielgud, *Stage Directions* 54). Kennedy cautions that, while it is "tempting" to interpret Barker's return to Paris "as a sign of his utter detachment from the affairs of the theatre," other considerations were involved (*Granville Barker* 157). Letters from Barker to Gielgud after *King Lear's* premiere contain very specific questions and recommendations, suggesting that Barker remained highly interested in the production (*Granville Barker and his Correspondents* 425-27). Anxieties about the war, rather than artistic ennui, may have inspired Barker's premature exit from London. Kennedy cites letters in which Helen writes from across the Channel, urging Barker to come to Paris. "Less than a month later France was occupied," Kennedy writes, "and the Barkers escaped barely in time" (*Granville Barker* 157). Barker had hidden from the world for a quarter century. It seems that, just when he tried to reconnect with the practical life of the theater, the world caught up to Barker with a vengeance.

Barker and Literature

Theoretical context

In 1934 Harley Granville Barker's warned against the "dangerous heresy that there is a kind of absolute art of the theatre, the task of which is not simply to interpret the author's play, but to re-create it in its own terms" (*Study of Drama* 20) and admonished that to "exalt the theatre, as this heresy does, at the expense of the drama is a retrograde step" (22). These pronouncements justify Barker's inclusion in what William Worthen calls "the 'directorial' mode of dramatic criticism" (*Authority* 223 n). This is one of the many "versions of performance criticism" which according to Worthen "locate performance . . . as supplemental to the designs of the text" ("Deeper" 444). Barker is unique among the major figures of the Elizabethan revival in perceiving performance as a supplemental adjunct to literature. His motivation, however, was not related to his advocacy of early modern staging conventions, but rather to his increasing personal connection to the academic establishment.

Barker's critical essays reveal a complex and at times contradictory attitude toward theater. While his scholarship initially advocated the stage as the primary site for understanding Shakespeare, over time Barker came to view performance as a mere accessory to literary criticism. Worthen's critique of John Barton, which identifies "ideological complicity" with the "literary" notions Barton claims to repudiate (Worthen, *Authority* 166), could also apply to Barker. Worthen describes how in the book and television series *Playing Shakespeare* Barton mocks a passage of unplayable academic criticism related to Hamlet's psycho-social motivations, only to employ similar

“thematics of character” when coaching an actor in this role (168). Barker in his Preface to *Macbeth* likewise mocks a literary method that he also imitates.

Barker writes of M.F. Libby’s *Some New Notes on Macbeth* that “pages have been written by an ingenious gentleman to demonstrate that [Rosse] is the motive force and the real villain of the play. To bring this home in performance, he would, one fears, have to be accompanied throughout by an explanatory chorus” (rpt. in *More Prefaces* 83). Yet in his later *Prefaces to Shakespeare* Barker himself often, as Purdom notes, “gets involved in questions of psychological interpretation that have nothing to do with drama as such” (220). An example is Barker’s speculation as to the degree of physical intimacy in Gertrude and Claudius’s relationship. Of the king’s speech to Laertes in Act Four, scene seven of *Hamlet* which begins

Not that I think you did not love your father;
But that I know love is begun by time,
And that I see, in passages of proof,
Time qualifies the spark and fire of it. (110-14),

Barker writes, “Of what does that covertly speak—those ‘passages of proof’—but of Gertrude’s mute obedience to Hamlet’s behest to deny herself to his bed?” (*Prefaces* 1: 224). He then admits, a few lines later, that such a reading cannot “be very clearly brought home to the audience” (225). Unlike Barton, who according to Worthen simultaneously mocks academic criticism while appropriating its methods, Barker’s shift toward a literary approach took place gradually during the decades following his retirement from the stage.

Barker's drift away from the stage

Barker's early writings sometimes defy the traditions of academic criticism. In 1923 he bemoans "the scholar's indifference to the theatre" and suggests that much dramatic scholarship had been "written by people who, you might suppose, could never have been inside a theatre in their lives" ("Some Tasks" 17). He complains that these critics had "often gone to great trouble to elucidate points which, if [they] could but have seen or even imagined the play in being-acted, that is, in a theatre, where a play belongs, would have elucidated themselves" (18). He claims that any play by Shakespeare will come to life if "shout[ed]" by "a company of schoolboys" but remain "inert under the touch of the most learned professor" (19). By 1934, Barker's tone was more conciliatory. In his *Companion to Shakespeare Studies* (co-edited with G.B. Harrison) Barker describes the actor as a "foolish Greek" ("Dramatic Art" 85), a necessary evil in the theatrical process. He implores his readers to "learn to listen through as well as to the actor" (86) in order to overcome the "intrusion" (85) of this thespian. Barker came to identify himself more closely with his scholarly readers than with his former theatrical colleagues. His changing attitude toward the work of E.K. Chambers illustrates this transition in sympathy. In 1925 Barker wrote dismissively of Chambers and his fellow "theorists" that if they "could be set to acting a play or so upon a stage . . . they would learn more in a week than they will persuade each other of in a generation" ("A Note" 70). In 1932, by contrast, Barker justified the activities of the Shakespeare Association by announcing, "We have planned . . . an elaborate analytical index to the six volumes of Sir

Edmund Chambers's *Elizabethan Stage and Life of Shakespeare*" (*Associating* 3-4). In less than a decade, Barker had gone from attacking Chambers to indexing him.

In the 1925 essay "From *Henry V* to *Hamlet*," first delivered as the British Academy Annual Shakespeare Lecture, Barker displayed his own growing dislike for the stage by attributing to Shakespeare an anti-theatrical bias. There were, he suggested, two Shakespeares. One was a "complaisant" theatrical professional and the other a "daemonic . . . genius bent on having his own way" who resented the limitations of his work as a "popular play-provider" (rpt. in *More Prefaces* 139). Of this eccentric literary "genius" Barker wrote, "*This* is the Shakespeare who was finally to people, not his little theatre only, but the whole intellectual world for the next three hundred years with figures of his imagining" (140). This pejorative reference to Shakespeare's "little theatre" is difficult to reconcile with the position of Barker's later champions that he "believed in the power of the stage" and that his "unswerving principle was that Shakespeare is understood best and appreciated fully only in the theatre" (Kennedy, *Granville Barker* 154). "From *Henry V* to *Hamlet*" goes on to dismiss *As You Like It*, *Much ado about Nothing*, and *Twelfth Night* as "bones thrown to the dogs of the audience, that wanted their plot and their ear-tickling jokes" (rpt. in *More Prefaces* 147), which is particularly odd considering that *Twelfth Night* had been Barker's only unqualified success as a director of Shakespeare. Barker does not, however, reject the stage completely. Instead he argues for establishing scholarship within the theater, and proposes a new guild of actors and directors, "grave and sober men" (166), who would be "scholars in their kind" and achieve respectability by working "side by side" with "scholars of the printed page" (167). There is logic in an

approach to Shakespeare which coordinates the efforts of academics and theater practitioners, but Barker displays throughout this essay a tone of contempt for the stage and for himself as a former showman who must now seek redemption as a man of letters.

“In associating with professors,” Purdom wrote, “Barker became (almost) one of them” (220). This is of course not necessarily a bad thing, but it led Barker to a supercilious attitude toward the theater. By 1934, Barker felt that he had to plead with his fellow scholars to frequent the playhouse. Employing the second person plural with his academic readers, Barker wrote, “The art of drama makes a primary demand upon us: to leave our armchair throne of judgment and descend into the mellay [sic]” of live performance. He warned of play-going that “far less of literature or art there will seem to be in the experience than of the vulgar emotions of life.” Barker acknowledged that “a case can be made against the theatre; artistically, and sometimes morally too” when a play is dominated by actors with their “imperfect human embodiment” and “immediate emotion.” But he assured his literary readership that “when great dramatists were about” the vulgarities of human performers were inevitably held in check (“Dramatic Art” 87). In *The Study of Drama*, published that same year, Barker hinted that actors were inherently limited in the depth of thought they could apply to their work. “A company rehearsing,” he wrote, “must very soon drop its critical attitude towards a play. For if the actors cannot, when it comes to the point, quite uncritically identify themselves with their parts their performance will be a very inhuman affair” (27). Elsewhere in this volume, Barker damned performers with faint praise by rejecting the notion of the “average actor as a vain, lazy and luxurious child” but then adding, “He will not have, perhaps, the

brains of a first-rate philosopher or scientist, a lawyer or financier—but then he has not chosen those paths in life!” (35). The myth of the dim-witted actor became a cultural stereotype with the rise of the American “Method” in the mid-twentieth century. Barker’s own psychologically realistic approach to acting, combined with his increasing estrangement from theatrical practice, appears to have led him by 1934 to a similarly low opinion of thespian intellect.

Barker’s transition from practitioner to scholar was possible in part because the literary establishment needed Barker as much as he needed it. Douglas Lanier suggests that “the rise of performance criticism is a recuperative response of literary institutions to the challenge of video and cinematic media” and that this criticism has enabled a process by which Shakespeare “and the cultural capital he represents can be uncoupled from the decline of the book in an increasingly post-literate society” (Lanier 191). While Lanier connects this phenomenon principally to cinema and not the theater, anxiety about the shrinking importance of the written word may have led some critics to welcome the participation of a former stage director like Barker, in the hope that his expertise would give their endeavors new relevance and credibility. This was particularly the case for those writing after Barker’s death during the post-World War II technological boom when new media took an increasing toll on readership. This phenomenon may help explain what Eric Salmon calls “the apparent discrepancy between the amount of practical work” Barker achieved and the “degree of influence” he has been afforded (xv). Critics like Byrne were so eager to have a representative of the theater as an ally that they exaggerated Barker’s stage accomplishments and, perhaps, the value of his writings.

Textual Fidelity

Ironically, the quality for which Byrne most admired Barker, his advocacy of “unabridged texts” (Byrne, “Fifty Years” 8) diminished over time. The Savoy productions were virtually uncut. Barker acknowledged in his 1914 *New York Times* interview that he “did cut just a little. Certain rather sad survivals of another generation I have ventured to clip out. Here and there an obscene jest has been snipped off.” But all accounts generally agree with Barker’s estimate that these excisions “amounted, perhaps to less than two dozen lines in all three plays” (qtd. in “A Talk About the Stage” 9). The very notion of a “complete text” (Byrne, Foreword xxii), however, presumes that there is a definitive master copy which should not be violated. James C. Bulman notes instead that “Shakespeare left no originary text—no perfect, authorially sanctioned script—for performance” (2). While this notion is a commonplace today, it was still something of a novelty in Barker’s time. Gary Taylor writes that the First Folio was generally considered a uniquely authoritative version until A.W. Pollard’s advancement of the “good” quartos in 1909 (Taylor 279). In his second career as an academic critic, Barker embraced this new scholarship and moved away from his earlier simplistic endorsement of “full text” productions.

In the 1927 Introduction to his *Prefaces*, Barker expressed dissatisfaction with the Folio as a definitive text. He wrote that there “is much to be said for turning one’s back on the editors, even, when possible, upon the First Folio with its demarcation of acts and scenes, in favor of the Quartos—Dr. Pollard’s ‘good’ Quartos—in their yet greater simplicity” (*Prefaces* 1: 8). In his Preface to *King Lear* that same year, Barker employed

what Dymkowski called “courageous discretion” (137) in arguing for a mixture of Folio and Quarto in assembling a performance text of that play. He also recommended the excision of certain passages appearing in both editions, which he claimed were not written by Shakespeare (Barker, Preface to *Lear* lxiii). Barker also urged the cutting of Edgar’s soliloquy at the end of Act Three, scene six even though he did not doubt its authorship, because “Shakespeare may afterwards have repented of it as sounding too sententious” (lxxii).

Barker’s 1923 Preface to *Macbeth* demonstrates that he was influenced by the contemporary challenges to textual authority defined by E.K. Chambers the following year as “The Disintegration of Shakespeare” (Chambers 7). Chambers refers to “the speculations started by Professor Pollard and pursued by Mr. Dover Wilson” (14) regarding collaboration and revision in Shakespeare’s plays. He rejects these ideas, but identifies them in terms that would become, against Chambers’s wishes, conventional wisdom by the end of the century:

We arrive at the notion of the long-lived manuscript in the tiring-house wardrobe, periodically taken out for a revival and as often worked upon by fresh hands, abridged and expanded, recast to fit the capabilities of new performers, brightened with current topical allusions, written up to date to suit the new tastes in poetic diction. Additional scenes may be inserted. If the old pages will no longer hold the new matter, they may be mutilated and replaced by partial transcripts. In the end hardly a single line may remain as it was in the beginning. Yet, in a sense, it is the same play, even as our human bodies, the cellular matter of which is continuously renewed, remain our bodies from the cradle to the grave . . . Who is the author of such a play? We cannot tell. (16)

Barker was quite influenced by this “disintegrationist” argument. In 1934 he wrote that there was “now sufficient agreement as to which of the plays in the First Folio may be

called early work, but discussion still as to whether the earliest of these are wholly or only partly or merely nominally Shakespeare's" ("Dramatic Art" 44). "And surely it is time," Barker wrote in his Preface to *King Lear*, "that all editions of Shakespeare put certain passages, whose fraud can be agreed upon, in expurgatorial brackets. We are ready for another—and another sort of—Bowdler" (lxiii n).

One drawback to this vision of indeterminate textual transmission is that it can allow a biased scholar to reject a scene or passage he does not like on the grounds that it is spurious. In his Preface to *Macbeth*, Barker acknowledges this "weakness in criticism to be always maintaining that what is well done is by Shakespeare and what is ill done is by somebody else" (rpt. in *More Prefaces* 86), yet he was to some extent guilty of this very vice in rejecting the witches' scenes as non-Shakespearean. While these may not be objectively "ill done," they inspired personal antipathy in Barker. He is of course not the only critic to doubt Shakespeare's authorship of some or all of the witches' material. Even as ardent an advocate for the authority of the First Folio as Neil Freeman concedes that there "is consensus that Shakespeare did not write any of the Hecat sequences" (Freeman xli). G. Wilson Knight suggests that Barker merely "succumbs to the disintegrating scholarship rampant in his day by regarding the play's opening scene as spurious" ("Producer" 794). But Barker's rejection of this scene as "poor" and "pointless" and his assertion that "Shakespeare did not, at any rate, begin his plays with superfluities" seem particularly adamant (*More Prefaces* 61). Barker also went beyond the schools of critical thought alluded to by Freeman and Knight in rejecting the second witches' appearance as "spurious" and "quite out of key with the more authentic part of

the scene” (63) and in asserting that “we do not meet Shakespeare’s true text till Macbeth’s own entrance” (61). While the revisionist forces defined by Chambers no doubt influenced Barker’s thinking in this matter, he may also have been moved to minimize the witches’ part by the same urge to contain femininity that made him exhort Shakespearean actresses to deny their womanhood on stage.

The primacy of character

Barker’s attitude toward the First Quarto of *Hamlet* shows how much he was guided by literary rather than theatrical concerns at the time of his 1937 Preface to this play, an essay which according to Styan illustrates Barker’s “academic atrophy and his divorce from stage experience” (*Shakespeare Revolution* 118). Barker rejects the First Quarto’s order of events, even though he acknowledges that there “is much to be said, from a narrowly dramatic point of view, of Q1’s scene-sequence” (*Prefaces* 1: 63). Barker’s stated intention for his *Prefaces* in 1923 had been to “to present the plays from the point of view of their performance upon the stage” (rpt. in *More Prefaces* 43), a rationale which would suggest that the “narrowly dramatic point of view” should be the only one considered. Instead, Barker prefers the Second Quarto because “Q2’s scene-sequence is the more favorable to the exhibiting of Hamlet’s character” and therefore “one of Shakespeare’s (probably latest) contributions to the subduing and adapting of the story and the storytelling to this maturer end” (*Prefaces* 1: 66). This preference for literary character over dramatic action indicates how far Barker had drifted from his theatrical moorings.

Barker first forcefully advanced this inversion of Aristotelian hierarchy in the 1925 essay “From *Henry V* to *Hamlet*,” in which he argues that “*Hamlet* is the triumph of dramatic idea over dramatic action and of character over plot” (rpt. in *More Prefaces* 150). Not confined to *Hamlet*, this notion was to increasingly dominate Barker’s critical writing as time went on. Even Eric Salmon, who consistently argues for the *Prefaces*’ theatrical relevance, acknowledges that Barker was “perhaps unduly influenced by the ‘character-drawing’ school of scholarly criticism” (222). Purdom is less kind, suggesting that Barker becomes “concerned with the characters in the plays as they may have been as living men or women, which takes him far outside the sphere of drama, and makes most of his commentary beside the mark and seriously misleading” (219). Purdom blames this on the influence of A.C. Bradley. He writes that Barker was “not able to withstand th[is] powerful professor. That becomes the radical defect in Barker’s criticism of Shakespeare” (220). Character is of course an important element in the plays and arguably the factor that distinguished Shakespeare from his contemporaries and has allowed his work to endure for centuries. But Barker’s excessive advocacy of character at the expense of plot ultimately renders much of his critical writing anti-theatrical.

The use of the *Prefaces* by actors and directors

Critics have long disputed the value of Barker’s *Prefaces to Shakespeare* for theater practitioners. The *Times* in its 1927 review of the first volume was strangely equivocal on this issue. On the one hand, the reviewer wrote that the *Prefaces* “give to the reader a feeling that he is present in a theatre . . . under the guidance of a brilliantly perceptive *regisseur*” and that Barker’s “purpose throughout” was “to set Shakespeare’s

work on the stage.” Yet the review closes on an anti-theatrical note: “Mr. Granville-Barker of all men must know how genius may grow weary of the pit. How else is it that only in imagination, as we read these prefaces, may we attend the rehearsals of the first of the English producers?” (“Hidden Man” 14). Apparently the *Times* saw the *Prefaces* as a substitute for theater rather than an aid to its creation. For Knight, Barker’s *Prefaces* “lack the glamour, the tang and smell as it were, perhaps even one might say the vulgarity, of theatre art; despite their stage references, they are products of the academic rather than the histrionic intelligence” (*Shakespearian* 225). They were therefore “as near to the academic world as to the stage” (Knight, “Producer” 794). Knight resented what he perceived as a lack of specificity in Barker’s recommendations for performance, noting for example that in “his well known study of *King Lear*, Barker tells us that the storm is to be acted with a more-than-realistic technique; but he explains no farther” (*Shakespearian* 226). Speaight similarly sees the *Prefaces* as being of little practical value, and writes that against them “any director will break his teeth in vain” (Speaight, *Shakespeare* 144). Barker wrote that his “prefaces themselves may best be thought of as the sort of address a producer might make to a company upon their first meeting to study the play” (rpt. in *More Prefaces* 43). Styan considers them “strangely academic” in light of this stated purpose (*Shakespeare Revolution* 108) and follows Purdom in asserting that Barker “devoted too much of his energy to scholarly issues of little account, like the discussion of the time-scheme in *Othello*, or act-division in *Hamlet*, or the separation of Shakespeare’s hand from a collaborator’s” (Styan, *Shakespeare Revolution* 112; Purdom 218-25).

Others contend that Barker's *Prefaces* are consistently stage-centered. In direct response to Styan's assertion, Salmon writes that "even looked at from the strictest of practical stage viewpoints, only the middle of these three instances seems to me to be an issue 'of little account'; the other two, surely, have immediate and important implications for the interpretation and the playing of the play" (227). Yet Barker himself dismisses one of these two concerns, the "discussion of the time scheme in *Othello*" which Salmon calls "immediate and important," as irrelevant to stage production. "When it is acted," Barker writes in his Preface to *Othello*, "we notice nothing unusual, and neither story nor characters appear false in retrospect" (*Prefaces* 4: 141). Salmon nevertheless asserts that "there is no point" at which Barker "lost touch with the stage" (204), and Moore similarly claims that "Barker never forgets that he is dealing with a play meant for the theatre, and he approaches it as a director" ("Introduction" 17).

Some of Barker's critical comments could be of use to an actor preparing a Shakespearean role. His observation of the "commanding hardness and firmness in the rolling r's and final d's" in the Prince's first speech in *Romeo and Juliet*, which by "its sound alone . . . does half its business" (*Dramatic Method* 72), and his analysis of how the naturalistic pattern of the Nurse's first speeches in this play give the verse a prose-like verisimilitude share this potential for practical application (73-74). His description of Antony's rage at Thidias in *Antony and Cleopatra* microscopically defines the optimal timing for this moment on stage. "The caesura-pause of two beats that the short line allows is followed by the repeated crack of two more short phrases," Barker writes, "the first with its upward lift, the second with its nasal snarl and the sharp click of its ending;

the last line lengthens out, and the business finished with the bitter *staccato* of ‘Take hence this jack and whip him’” (*Prefaces* 3: 49). Few actors, however, could make use of Barker’s commentary on the Lysander and Hermia exchange in Act One of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* which begins, “The course of true love never did run smooth.” Barker writes:

The whole passage is conventional in form. Conceit answers conceit. The pretty antiphony is convention itself. Lysander’s apologue is conventionally rounded and complete. But how nicely it is charged with emotion, with enough to illumine the form, but not with so much, nor of such a complexity as would warp it. (rpt. in *More Prefaces* 113)

This passage is coherent but, even taking into account differences in diction between Barker’s age and our own, his language seems esoteric for “the sort of address a producer might make to a company upon their first meeting” (Barker, rpt. in *More Prefaces* 43).

Directors desiring to stage Shakespeare in an Elizabethan style can find some inspiration in the *Prefaces*. Barker’s own experience with *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* at the Savoy, for instance, seems to inform his caution against over-decoration in his 1924 Preface to this comedy. “To avoid discordancy while satisfying still that hungry eye,” he writes, “modern producers have devised scenery which is not scenery, forests that are not like forests, and light that never was on sea or land” (rpt. in *More Prefaces* 96). Barker then asks with regard to such extravagant settings, “Is the ear not cheated by delighting the eye?” (97). In the 1923 Preface to *Macbeth*, Barker offers a strong illustration of the power of Elizabethan staging in his analysis of that tragedy’s climactic combat:

We may be fairly certain that the play is meant to end on the lower stage. If Macduff and Macbeth are to have a good fight, this—or at least the best part of it—should take place on the lower stage too. Now the double stage direction [*Exeunt fighting. Alarums. Followed immediately by Enter Fighting and Macbeth Slain*] will be made clear if they can leave the lower stage fighting, and re-appear in the gallery. If Macbeth is killed on the inner upper stage the drawing of its curtain would conceal his body. And if young Siward had been killed there too, there would be no pressing necessity for the removal of his. (rpt. in *More Prefaces* 66)

For a rapid succession of scenes such as this, Barker writes, “No swifter movement is well possible than that for which the Elizabethan stage provides” (67). While Barker’s assumption of a curtain hung in front of the balcony does not jibe with twenty-first-century understanding of early modern conventions, his description of *Macbeth’s* finale is nevertheless stimulating and specific enough to make sympathetic directors want to bring Barker’s staging to life.

In his 1927 *Preface to Julius Caesar*, Barker demonstrates an intuitive understanding of the Elizabethan stage that anticipates more recent scholarship. Of the Folio stage direction “*Enter Brutus in his Orchard*” Barker writes, “This looks like a discovery upon the inner stage” (*Prefaces* 1: 213), and then entertains a digression on this architectural feature:

I think that scenes were more often played ‘in relation to’ the inner stage than consistently within its boundaries; that is to say, the actors, having gained the effect of a discovery, would be apt to advance upon the main stage, where their movements would be less cramped, where they would be in closer touch with the

audience . . . One need not suppose that the Elizabethan actor ever saw the division between inner stage and main stage as a fixed boundary. (*Prefaces 2*: 215)

As Byrne notes, Barker used his “instinctive playwright-producer’s grasp” in this passage to see beyond the early twentieth-century understanding of the “inner stage” as a false proscenium behind which complexly staged scenes could be played in their entirety toward the more limited notion of a “discovery space” endorsed by later theater historians (Byrne, “Foreword” xx).

By the time of his 1930 Preface to *Antony and Cleopatra*, Barker seems to have wearied somewhat of discussing the practical ramifications of Elizabethan staging. At times in this preface, he shows the same zeal for exploring original methods that he had applied to *Macbeth* and *Julius Caesar*. In his description of the three-day battle, for instance, Barker again achieves the gripping visualization employed in his Preface to *Macbeth*: “Then comes the marching and counter-marching of the armies that are not to fight (pure symbolism!), each with its subordinate general in command. The stage empties again, and its emptiness holds us expectant. Then, of a sudden, comes the climax, the significant event; *the noise of a sea-fight* is heard.” Barker accurately identifies the theatrical importance of this moment, “We are shown, it is to be remarked, no actual fighting at all” (*Prefaces 3*: 25), but he abandons his description of the play’s action at the moment which perhaps constitutes its greatest challenge for an Elizabethan approach to staging. His discussion of Cleopatra’s apprehension by Gallus and Proculeus (Act Five, scene two) is inconclusive. He assumes that Cleopatra must appear at the time of her capture “on the inner stage behind a barred gate” (*Prefaces 3*: 39). Barker then rejects

the solution (which he cites from the Arden edition) of Gallus climbing to the balcony while Proculeus distracts Cleopatra, thereafter appearing behind her on the inner stage. For Barker this “climbing up and climbing down again” would take too much time. He instead suggests that Gallus and the other guards might somehow “be upon the inner stage by the back way” and surprise Cleopatra from behind while she speaks to Proculeus (*Prefaces* 3: 40). Barker’s idea violates the logic of theater. If the audience sees Cleopatra behind a barred gate, they will assume that one cannot simply walk backstage to get around this barrier. Barker’s long absence from the stage leads him to overlook the possibility of leaving Cleopatra on the balcony for this scene, and having Gallus quickly scale the *Frons Scenae* to ascend to her. The skilled tumblers of Shakespeare’s company could likely have found a creative way to achieve this effect, perhaps similar to that employed in the 1972 Peter Snell film adaptation of the play starring Charlton Heston, in which Roman soldiers turned their shields to build a ramp up which Gallus sprinted. Barker in the end dismisses the issue, perhaps because he sensed the inadequacy of his proposed solution. “The discussion is fairly barren from a modern producer’s point of view,” Barker writes, “he can provide for all these exigencies without violating the text or distorting the action” (*Prefaces* 3:40). Perhaps such a producer can, but not without employing scenic devices more complex than those of the Elizabethan stage. This refusal to engage with the mechanics of early modern theatrical practice is typical of Barker’s later Prefaces, in which he consistently eschewed considerations of *mise-en-scene*. His 1937 Preface to *Hamlet*, for example, is longer than the play itself but contains no section devoted to staging.

Barker, Shakespeare, and retirement from the stage

In “From *Henry V* to *Hamlet*” Barker, embittered by his experience at the Savoy, attributes an anti-theatrical bias to Shakespeare. Elsewhere in his critical writing, Barker often moves up the date of the playwright’s retirement to Stratford, perhaps seeking to justify his own abandonment of the stage at a comparatively young age. In his Preface to *Cymbeline*, Barker writes of “the shifting from outdoors in” (2: 85) which occurred in 1608 when The King’s Men took over the Blackfriars Playhouse. “Shakespeare is an old hand when the change comes,” Barker comments, “and will live out the rest of his life retired, more or less, from the stage” (2: 87). 1608 is an early date for Shakespeare’s withdrawal from London. The playwright’s 1613 purchase of “the Blackfriars Gatehouse,” which “stood close by to the Blackfriars Theatre” is evidence that Shakespeare maintained some connection to London until the final years of his life (Schoenbaum 10). Barker nevertheless frequently seems eager to pack Shakespeare off to Stratford. In his Preface to *Coriolanus*, Barker writes that this play’s extensive stage directions “stand among the items of evidence of a retirement to Stratford.” Reuben Brower in a “Textual Note” to the Signet Classic edition writes that *Coriolanus* was almost certainly “written and performed not later than 1609” (199), yet Barker claims that Shakespeare composed this tragedy as “a manuscript to be sent to London” for “a staging which the author did not expect to supervise himself” (*Prefaces* 3: 238). Freeman writes that *Macbeth* is generally dated “between 1603 and 1606” and that “most critics tend toward the later date” (Freeman xxxix), but Barker suggests that soon after the Scottish play was written Shakespeare “was retiring to Stratford” (*Dramatic Method* 113). In 1606 Shakespeare

was forty-two, only slightly older than Barker when he married Helen Huntington and bid farewell to the theater. Barker's comments about the composition of *Coriolanus* and the move indoors from the Globe combine with his assertion regarding *Macbeth* to suggest that he wanted Shakespeare to have retired early, as Barker had done, to a life of gentlemanly leisure.

CHAPTER III
NUGENT MONCK

Introduction

In 1923 Francis Birell, writing in the *New Statesman*, lamented that Nugent Monck's Maddermarket Theatre was "not nearly as well known as it ought to be" (Birell 774). During Monck's lifetime, this deficit of recognition was largely redressed. By 1934 Hugh Hunt would write in *Theatre World* that "the Norwich Players have been one of the most important factors in the renaissance of the drama," noting that "Mr. Monck has produced the whole of Shakespeare's dramatic works, and in so doing became the first producer in the world, except perhaps Shakespeare himself, to complete this magnificent cycle in one theatre and by one company of players" (Hunt, "Maddermarket" 48). George Bernard Shaw wrote to Monck in 1940, "There is nothing in British theatrical history more extraordinary than your creation of the Maddermarket Theatre out of nothing" (qtd. in Hildy, "Reviving" 266). In 1953 a distinguished group of theater artists and critics including Ivor Brown, Lewis Casson, Barry Jackson, Paul Scofield, Edith Evans, T.S. Eliot, and John Gielgud wrote a letter to the *Times* soliciting support for Monck's theater. "The work of the Norwich Players at the Maddermarket Theatre," they wrote, "is of international repute, it has done much to spread the ideals of William Poel, and it has had a notable influence on modern methods of Shakespeare production in the professional theatre" (Brown et al. Letter. *Times* 15 Oct. 1953: 9). Three years after Monck's death,

Ross Hills wrote of his “notable influence on the theatre at large” as that of “a link in a chain. From Poel to Nugent Monck, thence to the Old Vic and Stratford-upon-Avon” (24).

In recent decades, however, Monck has been largely overlooked. Dennis Kennedy, for instance, dismisses his significance by writing that Monck “built a small Elizabethan Theatre in Norwich, the Maddermarket, where he staged reconstructed performances of small interest and smaller effect” (*Looking* 153). More has been written about Granville Barker’s three productions at the Savoy than about the hundreds of plays staged by Monck over the course of his career. One cause of this near oblivion was Monck’s unwillingness to write extensively about himself or his work. Charles Rigby, perhaps referring to Monck’s tenuous status as a homosexual in a conservative environment, wrote in 1933 that “Nugent Monck out-oysters the oyster” (6) and “knows the value of reticence and minding his own business” (7). Monck was in fact too reticent for the good of his reputation with posterity. He started but never finished an autobiography, announcing on his eightieth birthday, “I have lived the life, and I find it dull” (qtd. in Hildy, *Shakespeare* 5). This reluctance to leave a written record hindered the dissemination of Monck’s ideas. His brief 1959 article for *Shakespeare Survey* (published posthumously) provides a fascinating glimpse into Monck’s methods, and leaves the reader wanting more. Instead of writing about his efforts, Monck put all available energy into his theatrical productions. These were staged in provincial Norwich and therefore did not attract the press coverage they might have garnered in London. Fortunately, Franklin J. Hildy’s exhaustive archival research, culminating in his 1986

volume *Shakespeare at the Maddermarket: Nugent Monck and the Norwich Players*, documents Monck's career and makes possible its examination.

I will begin my study with a consideration of some biographical factors, followed by a review of Monck's early efforts in London and his initial experiments with the Norwich Players at the Crypt and the Old Music House. I will then explore Monck's conversion of a former Catholic church into the Maddermarket Theatre, which Hildy calls "the first theatre in England since the Commonwealth to have been designed and built with no trace of proscenium" (*Shakespeare* 49). I will examine Monck's attempt to construct the Maddermarket as a replica of an Elizabethan playhouse, along with his adherence to early modern staging conventions and attitude toward textual fidelity in the productions staged there. I will discuss what I perceive as the populist ideology underpinning Monck's work and will seek to identify an affinity between Monck's efforts and the "Poor Theatre" later envisioned by Jerzy Grotowski. Finally, I will address the thorny problem of separating the respective legacies of Nugent Monck and Harley Granville Barker. Such a division can only be partial, as these two men shared a common antecedent in Poel, influenced each other, and inspired some of the same practitioners in the following generation. Nevertheless I believe it is important to distinguish between the theatrical concept of the Elizabethan revival championed by Monck and the more academic version of this movement advocated by Granville Barker. Only by recognizing these two distinct inheritances can twenty-first-century theater practitioners make informed decisions about incorporating Elizabethan practices into their postmodern productions.

Biography

Unlike Granville Barker, who was forced on stage by his mother at a young age, Nugent Monck chose a theatrical career of his own volition. His family wanted him to be a musician, and he was a Music student at the Royal Academy before changing his principal course of study to Drama in 1899. At that point, Monck later recalled, “My parents decided they would have nothing more to do with me, and I must go my own wicked way” (qtd. in Hildy, “Reviving” 18). Barker was by all accounts quite talented, but Monck had no real gift as an actor. “I called myself a professional,” he said of his life as a performer before moving to Norwich, “but my acting ability was small and I seldom had any work to do” (qtd. in Marshall, *Other* 92).

Monck was the son of an Anglican minister, but rejected the faith of his parents. “Gradually,” Hildy writes, “he found a substitute for their religion in the theatre” (Hildy, “Reviving” 12). His sense of the spiritual mission of the stage increased when Monck was cast in William Poel’s 1902 production of *Everyman*. Monck later wrote in his unfinished autobiography that this production was so powerful that audience members often knelt in prayer after performances (25). “As a spiritual force,” Monck told a British government committee studying the function of theater, “nothing can touch drama outside a definite religion—as it can ‘get’ people who—for some reason or other—are religiously dead” (qtd. in *The Drama in Adult Education* 8-9). This same committee confirmed that in Norwich “the people who had left the churches came to the Maddermarket Theatre and found some elements of religion there” (*The Drama in Adult Education* 65). Mariette Soman describes Monck’s production of the medieval Interlude

Youth, given at his home in Norwich during the early days of the Norwich Players, as an expression of his transcendent vision. “The spectators were carried back to the past centuries of faith,” she writes, “when religion was part and parcel of the daily life of the people. The few feet that separated audience from players was bridged by spiritual imagination, and the whole room was thinking and feeling in unison” (Soman 10). Yet the intent was not to spread the Christian faith. Nugent Monck appears as a character in David Holbrook’s 1978 coming-of-age novel *A Play of Passion* set in an around the Maddermarket during World War II. This fictionalized Monck declares, “I’m really an atheist—or, rather, I suppose an agnostic” (123). The founder of the Maddermarket was normally too circumspect to issue such bold proclamations, but Holbrook’s reconstructed quotation nevertheless seems to accurately express Monck’s views on religion. While he appreciated medieval religious drama for its spiritual qualities, Monck did not seek to buttress organized religion. Instead he offered the theater as an alternative faith for those who, like himself, no longer felt connected to the established churches (Hildy, *Shakespeare* 162).

In their youths, Harley Granville Barker and Nugent Monck shared a leftist outlook and socialist leanings. Barker’s political turn to the right paralleled his move away from work in the theater toward a life of literary study. Nugent Monck, in contrast, remained an active stage practitioner his entire life and never surrendered his populist vision. According to Hildy, Monck developed “social consciousness” during “his years in the Liverpool slums” (“Reviving” 19). Monck’s father had been demoted to an inner city congregation “because he had insisted on chastising the middle-class parishioners” of his

previous parish “for their neglect of the poor” (11). While there is no record of Monck’s having officially been a member of a Socialist party, Haden L. Guest wrote of Monck’s play *The Hour* in the *New Age* on 16 May 1907, “Every Socialist interested in real plays . . . should go and see it” (Guest 43). Monck wearied of Fabianism, noting of Shaw’s *Candida* in 1917 that he had become “bored with [its] stale socialism” (from unpublished letter, qtd. in Hildy, “Reviving” 131), but he never wavered from his populist belief that the working classes could benefit from theater and deserved the opportunity to do so. Monck pursued this potential audience with the zeal of a missionary. He refused to accept the cynical advice offered by George Bernard Shaw in a 1923 letter, who wrote, “First rate art cannot be pushed beyond a certain percentage of the population. It is not that the rest are ignorant or indifferent: they very actively dislike and resent it; and forcing it on them—even if you could—would be as cruel as making little children go to church” (quoted in Hildy, *Shakespeare* 90). At the very least, Monck believed this “certain percentage” to be far greater than Shaw estimated. He always insisted that his work at the Maddermarket was not “high-brow,” and that it could be appreciated by anyone with a basic education (Hildy, *Shakespeare* 126).

Monck’s experience in World War I perhaps best illustrates his indefatigable urge to bring theater to as many people as possible. At the war’s beginning, Monck had already moved to Norfolk and was producing plays with the Norwich Players in the Old Music House, which was their home before they built the Maddermarket in 1921. The Players all joined the war effort, but Monck at thirty-six was too old to enlist. He therefore lied about his age in order to be accepted into the medical corps and was sent to

Egypt where he worked as an orderly in an operating room. He attributed his success in this position to thespian discipline, “A succession of orderlies had been tried and fainted. For some reason or another I did not faint, I did not even feel faint. I was much too interested in the cutting up. I was not a good orderly, but I could hold limbs steadily, being able to stand quite still from my long theatrical training” (qtd. in Hildy, “Reviving” 126). Soon after learning his new job, Monck set about staging all-male amateur theatricals in his spare time. He went to great lengths to assure the quality of these productions and on one occasion even commandeered “two naval searchlights” to illuminate an indoor performance (132). One of Monck’s efforts, an adaptation of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, garnered sufficient attention for John Booth to mention it in “Shakespeare in the English Theatre,” a summary of the “principal stage productions of Shakespeare’s plays in this country in the last hundred years” published in the *Times* on 17 April 1919 (Booth 212). According to Hildy, Monck’s Poelesque revivals may have inspired Robert Atkins, who was stationed in Egypt and saw Monck’s *Macbeth*, to institute Elizabethan methods at the Old Vic after the war (*Shakespeare* 37).

A letter from Monck in March 1917 gave the impression that these theatrical activities turned his war-time experience into something of a lark. “My only interest,” he wrote, “is in *The Importance*, in which I’m playing Lady Bracknell and fighting with my clothes” (qtd. in Hildy, “Reviving” 129). Another missive from August of that same year gives a more accurate picture:

Tremendous excitement because a hospital ship may soon be going to England. All the legless men are rushing about trying to get ready. The legless men are helping the armless and the armless usually have a legless hanging on to them. It

is rather wonderful and beautiful to see them each other, all so joyously happy. It is quite pathetic for the others with enough body left to be sent back to the firing line. (qtd. in Hildy, "Reviving" 130)

Shakespeare had a special resonance for the military audience in Egypt because, as Monck later noted, "all this silly old fighting and dying business seemed much less silly when you yourself were nearly killed last week in a scrap" ("Shakespeare and the Amateur" 321). That Monck was able to continue producing plays under such circumstances is a testament both to his resilience and to the healing power of theater.

Monck wrote of producing Shakespeare during the first war that the task was easier because "he wrote mostly for men (though there was plenty of competition among the soldiers to play the few women's parts)" ("Shakespeare and the Amateur" 321). An observant reader might correctly suspect from this comment, and from Monck's excitement at playing Lady Bracknell, that he was homosexual. He lived as openly as he could in a comparatively intolerant age. While Hildy suggests that "Monck's sexual proclivity . . . seems to have had little influence on his life's work" ("Reviving" 12), some in Norwich saw Monck and the Maddermarket as a rallying point for what would later be called Gay Pride. The Nugent Monck of *A Play of Passion* is openly gay; and Reyner Banham wrote in a 1964 reminiscence of his life in Norwich that "what made Monck's career important was not the obvious bit about the repertory stage and his place in the Shakespearian tradition, but the mere fact of his equivocal presence (he was one of my favorite queers) and his refusal to go native" (372). Monck's status as a member of a persecuted minority gives added significance to his tolerant vision of an inclusive theater accessible to all.

Monck shared with William Poel the Pre-Raphaelite vision of a return to the simplicity of a pre-industrial world. He sought to create an analogous movement in theater to that which the Pre-Raphaelites had pursued in the visual arts. In an interview with Dublin's *Freeman's Journal* in 1911, Monck expressed the hope that "we might work as the Pre-Raphaelites did in painting and evolve a new outlet for dramatic sense which would not be hampered by stock traditions, scenery, curtains, footlights, paint, and the other things that make for technique" (qtd. in Hildy, *Shakespeare* 10). Like William Poel, Monck feared that cinema was robbing the theater audience of its ability to listen through a relentless emphasis on the visual (Hildy, *Shakespeare* 86). Monck anticipated Guthrie in his assertion that, to survive in the cinematic era, theater would have to abandon naturalism and move in another direction. "The one great thing," Monck wrote, "that the kinema [sic] has done for the theatre is that it has stopped it attempting to compete with realism" (qtd. in Hildy, *Shakespeare* 162). While he skillfully incorporated electronic lighting into his Maddermarket productions and succumbed somewhat in later years to the temptation of more elaborate staging, Monck's work generally emphasized low-tech visual simplicity and eschewed cinematic realism. Throughout his long career, Monck's wariness of technology and appreciation of the growing challenge from cinema combined with the inclusiveness of his populist vision and his belief in the spiritual mission of theater to shape his artistic endeavors.

Early Work

Nugent Monck began his theatrical career in London at the start of the twentieth century. He performed in several productions of the Elizabethan Stage Society and also

worked for William Poel as a stage manager. Following the collapse of Poel's organization in 1905, Monck formed his own similar group, the English Drama Society (Hildy, *Shakespeare* 9). It was with this company that Monck first staged Shakespeare in a 1906 production of *Love's Labour's Lost*. Desmond MacCarthy reviewed this offering for the *Speaker*, and his description of the setting suggests both the low-budget nature of the endeavor and the influence of William Poel:

The Bloomsbury Hall, Hart-street, is a long, oblong room, with a level floor. At one end of it is a kind of dais of two different levels, winged with tapestry curtains, and led up to on each side by two or three steps. Two little, formal trees, in tubs, showing that the scene was out of doors, stood on this stage, which was crowded, when I entered, by five gentlemen in Elizabethan costume . . . I sat so near that I felt almost like an Elizabethan gentleman perched on the stage itself. (Rev. of *Love's Labour's Lost* 91)

The English Drama Society articulated their aesthetic in a 1907 brochure, which states that the Society's founding members "wished to revive something of the early simplicity of the Drama, banishing as much as possible unnecessary and cumbersome scenery and properties" (quoted in Hildy, "Reviving" 37).

Monck's amateur theatrical organization was no more financially successful than Poel's had been, and in 1909 the English Drama Society was forced to disband (Hildy, "Reviving" 57). Even before the group's collapse, Monck's work with his Society did not pay him enough to live on. He therefore entered into the lucrative sideline of staging civic pageants, which brought Monck to Norwich for the first time as the director of some "Historical Tableaux" (50). While directing pageants, Monck had his first opportunity to work with direct lighting, in which instruments are aimed at the stage from the back of a

performance space. This innovation greatly influenced the staging of Shakespeare in the decade to come, and Monck played a key role in its dissemination.

In 1910 Monck made his greatest impact on the London theater. He did so not as an actor or director, but rather as stage manager for William Poel's production of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* at His Majesty's Theatre. This staging employed two innovations, an apron stage and direct lighting, which were adopted in subsequent productions by that theater's operator, Herbert Beerbohm Tree. Poel had extended his platform beyond the proscenium before, but Tree had dismissed these efforts as irrelevant antiquarianism. The introduction of direct lighting, however, made possible the acceptance of the apron stage by traditional practitioners like Tree. While no electronic lighting can of course ever be "Elizabethan" in a historical sense, illumination originating from the back of the house facilitated the extension of the proscenium stage into an apron or thrust configuration, which is one of the key characteristics of the Elizabethan revival. Before direct lighting, performance spaces were lit either from the wings or by footlights at the stage's front edge. This meant that moving downstage of the proscenium arch inevitably left performers in the dark. Direct lighting, by contrast, allowed illumination to be focused on actors no matter where in the theater they went. Monck had previously used this effect in his Norwich pageant and, Hildy argues, was responsible for its application at His Majesty's in 1910 (*Shakespeare* 12).

Beerbohm Tree was impressed by Poel and Monck's configuration for *Two Gentlemen*. Bridges-Adams writes:

Tree, at the height of his supremacy, was sensitive to the winds of change. I watched him once while William Poel . . . was building a forestage out over the stalls of His Majesty's and placing his arc-lamps in the upper circle . . .when, not long after, Tree staged *Henry VIII* it was apparent that he had imbibed Poel's sense while rejecting his aberrations. There was an unmistakable forestage. ("Proscenium" 28)

By Poel's "aberrations," Bridges-Adams means the absence of scenery. Tree maintained his elaborate sets upstage while expanding his playing area forward with an apron lit by instruments at the back of the house. Barker used basically these same methods at the Savoy. While he deserves some credit for innovation in replacing realistic "scenery" with abstract "decoration," the basic configuration of Barker's productions had already, by the time of the Savoy *Winter's Tale* in 1912, been adopted by as conventional a theatrical figure as Herbert Beerbohm Tree.

Even with these innovations, the days of large-scale Shakespeare on the professional London stage were numbered. By the end of World War I, such lavish endeavors were no longer economically viable. Hildy notes, "In 1917 Henry Irving [*fills*] was forced to withdraw a successful production of *Hamlet* after only two weeks in spite of very good houses because the cost of producing it was double that of a modern play and his theatre simply could not afford it." This financial pressure helped to make the inexpensive Elizabethan style "the new direction of the theatre" (Hildy, *Shakespeare* 40).

Poel had predicted this eventuality in 1912:

The increasing railway rates, together with the additional cost of labor and cartage involved in moving scenery from town to town, are becoming a serious tax on the managerial purse, so that any disposition shown by the public to dispense with scenery will, without doubt, find, sooner or later, ready acceptance in the theatre. (*Monthly Letters* 82)

Old habits die hard, however, and the West End was by no means ready for the minimalist aesthetic of the Elizabethan revival. It would be two decades before such an approach became a regular feature on the professional London Stage, and even then it would be largely confined to theaters like the Old Vic, which today would be considered part of the “not-for-profit” sector. Monck, for his part, despaired of ever being able to do the kind of work he wanted in the professional theater. He decided instead to devote his life to working with amateur actors, accepting a small remuneration for these efforts and supplementing his income as a freelance director. His base of operations would not be London but rather the provincial city of Norwich.

Crypt and Music House

“Why Norwich?” Ralph Hale Mottram asked rhetorically in examining the career of Nugent Monck and answered, “For no logical reason” (7). This is not completely true, as Monck had a very practical motivation for moving north. While he was producing “Historical Tableaux” in Norwich in 1909, “a wealthy and rather eccentric old lady” named Mrs. M. E. Pym, acting on a caprice, purchased a house for Monck to live in at the very low rent of six shillings per week (Hildy, “Reviving” 53). This dwelling was a Tudor structure ominously called “The Crypt.” For a while Monck split his time between this abode and London accommodations. Then, in the spring of 1910, he moved to Norwich for good. After the death of Mrs. Pym title passed to Monck (241), and he lived in this ancient home the rest of his life.

The Crypt was the first meeting place of the Norwich Players, and their early productions were staged in Monck’s living room. This group according to Mariette

Soman “was formed in 1910, and consisted of nine members, all men, and all under thirty years of age” (9). It had for Mottram “at different times the characteristics of a male salon, a stage school, and a secret society” (10). Monck’s own description is less sinister. “We began in such a small, humble way,” he recalled years later, “five of us around a fire discussing plays we should never see, because they were plays which no one in the early 20th century would expect a public to pay to see” (qtd. in Fowler 349). As Andrew Stephenson describes, this group of amateur enthusiasts “fell to wondering if there might not be other and better methods of staging plays than those of the ordinary commercial theatre.” The “other and better” approach they arrived at emulated the simple staging of Poel’s Elizabethan revival: “Footlights, proscenium, drop curtain and scenery were discarded and an astonished audience found itself thinking less of upholstery than of the play-wright” (Stephenson, *Theatre Arts Magazine* 203). The Norwich players, however, did not begin with Shakespeare. Instead, their first performance was of *The World and the Child*, which Hildy describes as a “Tudor Morality” (“Reviving” 65), on 3 November 1910. This was followed by Monck’s adaptation of *St. George and the Dragon* early in 1911.

Monck soon received an offer to work at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin and for a couple of years spent most of his time in Ireland and on tour in America. He had invited William Butler Yeats to attend the English premiere of *The Countess Cathleen*, which Monck staged in 1911 for “the Norwich high School Old Girls’ Association” (Hildy, “Reviving” 68). Yeats accepted, and was impressed by how his play had been handled

and by Monck's work with the Norwich Players. Stephenson writes of a return visit of the Irish playwright to Norfolk:

When W.B. Yeats and the *Morning Post* critic called on him in Blackfriars' Hall where he was supervising the preparation for the production of [Sybil Amhurst's version of the Book of] *Job*, in no time they found themselves tying the ticket numbers on the seats. Yeats decided that a man who could casually persuade an Irish poet to undertake such a task was obviously the right man to run the Abbey Theatre, Dublin. (*Maddermarket Theatre Norwich* 5)

The anecdote regarding Yeats's adventures in House Management may be apocryphal, but in October 1911 Monck was nevertheless offered the job of running the Abbey Theatre School while the company toured America in *Playboy of the Western World*. This educational project eventually led to the formation of the Abbey Second Company (Hildy, *Shakespeare* 19). While Monck was in Ireland, the Norwich Players performed occasionally under the direction of W. Bridges-Adams, who had come to Norwich originally to design a "water-frolic" staged by Monck in 1910 (Stephenson, *Maddermarket Theatre Norwich* 4), and who later became director of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre in Stratford (Bridges-Adams, *Letter Book* 29).

Monck had some success at the Abbey. He introduced that theater to the innovations of direct lighting and an apron stage which he had employed with Poel in the 1910 production of *Two Gentlemen at His Majesty's*. Monck also managed the Abbey company's second American tour (Hildy, "Playing Spaces" 82). At Yeats's request, Monck incorporated a set of screens Gordon Craig had donated to the Abbey into a production of Lady Gregory's *The Canavans*. These flexible screens made of canvas stretched over wood represented "the culmination of [Craig's] innovative theories on

stage design,” and Monck’s production was one of the few times they were ever employed to practical benefit (Hildy, *Shakespeare* 27). This demonstrates that while Monck generally strove for a minimalist approach in theatrical production, he was capable of mastering the most innovative features of the “New Stagecraft.” In direct contrast to the visual effects of Barker’s Savoy productions, which distracted the audience from the spoken text, Monck’s designs at the Abbey served to increase comprehension. Hildy notes that “most critics would say that the actors spoke so well that not a word was missed” and that “it took the poet Yeats to notice that it was not only the training Monck gave the company which accounted for this; of equal importance was the way Monck’s visual artistry made the audience listen” (24).

Monck’s time at the Abbey had a lasting impact on his later career. Yeats attended the opening of the Maddermarket in 1921, and Stephenson wrote that the “Abbey theatre, Dublin, is the parent and prototype of th[is] little theatre” (*Theatre Arts Magazine* 210). Monck also heeded Lady Gregory’s advice on establishing and maintaining his own company. “Don’t engage professional players; they have been spoiled for your purpose,” she wrote to Monck. Instead she encouraged him to “engage and train, as we of the Abbey have done, amateurs: shop-girls, school-teachers, counter-jumpers; cut-throat-thieves rather than professionals” (qtd. in Hildy, “Reviving” 111). Monck did not, however, stay at the Abbey long. He later claimed that he left because he “wanted to produce Shakespeare and not Irish peasant plays” (qtd. in Fowler 349). More diplomatically, Monck said of the Abbey in a 1952 interview with the BBC, “Although I learned much from that institution—how to run a small theatre cheaply—I felt the limits of

the Celtic twilight and my heart was really in the Shakespearean experiments that Mr. William Poel was making” (qtd. in Hildy, *Shakespeare* 32). This emphasis on Shakespeare is somewhat puzzling considering that, up to this point, Monck had staged exclusively medieval (and medieval-themed) drama with the Norwich Players. Monck’s newly fortified passion for Shakespeare and Elizabethan staging may be explained by his 1912 visit to the reconstructed Globe playhouse at the Earl’s Court “Shakespeare’s England” Exhibition (Hildy, “Playing Spaces” 82). While Poel had attempted to reconstruct the Fortune stage within the boundaries of a proscenium structure, the Earl’s Court Globe represented the first attempt, however flawed, to build an entire theater in the Elizabethan manner. In his next two performance spaces, Monck would attempt a similar feat.

When Monck returned to Norwich from working for the Abbey, his ambitions had outgrown his living room. In December 1913 he rented the “upper floor of what had once been a medieval banqueting hall” in a building known as the Old Music House to serve as a theater for the Norwich Players (Marshall, *Other* 93). In this space Monck built a stage “roughly fifteen and one-half feet wide and sixteen and one-half feet deep” (Hildy, “Reviving” 121). This is an intimate playing area, to say the least. Mariette Soman observed that the Music House stage would “barely take an average-sized dining room carpet” (25). There was no proscenium arch or wing space, and the audience was seated exclusively in front of the platform. About a third of the way back from the downstage edge of the stage, Monck placed two pillars from which he hung a “hessian” (burlap)

curtain. Monck would set up one scene behind this curtain while another was played in front. He would then open the hessian drapery to segue instantly from one scene to another (Hildy, “Reviving” 121).

Monck’s use of a curtain in this manner is similar to the traditional Broadway musical technique of playing “in one” scenes or musical numbers downstage of a traveler or scrim, which then lifts to reveal a more complex set upstage. This device is at odds with twenty-first century understanding of Elizabethan staging. But in Monck’s era, even the most ardent Elizabethanists were conditioned by centuries of proscenium tradition to accept the notion of a “traverse curtain.” They looked at the onstage pillars portrayed in the “de Witt” drawing and assumed that a curtain must have been strung between them to allow for the “alternation theory,” a plan of staging similar to that employed by Monck at the Music House (Hildy, *Shakespeare* 65). The nature and/or existence of this “traverse curtain” came to be disputed, and the critical consensus shifted over time toward the notion of an extensive “inner stage” which would accomplish the same revelatory function as the traverse, only further upstage. Barker in his Preface to *Julius Caesar* conflates these two notions, using “traverse” to describe the curtain which closes the inner stage under the balcony (*Prefaces* 2: 215). The historical invalidity of the traverse curtain and the alternation theory are immediately apparent in a thrust configuration. Spectators on the sides would observe the scenes being set behind the traverse and, depending on their position, might be blocked by this curtain from seeing action downstage of it. Monck’s Maddermarket Theater had seating on the sides, and this forced him to abandon the simple traverse curtain he had employed at the Music House in favor

of a more complex system of draperies which sought to maintain proper sightlines (Hildy, “Reviving” 193). Monck never completely abandoned the alternation theory, however, and this remains the most serious flaw in his attempt at historical accuracy.

Despite his use at the Music House of a traverse curtain to allow for the visual designation of scene locations, Monck’s aesthetic was one of Spartan minimalism. “We only want on the stage the elemental things,” he wrote in an unpublished manuscript. “The Japanese theatre has shown that it’s not by covering the entire surface that decoration is achieved, but by knowing the one spot, the only spot, where a bird or a flower may be hung to give a sense of decoration to the whole” (Monck qtd. in Hildy, *Shakespeare* 62). The miniscule stage of the Music House combined with the lack of a fly system and an absence of wing space to keep Monck’s productions very simple. On this comparatively bare stage, the Norwich Players departed from their early repertoire of medieval drama and made their first attempt at Shakespeare with a production of *Twelfth Night* in February 1914 (Hildy, *Shakespeare* 36). They were off to a good start in their new home, but World War I soon intervened and put their endeavors on hold.

After the war, Monck had to build a new company from scratch. Marshall writes that of “the original group of players none of them ever returned to perform again in their little theatre” (*Other* 93). Most had moved on to new lives elsewhere and “Victor Earles, who had played most of the major parts, was killed” in the conflict (Stephenson, *Maddermarket Theatre Norwich* 15). Undeterred, Monck assembled a new group and allowed women to participate for the first time. In keeping with the emphasis on Shakespeare established after their move to the Music House, the Norwich Players began

their first postwar season with *Much Ado About Nothing* in September 1919 (Hildy, “Reviving” 138). Mariette Soman describes the simple effectiveness of Monck’s staging for this production:

Charm is the producer’s chief characteristic—quaintness and charm. Take the church scene in ‘Much Ado’ as an example. The priest accompanied by his acolytes in red came on and stood with his back to the audience, while the curtains opened discovering the whole of the cast who moved slowly forward to the priest, the two principals a little in advance of the rest on a small white stage-cloth. The effect of this cloth was, when Claudio waves the priest on one side, to isolate Claudio and hero for the tragic scene as no other method on so tiny a stage could possibly do. (29)

If staged by Tree at His Majesty’s or Barker at the Savoy, this scene would likely have been dominated by a realistic or expressionistic representation of a church. Instead, there is no mention of any kind of scenic backdrop in Soman’s description. Rather than chafing at his lack of scenic resources, Monck used their absence to his advantage. As the *Times* wrote of Monck’s work in an anonymous article on 20 August 1920, “It is not merely that he understands the limitations of both stage and actors. He does more. He realizes their possibilities” (“Norwich Players: Amateurs” 8).

Architecture, Design, and Staging Practices at the Maddermarket Theatre

By 1921 the Norwich Players had once again outgrown their performance space, and Nugent Monck went in search of a new venue. He found an eighteenth century edifice originally built as a Roman Catholic chapel and used most recently as a “Salvation Army citadel” (Fowler 349). Most commentators, including Monck himself, also mention the building’s history as a baking powder factory, but Hildy disproves this

assertion (Hildy, “Reviving” 155). According to Marshall, the site “was christened ‘The Maddermarket’ because it was situated by the side of the medieval market where the madder roots were sold for dyeing turkey red the once famous Norwich wool” (*Other* 94). Monck said of his first visit, “The place was not prepossessing and ludicrously decorated. When I looked at it first I exclaimed ‘what awful blue paint’ and as I said it I discovered the acoustics were perfect” (qtd. in Hildy, “Reviving” 149). Sufficiently impressed, Monck bought the building and began its renovation. While Fowler writes that the Norwich Players collectively “pawned their boots” (349) to make this purchase, it was Monck who assumed the bulk of the risk, investing everything he had and borrowing to the limit of his credit (Hildy, *Shakespeare* 44). The renovation, achieved in just five weeks, was a mammoth undertaking. “The architect and contractor donated many late night hours to the attempt,” Hildy writes, “the workmen defied a union ban on overtime in order to keep on schedule, and the Norwich Players helped build up the stage around themselves as they rehearsed for opening night” (“Reviving” 157-58). Monck wrote that by the time the work was finished, “I was already broke, without a penny in the world, and fed by my Players” (Monck, *Shakespeare Survey* 72).

Monck built the Maddermarket on an Elizabethan model and operated it with “reasonably similar methods of staging to those which had existed in Shakespeare’s day” (Hildy, *Shakespeare* 45). His motives for emulating early modern practices, however, had nothing in common with the desire to freeze Shakespeare in time by creating a theatrical museum, which some postmodern critics habitually attribute to historical reconstructions. For Monck Elizabethanism was “not mere antiquarianism; it was the wave of the future”

(Hildy, "Playing Spaces" 83). As T.R. Barnes wrote in 1935, Monck "wanted an Elizabethan stage; not for sentimental or archaeological reasons, but because he believed, and has since triumphantly proved, that it is the cheapest, most flexible and most artistically satisfactory form of stage for a small theatre" (258). Monck believed, according to Stephenson, that "the open platform stage is not only the best stage on which to produce seventeenth century drama, but the best stage on which to produce Greek tragedy, miracle plays, Restoration Comedy . . . and even modern plays" (*Theatre Arts Magazine* 211). Hugh Hunt summarized the scope of Monck's repertory as of 1934:

Greek drama is represented by Euripides, Sophocles, Theocritus and Herodias; Indian, Japanese, Norwegian, Spanish, French, Italian, German and Russian are here to show, while British drama is represented from the Wakefield Cycle down through the Elizabethan, Restoration, Georgian and Victorian ages; nearly two hundred plays, many of them plays which have never been presented before in our lifetime, have run their week on the Maddermarket stage. ("Maddermarket" 48)

Monck wrote in 1949, "Practically any play (in which the setting is not more important than the text), can be given on our stage," and added, "Several living authors watching a performance have expressed surprise and delight with the continuity" (Monck, *Drama* 20). Elizabethan methods were for Monck a means of achieving intimate and affordable stagings which would contrast with the scenic excesses of the proscenium status quo and address the growing challenge from cinema.

Despite the broad range of plays from diverse periods presented on its stage, Monck strove for historical accuracy in the early modern design of the Maddermarket Theatre. Hildy writes that Monck "consulted as many books as he could find on the playhouses of Shakespeare's day, most notably W. J. Lawrence's *The Elizabethan*

Playhouse and Other Studies” and that the Maddermarket largely adheres to “Lawrence’s conjectures about Shakespeare’s own indoor theatre, the Blackfriars” (*Shakespeare* 45). Indeed, the photographs Hildy reproduces resemble the reconstructed Blackfriars Playhouse in Staunton, Virginia (56-58). The main difference between the Maddermarket stage and that of the new Blackfriars is “a large decorative canopy 18 feet above the stage” supported at the back by the posts in the *frons scenae* and at the front by two pillars nine feet downstage. “Such canopies were known to exist in the open-air stages of Shakespeare’s day,” Hildy writes, but “would have been unnecessary in an indoor playhouse” (46). The canopy likely appealed to Monck as a convenient place to hang lighting instruments, and he may initially have intended its posts to anchor the kind of traverse curtain he used at the Music House (47). In practice, however, Monck generally employed a more subtle and complex system of tapestries at the Maddermarket, which were hung upstage of the canopy supports (163).

The Maddermarket also differs from the Staunton Blackfriars in the presence of an inner stage under the balcony. The Blackfriars has a small discovery space in this position, approximately seven feet wide and of an adjustable depth normally set at six feet. Monck’s inner stage was almost twice as wide at thirteen and a half feet, but was fixed in depth at less than five feet (Hildy, *Shakespeare* 45). Hildy writes that there “is no historic evidence for the existence of an inner stage in the playhouses of Shakespeare’s day” (62). But he also points out that the “idea of an inner stage has its origins in the fact that there are some scenes in Elizabethan plays which need to be ‘discovered’,” such as that of Hermione’s statue in *The Winter’s Tale*, and that “the need for even the smallest

curtained space necessitates a decision on how this might have been managed in the theatres of Shakespeare's day" (65). The distinction between a historically accurate "discovery space" and a spurious "inner stage" may therefore be subtle. Hildy notes that many "producers brought up on the conventions of the picture frame stage" overused the inner stage as a kind of false proscenium, assembling elaborate stage pictures behind its curtain (62) as Barker did with the upper level of his Savoy configuration. Monck resisted this tendency, although he may have been forced to do so by the fact that the architecture of his building limited the depth of his inner stage to only five feet, making it "too small to accommodate more than the shortest tableau" (63).

Monck employed a removable staircase for some productions that allowed actors to move from the balcony to the main stage in sight of the audience. He explained in *Shakespeare Survey*:

Certain plays seem to need steps direct from the stage to the balcony, so that you can see the performers going up or down. Many writers have suggested this, but have never settled the exact position. Originally the steps may have been temporary, pushed into position according to the need of the play. Such a staircase—in three parts—is in use at the Maddermarket. It can be placed under the balcony if not required throughout a play, or otherwise stored in the scene dock. (Monck, *Shakespeare Survey* 72-73)

This staircase, for Hildy, "may represent Monck's first major contribution to modern notions of Shakespeare's stagecraft." He points out that Lawrence first proposed such a feature as historically accurate in 1927, three years after Monck's initial use of a portable stairway at the Maddermarket (Hildy, *Shakespeare* 232 n).

Monck's canopy was historically accurate for the early modern period, although inappropriate for indoor use. His inner stage was too large according to twenty-first-century understanding, but not so big as to serve as a false proscenium. His removable staircase, while innovative, was later acknowledged as a historically viable alternative. The architecture of Monck's stage was therefore functionally consistent with later, more authentic, reconstructions. The great pitfall of the Maddermarket with regard to Elizabethan practices, however, was the positioning of the audience. The theater was originally constructed with 206 seats in front, divided between the floor level and an upper tier, and approximately 30 on each side in elevated galleries (Hildy, *Shakespeare* 46). This configuration is disproportionately skewed to favor the audience in front. The number of side spectators decreased even further when sight lines for the second row of gallery seats proved poor, leading to the removal of these places soon after the theater opened. Seats overlooking the stage were soon eliminated as well, after unfortunate incidents of patrons dropping objects on the actors (47). This left the Maddermarket with only twelve chairs in each side gallery. Hildy notes that this lack of a significant side audience was "not without scholarly support," because "the authority Monck had turned to, W.J. Lawrence, had argued that there was no side audience at all at the Blackfriars except for a few nobles who possibly sat on stage" (48). The current reconstruction in Staunton, however, accommodates a much higher percentage of its public on the sides, with 78 out of a total of 300 seats located right or left of center.

Monck took his obligations to the small audience on the sides of the Maddermarket seriously. Bridges-Adams writes, "It was from [Monck] that I learned all I

know about what is now called acting in the round” (“Proscenium” 26). I believe, however, that the lack of an appreciable side audience nevertheless led Monck toward over-production. Without a significant number of spectators right and left to keep him honest, Monck was gradually tempted “toward significant scenic adjuncts” in a quest for “visual variety” (Hildy, “Reviving” 254). Many of these elements, such as a set of revolving flats (Hildy, *Shakespeare* 89), would have been impractical with an audience overlooking the stage. As it was, Monck’s “policy of hanging his traverse curtains halfway back between the posts and the rear façade” (66) acknowledged the sight lines of his public in the right and left galleries. A greater number of spectators seated further upstage on the sides, as at the twenty-first-century Globe and Blackfriars, would have prohibited the use of these tapestries altogether and led the Maddermarket closer to the Elizabethan ideal of a bare stage.

Monck’s draperies were a metatheatrical device. “All curtains were opened or closed by the actors in character in full view of the audience,” Hildy writes. “It was a frankly theatrical convention” (*Shakespeare* 67). Monck’s practice shared this Brechtian quality with a moment in Barker’s Savoy *Midsummer* described by Styan:

When Oberon gave Puck his final orders to put right the mistakes of the night, Puck ended the scene by seeming to stage-manage the production himself . . . Puck came down center and motioned for the lights to be dimmed, and then bent down as if raising the drop cloth as it ascended to bring in Demetrius and Lysander. For Puck to be physically aware of the mechanics of the Savoy stage was an extra-dramatic device by which Barker’s audience could be compelled to accept the mode of the play as one of conscious non-illusion. (*Shakespeare Revolution* 102-03)

A distinction exists, however, between Barker's Puck signaling the operation of electronic stage equipment and Monck's actors manually positioning their curtains. One involves the technological resources of the modern era, the other employs a method utilized on Shakespeare's own stage. Monck's Pre-Raphaelite urge to reject the practices of an industrial age found expression in his staging, while Barker's anxiety regarding technology, expressed in *The Harlequinade*, did not impact his work at the Savoy.

As in the case of all attempts at theatrical reconstruction, Monck's Maddermarket did not please all observers. Some, however, were ecstatic. The *Times* announced on 27 September 1921:

The history of the Norwich Players, culminating in the opening to-night of the first Elizabethan theatre to be constructed in this country since Cromwell ordered the closing of the playhouses, is one of the brightest spots in the dramatic history of this country, and must afford a great deal of comfort to those who are genuinely concerned for the future of the English stage. ("Norwich Players' New Theatre" 8)

Yeats, who attended the inaugural performance, said that he hoped Monck's theatre would inspire him to write "a bustling play in the manner of Shakespeare's historical plays with 'trumpets' and 'alarums and excursions,' and resounding defiance and everybody murdered at the end and no damned psychology" (qtd. in Hildy, *Shakespeare* 47).

William Poel, probably the harshest critic of Elizabethan methods among theater practitioners, had reservations about the Maddermarket. Monck said of Poel's initial reaction, "He hated it" (qtd. in Hildy, *Shakespeare* 48). But Poel nevertheless wrote in the *Manchester Guardian* on 1 October 1921, "No one has got closer to the essentials that

give scope for the successful presentation of Elizabethan drama than have Mr. Nugent Monck and his able assistants” (“Elizabethan Playhouse” 7). Stephenson forgave Monck his anachronisms. Of the downstage pillars supporting the incongruous indoor canopy he wrote in 1923, “These may not have been used in an Elizabethan private theatre, but they have proved so useful for bits of ‘business,’ so important in the adaptability of the stage, and present so pleasing a line to the eye, that their existence is fully justified” (*Theatre Arts Magazine* 204). Of Monck’s historical accuracy in general Stephenson elsewhere summarized, “The Maddermarket Theatre, while it cannot pretend to be an exact reconstruction of what we presume the Elizabethan playhouse to have been like, combines aspects of both the private and public theatres of the time” (*Maddermarket Theatre Norwich* 8).

Others critics have been less kind. Byrne, for instance, wrote of the Maddermarket that it “had neither proscenium arch nor curtain, but it was no more an Elizabethan open stage than any platform that stretches across the end of a hall from one side to the other” (Introduction xxxiv). Nevill Truman, in a 1929 article for *Amateur Stage*, describes Monck’s take on the scholarly reaction:

It was designed as an Elizabethan Theatre, and all the authorities had been consulted. But, as Mr. Monck says, no one really knows what an Elizabethan Theatre looked like, and he had to take all the practical parts of the experts’ books and leave the rest. The experts attended. They said it was all wrong. Monck retorted that at least its principles could be found in their books. And the critics turned and rent each other. Monck pursued his way calmly, and left the critics to dispute amongst themselves. (144)

Whatever the limitations of its historical accuracy, the Maddermarket proved a versatile stage not only for presenting Shakespeare, but also for applying Elizabethan methods to the work of other dramatists. Monck wrote in 1931 that the Maddermarket “was designed in order that Shakespeare’s plays could be presented with the staging and production for which they were originally intended,” but that he “soon discovered that practically any piece that did not depend upon Realism could be played upon this open stage with its gallery in the rear” (Monck, *Theatre Arts* 581).

Shakespeare, however, remained the Maddermarket’s primary focus, and Monck’s productions of his plays were marked by speed and clarity. Norman Marshall wrote, “It is remarkable how fast an actor can speak without becoming inaudible in a theatre like the Maddermarket where he is playing almost among the audience.” In contrast to accounts of Barker’s Savoy productions, Marshall claimed that at the Maddermarket, “There is no gabbling.” The speed of speech was matched by swiftness in scene transitions. While in “the normal Shakespearian production it is amazing how much time is wasted between the innumerable scenes,” Monck instead used “his Shakespearian stage exactly as Shakespeare intended it to be used, each scene following on the other without even an instant’s pause.” Marshall concluded that until “one has seen a production by Monck it is difficult to realize how essential it is for the full effect of any Shakespearian play that it should flow along without the slightest interruption” (*Other* 96).

The immediacy and intimacy of the Maddermarket experience inspired Herbert Farjeon to write, “The Maddermarket Theatre in Norwich is a revelation.” “You do not

look on at the feast through a crack in the wall,” Farjeon claimed, “You are actually present at it. You come upon it as you might come upon a fight in the street” (61).

Charles Rigby, a local critic for the *Eastern Daily Press*, was similarly impressed by Monck’s 1931 production of *Macbeth*. “The action hurries on breathlessly,” he observed. “But then, when you have recovered your breath you realize that you have missed nothing” (rpt. in Rigby, *Maddermarket Mondays* 58). While Fowler claimed that Monck sought “to rescue Shakespeare” from “the schoolmen who treated his works as books to be studied rather than as plays to be enjoyed” (349), Monck never expressed an anti-literary attitude in his limited writings. His work as a director, however, apparently convinced at least one critic of the primacy of performance. “If you prefer to read *Macbeth*, the preference becomes inadequate,” Rigby wrote. “There is too much atmosphere imparted by the spoken lines, the hues of the costumes, and settings that achieve their effect by understatement, to leave any longer the meal at the printed page satisfying” (rpt. in Rigby, *Maddermarket Mondays* 58).

Of course, not everyone was enamored of Monck’s methods. Terence Gray, director of the Cambridge Festival Theatre, wrote of the Maddermarket in terms that recall Max Beerbohm’s earlier criticism of William Poel. “Cannot Max Reinhardt, Jessner or Hilar,” Gray asked, “make more of Shakespeare, producing him with all the forces of modern continental stagecraft at their command, than can some archaeologist reviving the conditions of the Elizabethan stage?” (qtd. in Hildy, *Shakespeare* 114). More commonly, observers complained that Monck cut too much of Shakespeare’s plays in performance. The *Observer* critic wrote of Monck’s 1925 *Romeo and Juliet* that he had

been surprised to find the text “rather ruthlessly slashed,” particularly as he considered the Maddermarket “the Mecca of true Shakespearians” (qtd. in Hildy, “Reviving” 284). Both Soman (25) and Fowler (350) also claim that Monck cut Shakespeare “ruthlessly” (350). Hildy denies this charge (*Shakespeare* 100) but acknowledges that throughout “Monck’s career there was always a wide divergence of opinion as to the extent to which he cut Shakespeare’s plays” (99).

Monck wrote in 1937 that the great advantage to staging Shakespeare came from having “no author to bother about—you could cut and perform just as much as you liked” (“Shakespeare and the Amateur” 321). In practice, however, he was sometimes apologetic about cuts, as when he announced in the 1924 program for *Antony and Cleopatra*, “The producer regrets that in order to shorten the play he has been obliged to omit the Pompey scenes” (qtd. in Hildy, “Reviving” 283), and when he wrote of his war-time production of *The Taming of the Shrew* that “the Induction was cut, much to my regret, but it was impossible to tie up at least four good actors for the rest of the play just to wait attendance on Christopher Sly” (Monck, *War-Time Drama* 3). Farjeon suggests a highly practical motivation behind Monck’s practice of editing scripts. These were cut, he wrote, “because Norwich likes to be in bed by ten o’clock” (Farjeon 61). Some of Monck’s cuts, however, suggest an aggressive agenda of adaptation beyond the bounds of pragmatism, as when he cut the entire first act of *Pericles* (Hildy, “Reviving” 387) and created a chorus for *Titus Andronicus* in order to consolidate the action of that play (331). While the majority of Monck’s cuts were, as Ross Hills writes, “made with discretion”

(21), he never subscribed to the kind of fetishistic reverence for a “complete text” advocated by Byrne and employed by Barker in his Savoy productions.

With his 1933 *Henry VI* Monck completed the Shakespearean canon (Hildy, *Shakespeare* 128). Up to this point, Monck later maintained, his productions had all been “strictly Elizabethan” (Monck, *Drama* 20). Now however he began to experiment more broadly because, as he told the *Times* in 1953, “after six productions of *Twelfth Night* the audience got nearly as bored with it as I did” (qtd. in “Shakespeare at the Maddermarket” 9). Monck once went so far as to stage a production of “*What You Will* (in very large letters) or *Twelfth Night* (in very small), in which Viola breathed her lines to a typewriter and Orsino called ‘What ho, Cesario!’ into the telephone” (“Shakespeare at the Maddermarket” 9). Besides Monck’s temptation to stray from his core artistic vision, the Maddermarket also had to cope with the challenges posed by the Great Depression and World War II. This latter nearly destroyed the Norwich playhouse.

The British government closed all theaters at the start of the conflict in 1939. Monck was able to re-open soon afterwards, partly through the assistance of Tyrone Guthrie, who was working for the government’s Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (Hildy, “Reviving” 371). While it remained open thereafter, the Maddermarket’s situation in the early years of the war was highly precarious. Hildy writes that “by 1943 Monck found himself running the box office, making the costumes, designing and building the sets, cleaning the theatre, and even spending night after night sleeping in the Maddermarket as part of the fire watch” (*Shakespeare* 143). The saga had

a happy ending, however, as American troops stationed in the area after 1942 provided the Maddermarket with a badly needed public.

Monck wrote for the journal *War-Time Drama* in 1944, “We are getting a new type of audience these days, strangers to our city, and their enthusiasm gives the performers great encouragement. Some have never seen good plays before, and, like many of the American troops, have never seen Shakespeare acted” (Monck, *War-Time Drama* 3). While some of these Yanks were no doubt as unsophisticated as Monck suggests, others according to Reyner Banham were “college-educated top-sergeants who knew all about the man and his theatre from reading *Theatre Arts*.” Some were accomplished actors themselves. “The first and only time I ever met James Stewart,” Banham recalls, “he was with some other uniformed thespians, swapping tall memoirs with Nugent Monck on the stage of the Maddermarket Theatre.” These international playgoers inspired Norwich locals to a greater appreciation of Monck’s institution. “Norwich,” Banham writes, “discovered that it had a famous theatre and a producer of genius in its midst. Discovered just in time, for he was pushing 70 by then” (372). This new popularity continued after the war when, for the first time, the Maddermarket audience was made up primarily of locals and not of theater enthusiasts driving in from other parts of England (Hildy, *Shakespeare* 145). Monck retired as head of the Maddermarket in 1952, but continued to direct regularly until his death in 1958. In 1953, he staged *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* outdoors in Norfolk. It was his last Shakespearean production (Hildy, “Reviving” 395).

Populism and Ideology

Although almost everyone at the Maddermarket worked on a volunteer basis, Nugent Monck always paid his cleaning crew. “Heaven defend us,” he said, “from an amateur charwoman” (qtd. in Truman 144). While this comment is pragmatic it also reflects a lifelong respect on Monck’s part for the working class, an attitude developed during his boyhood in Liverpool. Monck extended similar consideration to his actors, although he could not compensate them monetarily. Once, while staging a pageant at Winchester College, Monck was offered an opportunity to dine with the event’s sponsors. “What about the Players?” he asked. When told the performers would be eating in the servants’ quarters, Monck announced, “So will I” (qtd. in Hildy, “Reviving” 116). While Harley Granville Barker in his later writings sometimes adopted a superior attitude toward performers, Monck never thought of actors as “the help.”

Monck’s approach to financing was equally egalitarian. He believed that “all theatre should depend on the box office in order to keep it from becoming too elitist” (Hildy, “Reviving” 237). In securing funding, Monck sought the support of citizens who would advance small sums of money in the expectation of recompense once a production succeeded. “It is better to have a hundred poor patrons at a guinea each than one rich man who is willing to throw away a hundred guineas,” he explained, because while “the rich man does not mind if he loses his money . . . the guinea guarantor has not the slightest intention of losing his” and therefore becomes “an active and excellent publicity agent” (Monck qtd. in Marshall, *Other* 93). Monck’s financial method was the opposite of Barker’s reliance on patronage. The Savoy productions were made possible by a

gentleman farmer named Lord Lucas who sold his pig-farm and gave the 5,000 pounds in proceeds to produce Shakespeare because, he said, “I like his pearls better than my pigs” (qtd. in Purdom 139).

Monck passionately believed that theater should be accessible to all, and that everyone was capable of enjoying it. Once, while stationed in Greece following the 1918 armistice, Monck requested permission to visit the ancient theater at Delphi. He later recalled, “‘Certainly Not!’ I was told. ‘No N.C. O. could possibly want to see it.’ It was a sight reserved for officers and nursing sisters” (qtd. in Hildy, “Reviving” 137). Mottram wrote in 1936 of Monck’s reaction to this snub, “I think he has never forgiven the British Army” (9). Monck sought in his efforts at the Maddermarket to combat this kind of cultural snobbism and to make his art available to the broadest possible segment of society. The stated goal of the Norwich Players was “to produce plays of literary and artistic merit in the best and most vital manner possible . . . [and] to bring such within the level of the democracy” (qtd. in Cook 212). There were limits, of course, to this populism. As Cook noted of Monck, “It would be idle to suggest that either his company or his audiences have been recruited from the Norwich *sans-culottes*” (212). The Players had to be somewhat financially solvent in order to devote leisure time to an amateur endeavor, and Monck’s public in the years before World War II was largely composed of high-culture mavens who came to the Maddermarket from all over England. Nevertheless, Monck constantly strove to expand his Theatre’s accessibility, believing that “the sheer persistence of a consistent program” would inevitably increase the number

of people who could appreciate it (Hildy, “Reviving” 237). In the end, he succeeded in building a local following that spanned demographic divisions.

Monck described in *Shakespeare Survey* the difference between his later public at the Maddermarket and a more typical Shakespeare audience. “At Stratford-Upon-Avon,” he observed, spectators

know what they are going to see, and treat what they are shown with reverence. This situation is different if you are giving Shakespeare to a working-class audience between the ages of sixteen and twenty. There is no knowing what will raise a loud burst of ironic laughter, for these audiences are intelligent and quick to take up points; they are also readily moved by sincerity. (Monck, *Shakespeare Survey* 75)

In 1933, Charles Rigby suggested that Monck was “ahead of his time” in seeking to serve a population that was becoming “better and better educated” and would consequently “demand from the drama more and more intellectual diversion and sustenance” (8-9). While the intervening decades in theatrical history have not consistently borne out this hope, Monck’s example continues to provide inspiration for theater practitioners seeking to bring Shakespeare to a wide audience.

Ideologically, Monck’s populist approach to Shakespeare has a potentially repressive component. If its function were to indoctrinate the lower orders in an elitist hegemonic discourse, then Monck’s agenda would be essentially conservative. At least one element of his production style, however, suggests that Monck did not seek to contain the expression of Norwich locals within the limits of “high-brow” Elizabethan language but instead offered his Players and public Shakespeare as a medium for communicating their own culture. I refer to Monck’s consistent use of Norfolk dialect in

the staging of comic roles. In his essay “Shakespeare, Voice, and Ideology: Interrogating the Natural Voice,” Richard Paul Knowles argues that the twentieth-century paradigm of vocal training for actors, which advocates “open” speech that is free of regionalisms, is politically reactionary. This “movement away from the accidentals of cultural conditioning that constrain the voice,” Knowles asserts, “allows for the *effacement* of cultural and other kinds of difference” (100). The supposedly culturally-neutral vocal style modeled by teachers like Kristin Linklater, Patsy Rodenburg, and Cicely Berry is for Knowles “filled by the unquestioned because naturalized assumptions of (dominant) ideology” (94). These voice teachers force aspiring actors from various class backgrounds and disparate geographic locations to all speak in a vaguely anglophilic “Mid-Atlantic” dialect, thereby subtly leading these performers and their audiences to emulate and respect the values of the Anglo-American elite. Knowles believes that this repressive agenda in voice training “explicitly connects with the fundamental precepts of the ‘Elizabethan revival’” through “the belief that ‘free’ and ‘open’ principles of staging,” whether in vocal work or scenography, “‘allow’ contemporary audiences direct access to Shakespeare’s transcendental intentions that has been unavailable since the seventeenth century” (102). Knowles’s argument has, I believe, great value for understanding the ideological ramifications of contemporary actor training, but falters in its attempt to connect an agenda of cultural effacement to the practices of the Elizabethan revival. Nugent Monck was the most prolific and consistent practitioner of early modern methods in the first half of the twentieth century, yet his approach to vocal work was radically different from that described by Knowles.

“The producer,” Monck wrote in 1937, “should never be afraid of provincialism, for nothing is more awful to listen to than an unnaturally refined voice; standardized English is as dull as a baker’s loaf. The home-made variety is more interesting” (“Shakespeare and the Amateur” 323). In his Shakespeare productions, Monck consistently used one variety of non-standard English, the Norfolk dialect, for portrayals of comic characters. Reynier Banham offers a phonetic rendering of this speech pattern which shows its deviation from the BBC norm. “Come yew haer, gal Gloria, do else I’ll lump ya one!” Banham transliterates, “Yew only want me outa the house so yew can goo off with that bleedin’ Yank.” (372). The use of this accent exclusively for low comic parts could have been construed as insensitive and demeaning, particularly since Monck was not a native of Norfolk. Local observers, however, consistently approved. Mariette Soman wrote of Monck’s early *Much Ado About Nothing* at the Music House that a “pleasant innovation was the use of the Norfolk dialect for all the low comedy parts,” adding, “One felt indeed that Dogberry was a Norfolk man” (27). Charles Rigby similarly wrote of the comic lead in Monck’s 1933 *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, “His broad Norfolk adds another cubit to his stature, whereby he out-Bottoms Bottom” (16). Rather than using non-standard speech to belittle a social group, as was the unfortunate case in American minstrel shows, Monck seems to have intended his application of Norfolk dialect to celebrate linguistic diversity in the same way that the Italian actor-playwright Dario Fo employs the patois of his native Lombardy.

Monck and Grotowski

Nugent Monck was not an overtly political director. Hildy notes that (like William Poel before him) Monck turned *Troilus and Cressida* into “an anti-war play” and advanced a similar pacifist message in *Romeo and Juliet* (“Reviving” 422), and that Monck “created quite a stir” in 1950 colonial Jamaica when he “staged a production of *The Merchant of Venice* with an all-black cast” (389). Yet Monck’s individual productions didn’t normally proclaim specific ideological statements. I believe, however, that Monck’s general philosophy toward the theater and its relationship to society strongly resembles the approach of a later and more avowedly radical practitioner, the Polish director and theorist Jerzy Grotowski. This seems at first an unlikely connection. Monck’s work, as Hildy writes, was generally “too tame” for those seeking an “emotionally demonstrative experience” (*Shakespeare* 89). Grotowski, in contrast, exhorted his actors to unveil their primal emotions and was openly confrontational with his audience. But I believe that the strategic similarities in the approaches of these two theatrical visionaries outweigh their tactical differences.

Both men believed in breaking the proscenium wall and establishing intimate contact between actors and spectators. Monck’s attempts to create engagement between performers and public at the Music House and Maddermarket suggest he would have agreed with Grotowski that “there is only one element of which film and television cannot rob the theatre: the closeness of the living organism” and that it was “therefore necessary to abolish the distance between actor and audience” (Grotowski 42). Grotowski far surpassed Monck in this quest for audience involvement. He intermingled

performance space and public seating and frequently incorporated audience members into the action (Grotowski 230-40). Monck would likely not have endorsed Grotowski's call to "let the most drastic scenes happen face to face with the spectator so that he is within arm's reach of the actor," where the playgoer "can feel his breathing and smell the perspiration" (42). Grotowski also had a more radical attitude toward dramatic text. While Monck freely cut and occasionally adapted Shakespeare in performance, the Polish director completely rejected the idea of "theater as a useful accessory to dramatic literature" and often eliminated dialogue altogether in favor of pre-verbal sounds (28). These two diverse practitioners shared, however, a sense of the spiritual mission of theater. They also both embraced minimalist, low-tech staging in an attempt to define their medium in contrast to cinema.

"Nugent Monck," Eric Fowler wrote, "was a deeply religious man" (348). Monck believed, Hildy writes, "that there was a basic sense in most people of something beyond mere materialism," which "he recognized as being at the heart of all religious belief" ("Reviving" 408). Monck appealed to this metaphysical longing in his productions, and saw theater as an alternative to the established churches. He said his audience came to the Maddermarket because "the theatre was giving them things" of a spiritual nature which "they could find nowhere else" (qtd. in Hildy, "Reviving" 338). Some in Norwich seem to have attended performances in lieu of traditional religious services. The pseudonymous "Hotspur" who reviewed Monck's 1930 *Pericles* for *Shakespeare Pictorial* went before that well-attended Maddermarket production to Evensong at the Cathedral where, he writes, "Two ladies and myself formed the total congregation" (15). Nevill Truman,

writing in 1929 of Monck's work, noted that the "Church is preparing us for another world, and to do so, it damns this; the Stage is trying to make the best of the world we live in," concluding that in "the hurry and bustle of today, the Norwich movement has a spiritual value" (144). Grotowski, writing in 1968, describes his own vision in similar terms:

I do not think that the crisis in the theatre can be separated from certain other crisis processes [sic] in contemporary culture. One of its essential elements—namely, the disappearance of the sacred and of its ritual function in the theatre—is a result of the obvious and probably inevitable decline of religion. What we are talking about is the possibility of creating a secular *sacrum* in the theatre. (49)

This notion of a quasi-religious quest, which Grotowski called "an intentional return to 'ritual roots'" (18), was common to the Polish director and the Elizabethan revival, as indicated by the fact that Poel, Monck, and Grotowski all chose to stage Kalidasa's sacred Hindu drama *Sankuntala* (Grotowski 20; Hildy, *Shakespeare* 90; Speaight, *William Poel* 147). Tyrone Guthrie would emphasize even further the ritual nature of theater in his writings and in his design of the Festival stage at Stratford, Ontario.

Monck would have been in sympathy with the spirituality and asceticism expressed in Grotowski's notion of "a 'holy' actor in a poor theatre" (41). Of the Maddermarket's poverty Truman wrote, "Those who think nothing can be achieved without money should note that the Norwich Players began with ten pounds" (144). Hildy writes that Monck "saw his financially viable amateur organization as a crusade" (*Shakespeare* 87), and Grotowski likewise suggests that renewal in the theater can only come "from amateurs working on the boundaries of the professional theatre" (50). His

description of these optimal theater artists as “a few madmen who have nothing to lose and are not afraid of hard work” (Grotowski 50) accurately describes the Norwich Players, especially in their early years. Like Monck, Grotowski believed that the magic of theater was available to anyone. Access was “not determined by the social background or financial situation of the spectator, nor even education. The worker who has never had any secondary education can undergo this creative process of self-search” (Grotowski 40). Monck similarly insisted that his work at the Maddermarket could be appreciated by any open-minded person, regardless of education level (Hildy, *Shakespeare* 126).

Monck and Grotowski both understood the need for theater to redefine itself in response to the challenge from cinema. Both rejected what Grotowski terms “the wrong solution” to this problem, which consists of making the theater “more technical” in order to compete with motion pictures. Instead, Grotowski writes, “the theatre must recognize its own limitations. If it cannot be richer than the cinema, then let it be poor” (41). Monck similarly advocated as a response to film a theater in which “there will be less noisy action on the stage” (from *Daily Film Review* 1928, qtd. in Hildy, “Reviving” 213). Grotowski’s assertion that “no matter how much theatre expands and exploits its mechanical resources, it will remain technologically inferior to film” (19) echoes Monck’s earlier pronouncement that theater must stop “attempting to compete with [the] realism” of cinema (qtd. in Hildy, *Shakespeare* 162). Monck shared this willingness to concede realistic and technological superiority to film with the other practitioners of the Elizabethan revival. “Authenticity spared the theatre from a competition it could not win,” Gary Taylor writes of the movement’s relationship to cinema. “The Elizabethan

stage,” he continues, “had no sets, no artificial lighting, [and] no period costumes” (Taylor 274). This paucity of resources allies the recovery of early modern practices to Grotowski’s “poverty,” in which “Theatre can exist without make-up, without autonomic costume and scenography, without a separate performance area (stage), without lighting and sound effects, etc.” (19). Monck expressed analogous sentiments in his desire to “evolve a new outlet for dramatic sense which would not be hampered by stock traditions, scenery, curtains, footlights, paint, and the other things that make for technique” (qtd. in Hildy, *Shakespeare* 10).

Monck and Grotowski both rejected standard forms of praise and accolades for theater artists. The Norwich Players performed anonymously, a practice which according to Hildy “did a great deal to encourage ensemble acting” (*Shakespeare* 77). No “calls” were ever taken at the Maddermarket (Vince 26). Legend has it that, in spite of “cries for the author,” Monck even denied a curtain call to George Bernard Shaw at the premiere of that playwright’s *Getting Married* (Hildy, “Reviving” 261). Grotowski wrote that in the “Poor Theatre” artistic satisfaction “does not mean flowers and interminable applause, but a special silence in which there is much fascination” (44). Maddermarket audiences typically offered this kind of undemonstrative recognition. An anonymous 1933 correspondent to the *Eastern Daily Press* who identified himself as a frequent Maddermarket patron claimed, “Our silence is a far higher tribute of appreciation than applause can be” (qtd. in Rigby 12). Lillah McCarthy offers a more typical metric for theatrical success when she writes of her performance in the Savoy *Midsummer*, “As Helena in a golden wig, I was again beloved. Presents showered upon me. Nice

chocolates, bad verses, flowers, [and] bracelets” (174). Ms. McCarthy was no more mercenary than the vast majority of her fellow performers at the time or sense, but she would likely not have enjoyed working for either Monck or Grotowski.

While they differed in the extremity of their methods, these two practitioners both rejected the trappings of technology and overproduction and believed that their more simple methods yielded spiritual results. Grotowski claimed that the practices of the “Poor Theatre” revealed “not only the backbone of the medium, but also the deep riches which lie in the very nature of the art form” (21). Monck similarly saw his minimalist efforts at the Maddermarket as an antidote to the over-stimulation of the cinematic age and as a means of maintaining spiritual community in a modern society increasingly afflicted with alienation.

The Legacies of Monck and Barker

Nugent Monck’s fame during his lifetime was international. Hugh Hunt wrote in 1934, “I have been asked by numerous friends in France and Germany if I ever visited the Maddermarket Theatre at Norwich, while most American tourists, interested in the theatre, make this one of their pilgrimages” (Hunt, “Maddermarket” 48). This global renown spread in the years following World War II, when a replica of the Maddermarket was built in Graz, Austria (Hildy, “Reviving” 382). Monck’s influence in the English theater was great, and not only with regard to early modern drama. His efforts at recovering Restoration comedies were essential to Nigel Playfair’s successful revival of this genre at the Lyric Theatre Hammersmith. *The Way of the World*, *The Rivals*, *The Beaux’ Stratagem*, *She Stoops to Conquer*, and *The Critic* were, Hildy writes, “all seen

in Norwich before they were seen anywhere else in England after the war” (“Reviving” 146). But it was as a producer/director of Shakespeare that Monck had his greatest impact. Burgoyne Miller wrote in 1931 that in spite of “the good work which is done at such places as the Old Vic and the Stratford Theatre, I am still convinced that the Maddermarket is the only theatre in England where Shakespeare is perfectly interpreted,” because Monck’s playhouse was “the only genuine Elizabethan theatre in England” (Miller 326).

Critics and practitioners widely saw the Maddermarket as a laboratory for testing ideas about early modern staging. Hugh Hunt directed half of the 1933-34 season at the Maddermarket while Monck was ill (Hildy, *Shakespeare* 130), and applied this experience to the historical controversy surrounding the nature of the “inner stage.” “Anyone who has had to deal with production on an Elizabethan stage,” Hunt claimed, “based on the assumption of balcony and underbalcony, such as exists at the Maddermarket Theatre in Norwich” would find that the upstage alcove was not appropriate for the staging of lengthy scenes (Hunt, *Live Theatre* 76). Hunt later went on to direct in the West End and at the Old Vic, where he often employed methods he had learned at the Maddermarket (Marshall, *Producer* 266). Barry Jackson was, according to Hildy, “enthralled by Monck’s work, and by the Maddermarket” (“Reviving” 250) to the extent that, when Jackson became director of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre in 1946, he immediately hired Monck to stage *Pericles* at Stratford (251).

In 1928 Charles F. Smith, the founding producer of the Leeds Civic Playhouse, wrote, “Some time ago I asked a very distinguished producer a characteristically

indiscreet question: ‘who in your opinion are the three greatest producers of this generation?’ ‘Gordon Craig, Granville Barker, and Nugent Monck,’ was the prompt reply” (qtd. in Hildy, “Reviving” 274). Smith’s anecdote suggests that at that time Barker and Monck were considered equally significant. Over the following decades, however, Barker’s influence came to be seen as predominant. In his 1977 *The Shakespeare Revolution*, for instance, J.L. Styan devotes two entire chapters to Barker (one examining his Savoy productions and another his early criticism) but less than two pages to Monck’s work at the Maddermarket (*Shakespeare Revolution* 124-25). The manner in which Monck’s contributions were overlooked by a subsequent generation of scholars provides a cautionary tale for stage directors, whose work is inherently ephemeral.

Barker chose to document his thoughts on theater practice in his *Prefaces to Shakespeare* and, even though these essays often contradicted Barker’s actual approach at the Savoy, the *Prefaces* earned him status as a major figure in the Elizabethan revival. Monck’s frustratingly brief posthumous article in *Shakespeare Survey* demonstrates that he could, if he wished, have written highly specific descriptions of the mechanics of early modern staging. In this piece, Monck describes the function of the Maddermarket’s architectural features:

In *Romeo and Juliet*, the balcony has several uses. It is, of course, kept for the first balcony scene, and for the second when Romeo secures his escape by the rope ladder, which Juliet unties, and throws after him . . . For the last scene of all, you return to the balcony. Juliet is upon the tomb below; there is a grating before the balcony so that the impression is given that you are looking down into a crypt . . . Juliet’s head should be towards the audience, so that when Romeo addresses her he is facing the audience. Juliet can easily turn when the Friar awakens her. The Duke and the crowd speak from the balcony; only the parents are below, save

for their torch-bearers, who close the curtains after everyone has filed out.
(Monck, *Shakespeare Survey* 73)

A book-length exploration by Monck of the issues touched on in his *Shakespeare Survey* article would have been invaluable for theater practitioners emulating an Elizabethan style.

Later scholars have underestimated Nugent Monck's contribution partly because it is difficult to separate his influence from that of other figures, most notably Harley Granville Barker. A group of productions and Prefaces between 1926 and 1931 illustrates the complex web of association between Monck, Barker, and their fellow Shakespeareans. In his Preface to *Antony and Cleopatra*, Barker advocated the use of Renaissance costumes for those plays of Shakespeare set in earlier eras, to be augmented by small sartorial touches from these more distant periods. He wrote:

In the National Gallery hangs Paolo Veronese's "Alexander and the Wife and Daughter of Darius." This will be very much how Shakespeare saw his Roman figures habited. Antony would wear Alexander's mixture of doublet, breastplate, sandals and hose. Here too is something very like Octavia's costume; and though Cleopatra might be given Egyptian stigmata, there would still be laces to cut.
(*Prefaces* 3: 42-43)

Monck used this style of dress for his 1926 *Julius Caesar*. Hildy writes of the production:

This was probably the first time anyone had put on stage the idea of costuming that Granville-Barker advocated in his preface to *Antony and Cleopatra*, which had appeared in 1925. In that preface Barker pointed to the late sixteenth-century

painting by Paolo Veronese, *The Family of Darius before Alexander*, which hangs in the National Gallery in London, as an illustration of how the Elizabethans viewed classical costuming. (“Reviving” 199)

Complications arise when one considers that Barker does not appear to have actually published his Preface to *Antony and Cleopatra* until 1930 (Purdom 303). This is a small point arising from a Byzantine sequence of revision and reprinting with regard to Barker’s *Prefaces*. It would be cruelly ironic if Hildy, who has undoubtedly done more than any other scholar to resurrect the reputation of Nugent Monck, were led by the unclear record of Barker’s publication dates to, in this one instance, give Monck less credit than he deserves. Nevertheless, this later date of publication for Barker’s Preface to *Antony and Cleopatra* raises the question of who influenced whom in the use of Renaissance costuming for Shakespeare’s ancient plays.

Barker did not use early modern dress in the two works set before 1500, *The Winter’s Tale* and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, staged at the Savoy. He may have been led to advocacy of this style by Monck’s work at the Maddermarket. Monck, Hildy writes, “like Poel before him, conceived of all the characters from Troilus to Hamlet, as essentially Elizabethan people and he dressed them accordingly” (“Reviving”198). Monck therefore almost surely used Renaissance costuming for his 1926 *King Lear*, which Barker saw in September of that year (Hildy, *Shakespeare* 188). Barker was sufficiently impressed with Monck’s production to refer to it overtly in his 1927 Preface to the tragedy. Complaining in a footnote of “modern scenic productions” which “lengthen the plays considerably,” Barker observed:

Mr. Nugent Monck recently produced *King Lear* at the Maddermarket Theatre Norwich, upon an unlocalized stage. He cut approximately 750 of the 3340 lines of text (the Folio will give authority for the cutting of some 200), allowed a ten minutes interval, did not play over-rapidly, and the whole performance only lasted two hours and twenty-five minutes. (Barker, Preface to *Lear* xviii n)

The *Times Literary Supplement* in its 23 June 1927 review of the Preface to *King Lear* found Barker's admiration for Monck's production significant. The reviewer attributed to Barker the notion that "the Maddermarket Theatre at Norwich appears to be the only place at which Shakespeare's *King Lear* has been acted, since the seventeenth century, as Shakespeare meant it to be acted" ("*King Lear* for the Stage" 437). This is a strong conclusion to reach from the brief expository footnote cited above. Perhaps other passages in the Preface also suggested homage to Monck. Barker's thoughts on costuming in *King Lear* comprise one such possibility.

Barker wrote with regard to dress that while "the prevailing atmosphere and accent is barbaric and remote," Shakespeare's "own seventeenth century" asserts itself in Edmund's "Italianate flavor" and "Edgar's beginning" which "suggests bookishness and the Renaissance." Oswald was similarly "a topical picture" that would be "all but obliterated" by an ancient British costume, and the presence of a Renaissance Fool "in a barbarous king's retinue" was for Barker a typically Shakespearean anachronism similar to that of "Henry V in doublet and hose" (Preface to *Lear* lxxix). Overall, Barker advocates the same mixture of Elizabethan and earlier elements that he would later endorse in his Preface to *Antony and Cleopatra* and that he would employ in his 1940 *King Lear* at the Old Vic. The *Manchester Guardian* wrote of this late production that the "rich Renaissance costumes . . . exactly communicate the tragedy's barbaric temper and

yet at the same time contrive to make each player look as though he or she had been painted thus by Moroni or Moretto” (Rev. of *King Lear* 6). This was also the style that Barker likely saw in Nugent Monck’s 1926 *King Lear* at the Maddermarket.

The question of influence with regard to the use of Renaissance costuming for plays set in the pre-Christian era grows even more complex when one considers the 1931 Old Vic production of *Antony and Cleopatra* directed by Harcourt Williams. Williams wrote of this production in the *Old Vic Saga* that “hanging on the coat-tails of Harley Granville-Barker” he pursued his inspiration for costumes in “the pictures of Paul Veronese and Tiepolo.” He also refers, however, to “the help of Paul Smyth” in this project (Williams 97, qtd. in Hildy, *Shakespeare* 120). This brings the circle back to Monck because, as Hildy notes, the designer Owen Paul Smyth learned his trade working under Monck at the Maddermarket from 1921 to 1928 (*Shakespeare* 119). Smyth had already created a production of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* for the Old Vic in which he “basically recreated the Maddermarket set designs of 1923” (320). While Barker’s Preface to *Antony and Cleopatra* no doubt influenced Williams and Smyth in their decision to use Veronese as a model for costuming, Smyth would also have been naturally amenable to this approach, having used a similar style in the 1926 Maddermarket *Julius Caesar* and, probably, in Monck’s own 1924 production of *Antony and Cleopatra*.

Both Barker and Monck influenced Tyrone Guthrie in his adoption of Elizabethan methods. Guthrie got his job running the Old Vic largely on the strength of his staging of *Love’s Labour’s Lost* at the Westminster Theatre in 1933. Guthrie freely acknowledges

that this production was based on Monck's 1930 revival of this comedy. He wrote in *A Life in the Theatre*:

I had seen the play not long before in a delightful production by Nugent Monck directing a semi-amateur cast in the little Maddermarket Theatre in Norwich. In Monck's production a permanent set suggested no clearly identifiable locality; [and] there were no breaks between scenes; . . . Most of the good ideas in my production were culled from Monck's at Norwich . . . From Monck I absorbed various points of style, and a point of view about this particular play. (84)

"I confess my debt to Nugent Monck," Guthrie concluded, "not with a blush but with pride that I had the sense to pick so good a model" (*Life* 84). Elsewhere, Guthrie wrote of Monck's 1930 *Doctor Faustus*, in which "scenery there was none" and "the costumes were exact copies of Elizabethan dress," that it was "more than archeologically interesting. It was stimulating because it suggested the possibilities of a technique that, being old, was not lost but new" (*Theatre Prospect* 49). Guthrie's comments recall George Bernard Shaw's review of William Poel's 1896 production of this same Marlovian tragedy, in which Shaw claimed that Elizabethan methods created a "picture of the past" which "was really a picture of the future" (Shaw, Rev. of *Doctor Faustus* 37).

Monck, however, is conspicuously absent from the roll of influences Guthrie cites in *A Life in the Theatre* to justify his application of Elizabethan methods at the Old Vic. "We would follow Poel and Barker and Shaw," Guthrie claims (121) and specifically cites Barker's *Prefaces to Shakespeare* as an inspiration (120). Nevertheless, Guthrie obliquely and unintentionally acknowledges Monck slightly later in this section. In a list of "the facilities usually supposed to have been available in the Elizabethan theatres"

Guthrie includes as the first item “stairs, leading to a balcony” (121). These are not a universally accepted feature of Elizabethan stagecraft. Neither the new Globe nor the reconstructed Blackfriars Playhouse in Virginia have such onstage stairs, and Barker does not consider them in his discussions of early modern practices. Monck, however, often used a removable staircase in his Maddermarket productions (Monck, *Shakespeare Survey* 72-73). Guthrie saw several plays at Monck’s Theatre, and may have there absorbed the notion of an onstage stairway as a useful component of Elizabethan staging.

No one can completely separate the respective influences of Harley Granville Barker and Nugent Monck on the Elizabethan revival. This is partly because they both owed much to William Poel. Of Paolo Veronese’s *The Family of Darius before Alexander*, for instance, which inspired both Barker’s Preface to *Antony and Cleopatra* and Monck’s 1926 production of *Julius Caesar*, Hildy writes that “Poel had used this very painting as the model for a costume in his production of *The Broken Heart* in 1898, and no doubt both Barker and Monck originally got the idea from that source” (“Reviving” 199). The impact of Barker and Monck on later stage directors is similarly intertwined. Both men had a passion for Shakespeare, and their work offers much to both scholars and theater practitioners. Barker’s influence has been more profound since 1960, largely because the *Prefaces to Shakespeare* continued to speak for him after his death. As twenty-first-century scholarship increasingly embraces performance as a legitimate alternative to written criticism, Nugent Monck may eventually gain the recognition deserves.

CHAPTER IV
TYRONE GUTHRIE

Introduction

In April 1952, shortly before his first involvement with the Stratford (Ontario) Festival, the *Times* reported that “Mr. Tyrone Guthrie, in a recent address to the Shakespeare Stage Society, said that there would be no drastic improvement in staging Shakespeare until there was a return to certain basic conditions of the Shakespeare stage” (“The Theatres” 9). Guthrie designed the Canadian performance space to include many “permanent architectural features” of an early modern theater (Guthrie, “First Shakespeare” 6). As an expression of the director’s Elizabethan aspirations, the 1953 Festival Program announced the intention of “enabling the plays to be staged in the convention for which they were written” (qtd. in Groome, “Stratford” 128). Historical accuracy was not, however, Guthrie’s primary concern. As John Pettigrew and Jamie Portman note, “Stratford’s stage represents an attempt to capture not the form but the spirit of Shakespeare’s original stage” (Pettigrew 77). There was “no need” in Guthrie’s view for “an exact replica of the Globe Theatre.” Instead his primary goal in imitating the Elizabethans was “to make the contact between players and audience as intimate as possible” (“The Theatres” 9). Guthrie wrote in an early letter to Festival organizers that he was “intensely interested to produce Shakespeare on a stage which might reproduce

the actor-audience reaction for which he wrote—viz.: the audience closely packed *round* the actors” in order to pursue “a fresh advance in Shakespearean production” (qtd. in Pettigrew 29).

Guthrie valued this intimacy because he believed theater was descended from ancient communal rituals. The placement of the public in close proximity to the playing area created a sense of unity between audience and actors which enhanced what Guthrie perceived as the sacramental quality of drama. “The appreciation of Ritual,” he wrote, “is greatly enhanced if you are aware of its performance as a social act, aware of being one of many who are ‘assisting’ at the performance, as the French so accurately describe the function of an audience.” The presence of spectators on three sides increased this sensation, because they could see each other as well as the performers on stage. By thus emphasizing the “social, shared aspect of performance” the public is “constantly . . . reminded that one and all are sharing the same occasion, taking part in the same rites” (Guthrie, “Do We Go” X3). This concern with theater as a communal ritual led Guthrie to become a major proponent, in both theory and practice, of the “open stage.” For Guthrie this term referred not only to the abolition of the proscenium but to “an auditorium arranged not *in front* of the stage, but, to a greater or less extent, wrapped *around* the stage.” He distinguished between an “Arena” format, where the audience completely surrounds the playing area, and a “Thrust” or “Open” configuration, in which the public only partially encircles the platform (Guthrie, “Do We Go” X3). The thrust stage is generally considered to have been a key feature of early modern theaters. The new Globe in London and the reconstructed Blackfriars in Staunton, Virginia both place

audience on three sides in a semi-circle of approximately 180 degrees from the front of each theater's *frons scenae*. In his most famous performance space, the original tent at Stratford, Ontario, Guthrie pursued a more circular form by arranging the public in a 240-degree arc (Somerset xiv). This allowed him to better imitate the conditions of ancient ritual celebrations which he believed had been enacted in the round. Guthrie frequently employed an Elizabethan-style permanent set and sometimes experimented with the early modern convention of "universal lighting," in which both actors and audience are bathed with the same unwavering illumination. His major influence in the recovery of Shakespearean staging, however, was as a founder of the open-stage movement.

There was a political dimension to Guthrie's advocacy of this alternative theatrical form. Peter Shaughnessy suggests that, for Guthrie, the "abolition of the proscenium arch, and the encirclement of actors by audience, had been conceived in the spirit of egalitarianism and democratic inclusiveness" (135). Guthrie believed that the proscenium arose partly as a manifestation of society's increasing division along class lines. It "marked the social chasm, which separated the predominantly courtly and aristocratic audience in the stalls and boxes from the socially inferior persons who were paid to entertain them" (Guthrie, *Life* 197). Guthrie contrasted this hierarchical arrangement with "the intimate, daylit relation of the Elizabethan actor to his audience and, at any rate in the public theatres, the far more democratic character of that audience" and sought to emulate this early modern ambiance through his use of the thrust configuration (197). During the Cold War Guthrie wrote that the danger of fire in proscenium theaters had led to the division of audience and performers by "yet another

barrier, the iron curtain, now a world-famous symbol of political separation” (“Do We Go” X3). This conflation of political and theatrical boundaries in the desire to abolish both is typical of what Shaughnessy calls the “generally anti-authoritarian character of Guthrie’s repudiation of the picture frame” (93). In 1964, when he was Chancellor of Queen’s University, Belfast, the *Times* reported a speech by Guthrie “in which he deplored the existence of all artificial borders and in particular that between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic” (“Guthrie Apology” 7). Shaughnessy connects this desire on Guthrie’s part “to dismantle a national barrier that existed both in the imagination and in physical fact” with the director’s “relentless drive to abolish the line between audience and performer and auditorium and stage” (94). Robert Morley suggested sardonically that “one of the reasons [Guthrie] returned to Ulster so frequently is that he always thought that he might be given the job of taking over and running the country” (qtd. in Rossi, *Astonish* 84). While Guthrie never pursued a career in politics, his work in the theater, like that of Nugent Monck, advocated an egalitarian agenda of inclusiveness.

Guthrie also had a more practical reason for championing the open stage. He believed that live theater could only survive the competition from cinema and television by adopting this alternative design. These new media, Guthrie felt, had raised audience expectations beyond the capabilities of the proscenium format. “When there was no better alternative,” he wrote for *The New York Times* in 1962, “the public was prepared to buy seats where the best that could be expected was a dim and distant relation with the stage.” People began to demand more “as soon as it was found that in the movies everyone could see and hear fully.” Guthrie warned that “the theatre will not survive

unless the fact is faced—and that right soon—that live acting is not indefinitely expandable. It is my belief that anything subtle or intimate cannot be projected much beyond fifteen rows” (“The Case for ‘Live’ Theatre” 210). A theater with a thrust configuration such as that of the Stratford Festival, which holds 2,262 people with no spectator more than 65 feet from the stage (Somerset xiv), provides the visual and aural closeness required by a public accustomed to cinema while simultaneously allowing enough revenue from ticket sales to enable economic viability. Guthrie thought that under such conditions theater could compete with film because “other things being equal, a real live creature, breathing and feeling and thinking his part right then and there before you, is apt to be more vivid than a photograph reproducing, perhaps for the thousandth time, movements made, maybe, years before and on another continent” (“The Case for ‘Live’ Theatre” 210).

Guthrie’s arguments for the thrust configuration, coupled with his practical example, convinced many that this model was the way of the future. He generally suggested that “the open stage was the answer” primarily “for plays written before about 1640” (Guthrie, “Theatre at Minneapolis” 67). But Guthrie’s success with more recent playwrights (including Chekhov) convinced many that, as Brooks Atkinson wrote in 1953, “Not only Shakespeare but modern playwriting needs the poetic freedom of some sort of platform stage” (“Shakespeare and his Stage” X1). The decision to build the Chichester Festival Theater with an open stage typically reflects Guthrie’s influence at mid-century. The *Times* reported on 4 February 1960 that the Chichester trustees (a group including Alec Guinness, who had worked for Guthrie in Canada) had

been convinced by the example of the Festival Theatre at Stratford, Ontario, originally under the artistic direction of Mr. Tyrone Guthrie, that a theatrical performance on those lines, being 'live' and three-dimensional in the most comprehensive and literal sense, is most likely to keep 'live,' three-dimensional theatre in existence in the age of films and of television with their two-dimensional screens. ("Chichester Festival" 3)

For a while it seemed that proscenium's days were numbered.

Many observers of this era described the inexorable advance of the open stage in terms similar to those used by Marxist revolutionaries to herald the inevitable triumph of socialism. "While these Roman mobs are at it," Walter Kerr wrote in the *New York Herald Tribune* regarding the Stratford Festival's 1955 production of *Julius Caesar*, "they can tear down the proscenium arch theatres from coast-to-coast" (qtd. in Pettigrew 108). Two years earlier, Atkinson invoked analogous imagery of upheaval when he wrote:

The whole theory of the proscenium stage that has dominated the English-speaking stage since the Restoration has begun to crumble . . . And anyone who now builds a theatre that is tied permanently to a proscenium stage is likely to find himself with a mausoleum on his hands before he has amortized the mortgage. ("Shakespeare and his Stage" X1)

In 1966, Guthrie could justly boast:

Most of the new theaters in North America with any serious policy have been built with an open stage. Stratford, Canada; the Arena in Washington, D.C.; the Alley in Houston; the Tyrone Guthrie in Minneapolis; the Vivian Beaumont in the Lincoln Center, and the new theater being built at Ithaca, N.Y. all have 'open' or 'thrust' stages. ("Do We Go" X3)

John Pettigrew and Jamie Portman claimed in 1985 that Guthrie's efforts in Ontario had "destroy[ed] forever the virtual monopoly and tyranny of the proscenium or picture-

frame stage” (Pettigrew 68). As in the case of Communism, however, this forward progress stalled. Decades later proscenium remains the dominant theatrical format in North America.

Commercial theater, as represented by Broadway productions and the auditoriums throughout the continent to which they tour, has remained largely untouched by the open-stage movement. New regional theater construction in the not-for-profit sector has also failed to consistently reflect Guthrie’s vision. While some theaters built after those cited by the director in 1966, such as Chicago Shakespeare’s permanent home at Navy Pier, have employed a thrust configuration, many others have stuck to proscenium. One example of this move away from the open stage was the 1992 decision by Washington, DC’s Shakespeare Theater to leave a thrust configuration at the Folger Library (albeit one with serious deficiencies) to move into a custom-built proscenium space at the Lansburgh building. Educational theater has also been slow to embrace open staging. Most college theater departments (even those with new facilities) still mount their most important productions on picture-frame stages, with any thrust work relegated to smaller “black box” spaces capable of various configurations.

Many factors have contributed to the failure, or at least the delay, of the open-stage revolution. Commercial theater in general and the Broadway musical in particular have continued to pursue what Grotowski called “the wrong solution” (41) to the challenge from film, employing ever more complex technological resources in an effort to create cinematic spectacle. Such illusionistic effects are only possible in proscenium. Not-for-profit theaters often imitate the elaborate stagecraft of Broadway in an attempt to

attract a broader public, and this has contributed to their continued reliance on the picture-frame. The vested interests of set designers in both professional and educational theater have often led this important theatrical constituency to resist thrust-stage experimentation. While these practical and economic concerns have probably had the greatest impact in delaying the advance of open staging, many performance scholars have also been sharply critical of Guthrie's efforts. Their negative interpretations have impeded acceptance of his vision, at least within the academy.

A discrepancy between Guthrie's stated ideological intent and the perceived philosophical impact of his efforts has led some critics to reject his architectural model. These scholars see Guthrie's open stage as a conservative adjunct of the commercial status quo rather than as an alternative to this paradigm. This came about partly because Guthrie's personal fondness for historical pageantry led some observers to associate the thrust configuration with "a lavish and luxurious production style" (Groome, "Affirmative" 144). This aesthetic, for Margaret Groome, prevents audiences from engaging with Shakespeare's revolutionary potential and instead creates productions which are "something to admire and 'visit' as one does a museum, something separate from one's day-to-day life" (Groome, "Stratford" 125). Almost all such theoretical criticism has focused on Guthrie's work at the Stratford Festival, which functions in this view as an Althusserian "Ideological State Apparatus" (Knowles, "Shakespeare 1993" 225) that serves a reactionary agenda. Groome, pursuing a Marxist reading in the tradition of Herbert Marcuse, sees the Festival as an example of "mass culture" which

“depoliticizes the working class and so maintains the authority of the dominant social order” by hypnotizing its audiences with spectacle (“Affirmative” 139).

This notion of Guthrie as a purveyor of visual excess seems at odds with the supposedly Spartan aesthetic of the Elizabethan revival. Throughout his career, Guthrie frequently aligned himself with the minimalist stagecraft practiced by William Poel and Nugent Monck. He rejected the commercial paradigm in which to “give the public something for its money, a Pageant is mounted to the accompaniment of a Shakespearean text.” Guthrie lamented that in proscenium theaters “director after director, faced with what I consider the insuperable problems posed by the architecture, falls back upon elaboration of spectacle” (*Life* 214). According to Pettigrew and Portman, “Guthrie wanted a stage without sets” (76). He achieved this goal in Ontario, where all of his productions were staged on an undecorated, purely functional platform. Guthrie was also sparing in his use of stage lighting. He eschewed the use of colored gels (Rossi, *Minneapolis* 7) and decreed that “lighting must not be used for illusionary purposes” but should instead be “a merely utilitarian source of illumination” (Guthrie, “Production” 166). Yet while Guthrie followed a “path of artistic austerity” (Whittaker x) when it came to sets and lighting, this philosophy did not hold in matters of costume.

In theory Guthrie sometimes advocated minimalism in stage dress, as when he wrote of *The Tempest*, “Let Ariel and Caliban appear as what they are—two actors; and let them persuade the audience that they are spirits by the art not of the dressmaker but of the actor” (*Ten Great Plays* 448). In practice, however, Guthrie’s productions featured elaborate and expensive costumes which Nathan Cohen describes as “more lavish than

the most lavish settings” (“Theatre” 235). This clashed with Guthrie’s professed rejection of scenic splendor. Groome diagnoses this disconnect: “Working with a stage that was deliberately austere, Guthrie proposed that ‘luxury’ be supplied by the costuming” (“Affirmative” 145). Cohen may exaggerate when he suggests that the Stratford Festival under Guthrie “accented visual richness . . . and spectacle at the cost of all else” (“Theatre” 235), but opulent stage dress was clearly a major feature of the director’s Canadian efforts. Alec Guinness’s gigantic “crimson coronation robe,” which literally filled the stage during 1953’s inaugural *Richard III*, typifies this tendency toward sartorial extravagance. Props were also ornate, picturesque and sometimes macabre. Robert Cushman describes *Richard III* as “the first of many great evenings for the flourishing of banners” (20), and Pettigrew and Portman note that “true to character, Guthrie kept sending Henry’s corpse back to the properties department for more gore, telling it to ‘ladle on the pus’” (5).

For unsympathetic scholars, Guthrie’s visual achievements went beyond good showmanship to perniciously invert theatrical values. Richard Paul Knowles suggests that Guthrie’s early productions created a “tradition of splendour” at Stratford in which “visual elements have competed with, or overwhelmed, the text” and “quality of design” has often taken “priority over clarity of directorial vision” (“Legacy” 41). He writes that “the flamboyant style of its founder” has led the Festival to stage “productions of Shakespeare that eschew subtle shadings or thoughtful modulation in favor of pictorial splendour and heightened emotion” (44). Groome similarly perceives an “automatic equation of quality *with* lushness and spectacle” on the part of the Stratford company

("Stratford" 115). Cohen concludes that, because of the stultifying impact of its bourgeois aesthetic, "the real Festival achievement has been to persuade its public that they need not take Shakespeare seriously" but can instead "consume" his plays "as you would any status commodity" ("Stratford" 273). Even with some allowance for hyperbole, these negative comments suggest that Guthrie, at least to some extent, failed in his stated intent to "appeal to the ear rather than the eye" (Guthrie qtd. in Funke 115).

Guthrie saw himself as an anti-establishment figure who challenged the passive mindset of postmodern consumerism. "We are the slaves of convention," he wrote in 1964. "We hardly think for ourselves at all. We imbibe through mass media the ideas and the ideology of the Chamber of Commerce" (Guthrie, *New Theatre* 167). Robert Hardy, who acted for Guthrie in three productions of *Henry VIII*, said that the director "rebelled against authority and spent his life theatrically making fun of tradition" (qtd. in Rossi, *Astonish* 142). For Margaret Groome, however, Guthrie's embrace of opulent spectacle negated any agenda of radical reform the director may have espoused. She challenges the notion "that Guthrie was a tradition-breaker" along with "the idea that the technical innovation of the open stage would be a progressive, even experimental, enterprise by which to advance Shakespearean production" ("Stratford" 124). Instead Groome argues that the "Guthrie variant of 'spectacle' frequently meant that the transgressive potential of the Shakespearean text (that is, the potential of both performance texts and dramatic texts to play a role in political and social transformation) was subverted by the physical and technical elements of the performance text." Because of its reliance on a "predominance

of facile effects,” the Stratford Festival under Guthrie “failed to give any indication that theatre might function as a commentator on the social situation, that theatre and culture possess the capability to resist society” (125).

If I understand Groome’s argument, it is similar to my own position regarding Herbert Beerbohm Tree and Edward Gordon Craig, and to the ideological interpretation of the Stuart masque offered by Stephen Orgel and Barbara Lewalski. Only those in positions of power can mount elaborate and expensive theatrical productions. Such stagecraft therefore inherently supports the status quo. A radical challenge can only come from what Grotowski calls a “Poor Theatre.” I have argued that the work of William Poel and Nugent Monck represented such an alternative. Tyrone Guthrie imagined a similarly provocative mission for his own theatrical endeavors, but his work has been interpreted by critics like Groome to mean the opposite of what Guthrie intended. My goal is not to blame Groome or Guthrie for this, but rather to understand how this miscommunication occurred. I believe that Elizabethan theatrical practices in general, and the open stage in particular, can offer the kind of “transgressive” ideological experience which Groome finds lacking at the Stratford Festival. The efforts of William Poel and Nugent Monck, for instance, represented a challenge to the theatrical and socio-political status quo. To advance a progressive vision, however, practitioners employing early modern conventions must avoid the pitfalls which led Guthrie’s work to be received, against his wishes, as politically and artistically conservative. Several factors contributed to this confusion, including Guthrie’s conflicted relationship with commercial theater and aspects of his personal character which led him to contradictory behavior in matters of

austerity and opulence. Critics have also largely failed to consider the radical ramifications of Guthrie's intrusive directorial style.

Guthrie and the commercial stage

Tyrone Guthrie was among the founders of the not-for-profit regional theater movement. Both Brooks Atkinson ("Critic at Large" 29) and Albert Rossi (*Astonish* 14) refer to Guthrie as a theatrical "Johnny Appleseed." Rossi describes the director as "a man whose odysseys took him to four continents, many countries and even more cities, planting seeds and nurturing saplings which grew into some of the most respected theatres in the world" (*Astonish* 14). Guthrie founded two such institutions in North America: the Stratford Festival and the Tyrone Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis. Guthrie's work with the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA) in Britain during World War II established a pattern of government funding which eventually enabled the transformation of the Old Vic (directed by Guthrie during the war) into the National Theatre (Forsyth 181; Rowell 125). Guthrie attempted to similarly impact theatrical practice in Australia but, although he was able to persuade the builders of Perth's Octagon Theatre "to adopt the thrust stage and the raked auditorium" (Forsyth 326), Guthrie never realized an antipodean achievement to equal those of Ontario and Minnesota.

For much of his life, Guthrie defined his endeavors in stark contrast to the practices of commercial theater. In his autobiography, Guthrie wrote that at the outset of his career in the 1920s he "heartily despised a good deal of the professional theatre for its blatant commerciality, its playing down to what I considered ignorance and bad taste"

(*Life* 68). Guthrie instead desired “to have a theatre of my own, which would make no concessions to popular vulgarity, which would be a temple” (69). Guthrie’s disdain for Broadway in the 1960s recalls William Poel’s earlier critiques of the West End. Guthrie claimed that mainstream theater was “no longer a business in which wisdom, thrift and honesty eventually pay dividends” but instead “a fantastic, speculative game” (*New Theatre* 19). “Broadway,” Guthrie wrote, “is organized for the supply of commercial entertainment. Into such an organization it is extremely difficult, I would almost say impossible, to fit a theater that is less concerned with making money than with the expression of ideas” (“Why I Refuse” X5). Guthrie’s actual relationship with commercial theater is more complex than these comments suggest. In 1964 he wrote a piece for *The New York Times* called “Why I Refuse Invitations to Direct on Broadway.” The title is unintentionally ironic, since Guthrie had accepted more than a dozen such invitations in the ten years preceding this article (Forsyth 352). Herman Shumlin, responding in the same New York daily, wondered why the director “should hold Broadway in such contempt” given the fact that Guthrie had worked there so often. “Where does he come off,” Shumlin asked, “to denigrate the very commercial theater which has, for the most part, been responsible for placing in his directorial hands the very plays which he ‘wanted to do?’” (Shumlin X3).

Throughout his career, Guthrie went back and forth between the commercial theater and what would become the not-for-profit sector. After his first stint at the Old Vic in 1933-34, Guthrie worked for two years on Broadway and in the West End. He wrote that he returned to the Vic in 1936, “to attach myself to something more significant

than my own career; to feel part of something more permanent, and rooted in more serious intentions than . . . commercial theatre” (*Life* 179). Guthrie does not accentuate that his forays into mainstream entertainment had been largely unsuccessful. He was not inundated with other offers when Lilian Baylis called with an opportunity to return to the South Bank (Forsyth 144). Following his triumphant establishment of the Stratford Festival in 1953, Guthrie used the notoriety gained in this non-commercial venture to once again pursue work on Broadway, this time with more success. Leonard McVicar referred to Guthrie in 1955 as “the foremost director in the J. Arthur Rank organization” (110), and Tania Long noted in January of 1956 that Guthrie would “stage more plays in New York this season than any other top-ranking director”(X1). Eric Bentley announced that “the 1955-6 season will go down in stage history as the one in which Mr. Guthrie took Broadway by what can accurately be called storm” (20). In that year he staged productions on the Great White Way of *The Matchmaker*, *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, and *Tamburlaine*. Everything went well until Guthrie’s financially disastrous production of Marlowe’s tragedy, which survived “only twenty-one performances of its scheduled eight-week New York engagement” (Maloon 1). Only after his Broadway star began to fade following the *Tamburlaine* debacle did Guthrie adopt the position that quality work could not be done within the constraints of commercial theater.

Rather than absolutely repudiating Broadway and the West End, Guthrie sought for most of his career to create a hybrid form which would address his dissatisfaction

with both commercial and non-commercial practices. He summarized the weaknesses of each model in the following passage written shortly after the founding of the Stratford Festival:

Theatre is divided into two directly opposed categories: first, Show Business which is fun, sexy and frivolous, educational only in the same sense as drunkenness or rape; second, the Serious Theatre, which is educational in the same sense as quadratic equations, and is a thundering, pompous, unmitigated but anemic bore. (“Long View” 152)

While his reference to the educative potential of intoxication and sexual assault is puzzling, Guthrie apparently aspired to a theater which could be as “fun” and “sexy” as Broadway while at the same time aspiring to a serious artistic mission.

This effort to have the best of both worlds has led some observers to conclude that Guthrie’s work offered nothing more than shallow, commercial fluff. Much of this critique focuses on the Stratford Festival. Margaret Groome attributes what she perceives as the Festival’s aesthetic of spectacle to Guthrie’s personal philosophy of staging. She cites the following passage from *A Life in the Theatre*, in which Guthrie discusses audience expectations: “For the price of their ticket they want not only the pleasure of the play, they want to feel that for a brief and glittering three hours they have bought, and therefore won, something largely, loudly, unashamedly luxurious” (*Life* 53, qtd. in Groome, “Stratford” 123-24). This quotation, for Groome, illustrates that Guthrie was personally predisposed toward “effects and lavish costumes” and projected this desire onto the public (“Stratford” 123). She does not consider, however, the explanatory context with which Guthrie prefaces this pronouncement. “I have come to recognize,

though reluctantly,” he writes, “that one of the chief pleasures of the theatre for the audience is to participate in lavish and luxurious goings-on.” Guthrie notes that this desire for elegance “may not be the noblest, highest aspect of theatre-going, but it is very human, especially in the case of people who normally have to be frugal” (*Life* 53). These qualifying comments shift the meaning of Guthrie’s emphasis on the “luxurious,” although not necessarily in the director’s favor. Instead of pursuing ocular splendor to satisfy his own spectacular tendencies, Guthrie can be seen as a cynical showman compromising his ideals to patronize an unsophisticated audience. While purists may disdain this policy of artistic appeasement, it was in many ways successful. Guthrie brought two key components of early modern staging—the thrust configuration and the permanent, non-decorative set—to widespread international attention in a way that William Poel, hampered by his lack of a theater, and Nugent Monck, geographically isolated in Norwich, could not. This achievement would likely not have been possible without some compromise with popular expectations, and Guthrie better understood the needs of the public because of his experience in commercial theater.

Biography and character

Guthrie’s contradictory attitude toward spectacle, in which he championed the austerity of Elizabethan staging while delighting in luxurious props and costumes, reflects certain aspects of his personal character and biography. Guthrie’s maternal great-grandfather was Tyrone Power, an illegitimate and impoverished Irishman who became, before his death in 1841, “one of the most successful, most wealthy actors who had trod the boards of the English-speaking stage” (Forsyth 12). The film star Tyrone Power, also

a descendant of this nineteenth-century thespian, was Guthrie's cousin (15). On his father's side, Guthrie's great-grandfather was "Dr. Thomas Guthrie, a nationally famous minister of the Scottish Kirk" (Guthrie, *Life* 5). In certain aspects of his life, the director imitated these two very different ancestors. Like the Irish actor, he was a risk-taker and a non-conformist. Like the Scottish Minister, he was a figure of authority who styled himself "Dr." In the younger Guthrie's case, however, this title derived only from "an honorary L.L.D. conferred on him by the Scottish university of St. Andrews" ("1,000 Miles"⁴¹). The "reference to him always as 'Dr.' Guthrie" by those associated with the Stratford festival incensed Nathan Cohen, and may have contributed to this critic's negative interpretation of Guthrie's work (Cohen, "Tyrone Guthrie" 423).

Scottish thrift and Irish profligacy are the stuff of cultural stereotypes, but Guthrie's background contained both nationalities and his behavior displayed both attributes. His personal life was marked by extreme austerity. "I think his *entire* luggage consisted of something like a very small string bag," recalled Coral Browne, who played Zabina in the New York *Tamburlaine*. "He was always ready to go somewhere, like Tel Aviv or somewhere with a string bag" (Coral Browne qtd. in Rossi, *Astonish* 107). On his first trip to Stratford, Ontario Guthrie brought only two shirts, one of which he washed by hand and hung to dry while wearing the other (Forsyth 230). When he directed *Henry VIII* at Stratford-on-Avon in 1949, Guthrie lived on the river in a covered punt with his wife, Judith (Forsyth 208). Following the death of his mother in 1956, the Guthries moved their permanent residence to the family home at Annagh-ma-Kerrig on the northern border of the Irish republic. At this time the house had no electricity (Rossi,

Astonish 44) and only intermittent telephone service (56). In order to demonstrate the beautiful rigors of country life, Guthrie frequently made visitors to Annagh-ma-Kerrig pick blackberries and flowers to barter this produce at local shops (Forsyth 263-64). Yet what actor Stanley Baxter calls the “cult of simplicity” in Guthrie’s private life did not carry over to his work on stage (qtd. in Rossi, *Astonish* 122). Instead he often swung to the opposite extreme. Robert Morley suggests that “this insistence on asceticism, on economy, on cut out the frills, in his private life, was equated in his production by putting in as many frills as possible. He was never happy unless he could find someone to ride a donkey on the stage” (qtd. in Rossi, *Astonish* 86). “Guthrie himself enjoyed displays of opulence,” Richard Paul Knowles writes, “and reveled in the kind of pageantry that in the hands of lesser directors has often reduced complex plays to lavish costume parades” (“Legacy” 41).

According to his obituary in the *West Australian* on 17 May 1971, “Tony Guthrie was a true Irishman in that he was agin [sic] the government on principle and loved thumbing his nose at the powers that be” (qtd. in Shaughnessy 92). In keeping with this rebellious and anti-authoritarian aspect of his personality, Guthrie often felt the need to shock. “Guthrie’s offenses are chiefly against bourgeois convention,” wrote Robertson Davies. “He loves to make people jump” (Davies, “Director” 39). Guthrie told *The New York Times* in 1956 that “one cannot be afraid to be thought a little odd, a little bit of a freak. I greatly admire people who aren’t always asking, ‘What will the neighbors say?’” (qtd. in Peck 105). Harry Andrews, who played Wolsey for Guthrie at the British Stratford in 1949, recalled that when living in their punt on the Avon the Guthries would

“always be naked. It didn’t matter who was coming up the river” (qtd. in Rossi, *Astonish* 117). Guthrie never appeared publicly nude in Ontario, but he frequently rehearsed in what Pettigrew and Portman describe as nothing but “underwear shorts and a see-through plastic raincoat” (61). Robert Cushman reports that when angered Guthrie would take this raincoat off to berate the cast (27). No physical exhibitionism has been reported in connection to Guthrie’s work on Broadway, but he could not refrain from announcing to a group of VIPs assembled for the first rehearsal of *The Matchmaker* in 1956, “Distinguished guests, we are now going to get to work, so will you kindly fuck off?” (qtd. in Rossi, *Astonish* 188).

Directorial practice and authorial intent

On stage, Guthrie expressed this desire to shock through what Pettigrew and Portman call “Guthrionics” (30), outrageous *coups de theatre* often orchestrated, his detractors claimed, at the expense of the play at hand. Guthrie often repeated himself with this kind of stage business. The *Times* reported that in his 1953 production of *Henry VIII* Guthrie introduced a parody of the Christian Passion into one of that play’s processions. The bearer of a large crucifix stumbled and was “given timely assistance” in imitation of the Stations of the Cross (Rev. of *Henry VIII* 12). The director repeated this same sacrilegious joke a decade later in a Minneapolis revival of *Richard III* (Taubman, Rev. of *Richard III* 26). Eric Bentley wrote of Guthrie’s 1955-56 stagings of *The Matchmaker*, *Tamburlaine*, and *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, “three plays which are so different that they would prompt no comparison at all,” that these productions “blended . . . into a single impression. For example, one of the memorably theatrical ‘moves’ is

that of an actor's popping up between another actor's legs. *Tamburlaine? Six Characters?* Both! What can be done in one play can be done in another." Bentley concludes by asking, "How satisfactorily can Wilder, Marlowe, and Pirandello, respectively, be subordinated to the mind and art of Mr. Guthrie?" (20). This charge of directorial intrusiveness plagued Guthrie throughout his career. "From the beginning," J. L. Styan writes, "he invited criticism for the business and fun he willfully interpolated in performance, his touches of parody and pastiche" (*Shakespeare Revolution* 180).

Beyond a penchant for pranksterism, Guthrie's style reveals a more independently creative vision of the stage director's role than Harley Granville Barker had advocated. He did not accept Barker's metaphor of a play's text as a score awaiting performance (Barker, *Prefaces* 1: 5). Instead Guthrie asserted that "the actor has infinitely more technical latitude and a far more creative task than the orchestral player. This is because the script of a play reveals so much less of its author's intention than does the score of a symphony" (*Life* 137). The written text, he asserted, was "only a *part* of the raw material of performance" because the "performance of a play is not merely the re-creation of an already fully realized idea" (17). Guthrie felt that a director's interpretation of any play must be "consciously and flagrantly subjective" (139), and Davies therefore concluded that the founder of the Stratford Festival was "less an interpreter" than "a creator" (Davies, "Ritual" 7). Guthrie believed that "every script is, theoretically, susceptible to improvement" (Guthrie, "Dominant" X1) and did not balk at cutting and occasionally rewriting classic plays. He eliminated forty-five percent of Marlowe's text in compressing the two parts of *Tamburlaine* into a single evening's performance (Maloon

8), updated the text of Jonson's *The Alchemist* with "references to Speedy Gonzalez, flick-knives, and the poofs" (Rev. of *The Alchemist* 16), and "invented an entire Shakespeare scene" in which the Duke of Florence reviewed his army for 1959's *All's Well That Ends Well* at Stratford-on-Avon (J.C. Trewin qtd. in Rossi, *Astonish* 36). Guthrie scoffed at the notion that such liberties violated the prerogative of the playwright. "With regard to what the script is about," he wrote, "the last person who, in my opinion, should be consulted, even if he is alive or around, is the author" (Guthrie, "Audience" 246).

Guthrie admitted that some of his approaches proved to be wrong-headed. He professed in his defense, "I'd rather be hung for a good powerful, self-confident sheep than a wee half-hearted baa-lamb" ("Modern Producer" 83). While his willingness to create theatrical meaning through script revision and extra-textual business often led to questionable choices in performance, Guthrie's ever-changing inventiveness refutes the notion that he ever staged "museum" productions. Rather than advocating "timeless" presentations of early modern drama or interpretations frozen in a historical past, Guthrie believed, "If it's your job to put one of Shakespeare's plays upon the stage, my view is that you should think carefully and deeply what it means to you—here and now . . . and express that meaning as best you can, and as boldly as you can" ("Modern Producer" 83).

Any reader aspiring to objectivity will blush at Roberson Davies's claim that in "forming an estimate of the work of Tyrone Guthrie as a director, it is necessary to remember that he is a genius." But one can more easily accept Davies's accompanying conclusion that "both Guthrie's astonishing successes and his wrongheaded failures will

defy explanation, for there is little ordinary reason in them” (“Genius” 29). In the remainder of this chapter, I will examine Guthrie’s successes and failures and will seek to identify how his shortcomings have sometimes led critics to receive Guthrie’s work in ways that he did not intend. Many scholars have analyzed the ideological implications of Guthrie’s work at the Stratford Festival but, while excellent descriptive accounts exist of his early career, there have been comparatively few attempts to scrutinize Guthrie’s efforts prior to 1953 from any kind of theoretical perspective. In an attempt to partially redress this imbalance, I will chronologically examine Guthrie’s career and trace the sporadic and irregular development of his commitment to Elizabethan staging. This investigation may allow scholars and theater practitioners to better emulate Guthrie’s triumphs and to avoid his mistakes in their own explorations of early modern practices.

Before Elsinore

Born in 1900, Tyrone Guthrie was as old as the century, and his age is therefore easy to calculate at any point in his career. His first regular theatrical employment came in 1926 as producer of the touring Scottish Players. The goal of this nationalist group was “to encourage the initiation and development of a purely Scottish drama by providing a stage and acting company which will be particularly adapted for the production of plays, national in character, written by Scottish men and women of letters” (Forsyth 69).

Guthrie spent two years “romping about the Scottish countryside,” James Forsyth writes, with this “group of tartan amateurs” (66). While these efforts were undistinguished, the experience eventually enabled Guthrie’s landmark involvement with the Edinburgh Festival. After leaving Glasgow at the end of 1928, Guthrie split his time for a few years

between radio and live theater. He succeeded Terence Gray as director of the Cambridge Festival Theatre for a season before spending six months in Montreal, where he worked for the Canadian National Railways on the production of a radio series titled “The Romance of Canada” (Forsyth 93). According to Forsyth, Guthrie was at this time already developing “his own idea of how Shakespeare should be staged” and frequently doodled designs for a new kind of theater on café napkins (106).

After leaving Montreal, Guthrie returned to England to work at the new Westminster Theatre, founded by Anmer Hall (Forsyth 107). He staged his first major theatrical success, *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, at the Westminster in 1932. Guthrie had seen Nugent Monck’s revival of this comedy, which had “no breaks between scenes” and featured “a permanent set” that suggested “no clearly identifiable locality” (Guthrie, *Life* 84). This appears to have been Guthrie’s first direct contact with any variant of Elizabethan staging, and he was very impressed. “All the good ideas in my production,” Guthrie wrote, “came from Monck’s at Norwich” (*Life* 84). Guthrie’s own “masque-like *Love’s Labour’s Lost*” was “spoken and almost danced before a simple background of tents and wrought iron” (Howard 140). Harcourt Williams, then the Old Vic’s resident producer, “was at that time looking around for a successor” (Forsyth 116). The Vic staged primarily Shakespeare, and Williams needed a replacement with proficiency in early modern drama. He saw Guthrie’s work at the Westminster, and recommended the director to Lilian Baylis, who hired Guthrie for the 1933-34 season.

Guthrie’s *Love’s Labour’s Lost* also impressed W. Bridges-Adams, then director of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre at Stratford-on-Avon, who hired Guthrie to stage

Richard II in April 1933. The *Times* reported Guthrie's intention in this production to "bring the spectator near to the action of the play" by means of "a liberal use of the forestage" in the newly reconstructed theater ("Festival at Stratford" 8). This strategy anticipated much of Guthrie's later work. This same journal's critic praised Guthrie's approach, which offered "the best promise of a truly modern interpretation of Shakespeare" by means of "a method which allows for pace, gives freedom to the actor, and invites the imaginative cooperation of the audience." The review lauded Guthrie's simple setting for the play as "not so much suggestive as receptive, seeming to 'take' the scenery that the poetry paints." As would be the case at the other Stratford decades later, decorative props and costumes supplemented this scenic simplicity: "The lists at Coventry glowed with colour from rich gowns and pennants and heraldic devices and a bluish grey sky deepened every tone." While the critic praised Guthrie's stage pictures or "groupings," he was not impressed by the production's individual performances, particularly that of George Hayes in the lead. The *Times* reviewer presaged later complaints that acting often took a back seat to pageantry and clever staging in Guthrie's Shakespeare productions. "This was a spectacle for which Mr. Guthrie had formed his mould," he wrote, "but it did not take shape" because "no method of staging this tragedy can offset indifferent acting" (Rev. of *Richard II* 8).

Guthrie writes in *A Life in the Theatre* that he was determined to implement early modern practices at the Old Vic. His tone suggests that Guthrie was the first to introduce such staging to Waterloo Road, but the Vic already had an Elizabethan tradition. Lilian Baylis had inherited control of the theater from its founder, her aunt Emma Cons. Miss

Baylis was notoriously frugal. Donald Spoto writes that “her stinginess with salaries and production costs was well known—some of her Old Vic productions cost about twenty-eight pounds, excluding salaries” (104). This predisposed Baylis toward Elizabethan experimentation. As Dennis Kennedy writes, “Extremely limited finances and a prejudice against elaboration justified one another; the result was a Shakespearean stage with a distrust of the visual.” Kennedy adds that “William Poel was frequently mentioned as the inspiration for the Old Vic Shakespeare, but it was Poel’s contempt for luxury that was influential rather than his radical Elizabethanism” (*Looking* 122).

Robert Atkins served as resident producer following World War I and, perhaps inspired by Nugent Monck’s war-time productions in Egypt (Hildy, *Shakespeare* 37), moved the Vic toward Poel’s vision of intimate minimalism. Atkins “built out a platform in front of the proscenium” in a gesture toward the actor-audience relationship of a thrust configuration. He also used mainly curtains and a “selective use of painted scenery” to create “non-representational settings” for Shakespeare’s plays (Rowell 104). Harcourt Williams, who assumed artistic leadership of the Vic in 1929, produced what John Gielgud called “Elizabethan productions which preserved the continuity of the plays” through “light and imaginative settings allowing quick changes of scene” (*Early Stages* 126). The *Times* complained of the Vic under Williams’ leadership, “Occasionally they may have worried their audience with literal Elizabethanisms (once they clothed the medieval prelates in *King Henry V* in the fashion of Protestant bishops), which would only be significant or tolerable in a wholly Elizabethan production, such as those of

Mr. William Poel” (“The Old Vic Company” 11). Guthrie’s plans for the Old Vic were therefore hardly revolutionary, but rather an extension of the “Elizabethan theatrical values” (Howard 139) already in place at the theater.

In some ways, Guthrie moved away from the path of Poesque austerity toward more commercial practices. He sought “to break the Old Vic tradition of discovering its own stars instead of importing them from the West End or the cinema” (Williamson, *Old Vic Drama* 1). Guthrie keenly sensed the growing importance of film and was, Tony Howard writes, “the first to exploit the movies as a source of talent, publicity and a broader public” (Howard 141). Specifically, he engaged Flora Robson, Elsa Lanchester, and Charles Laughton. Guthrie wrote of his plan for early modern scenic austerity that the “money saved was to go into costumes” (*Life* 121). Wardrobe, of course, was an important component of Shakespeare’s own theater and there is nothing “un-Elizabethan” about beautifully dressed productions. But Guthrie’s push for a bigger budget in this area meshed with his plan to recruit cinematic talent. “It would be a condition of Laughton’s joining,” Forsyth writes, “that the company would improve its costumes and scenery” (129). Guthrie’s high profile company and more luxurious production values embodied what J.C. Trewin called “the showmanship the diffident Harcourt Williams had distrusted” (159). The matriarch of the Old Vic was suspicious of Guthrie’s methods, and “his work during the 1933-4 season was blighted by uncertainties of trust between himself and Lilian Baylis” (Bate 148).

In *A Life in the Theater*, Guthrie wrote that he planned to “have no scenery except a ‘structure,’ which would offer the facilities usually supposed to have been available in

the Elizabethan theatre.” This platform stage would “serve as a permanent background throughout [each] play” in the Old Vic’s season (121). Guthrie commissioned this permanent set from the architect Wells Coates (whose name is sometimes hyphenated to Wells-Coates in published accounts). J.C. Trewin said in 1974 of this “built-up central structure” that “these days it happens everywhere, but it was a sensation then and everybody talked about it” (qtd. in Rossi, *Astonish* 31). The experiment, however, was not successful. In its review of Guthrie’s first Old Vic production, *Twelfth Night* in September 1933, the *Times* described this set as consisting of “two curving staircases, two formidable pillars with a balcony between them, and a central entrance under the balcony.” This created “a scene of the utmost austerity, massive, stony, [and] bare,” which was “satisfactory as an arrangement of architectural forms, but not in all things pleasing as a design for *Twelfth Night*” (Rev. of *Twelfth Night* 10). Guthrie acknowledged in retrospect that the set was “obtrusive” and “proclaimed itself, almost impertinently, to be modern” (*Life* 122), a conclusion supported by the *Times*’ observation that “Olivia’s bath-taps [we]re of chromium plate” (Rev. of *Twelfth Night* 10). “Whatever color it was painted, however it was lit,” Guthrie complained of this structure,

it appeared not as a merely functional background to the play but also as a powerful, stridently irrelevant competitor for the audiences’ attention . . . painted pink-gray for *Twelfth Night*, our opening production, it completely dominated the evening and suggested not Illyria but a fancy dress ball on a pink battleship. (*Life* 122)

Guthrie abandoned the Wells Coates set for his second Shakespeare production at the Vic.

In *Henry VIII*, which followed *Twelfth Night*, Guthrie used traditional settings from the Lewis Casson-Sybil Thorndike production of this play at the Empire (Trewin 159). “Suddenly, with a bang,” Trewin notes, “we were back in spectacular Shakespeare” (qtd. in Rossi, *Astonish* 31). The permanent set had been tactically flawed, but Guthrie’s willingness to abandon it and return so quickly to traditional stagecraft suggests that he was not at this point in his career strongly committed to Elizabethan-style scenic simplicity. He instead pragmatically tested different approaches in pursuit of a viable method. As Kennedy asserts, there was “no consistent visual style” to Guthrie’s work at the Vic (*Looking* 153). The pictorial splendor of *Henry VIII* was followed by a setting for *The Tempest* which “denuded Prospero’s island of practically everything” (Trewin 159) and merely “consisted of a log and a few strands of seaweed” (160). Charles Morgan complained in his review of this production for *The New York Times* that Elsa Lanchester’s brilliant performance as Ariel had been “undone by the shocking inappropriateness of the scenery and many of the dresses” (“Underneath Big Ben” X3). Morgan’s comments indicate how resistant mainstream observers still were to non-traditional approaches to Shakespeare in 1934 and suggest that while Guthrie was inconsistent he did not lack courage.

Guthrie’s experimental approach to staging Shakespeare confused and upset Old Vic audiences (Rossi, *Astonish* 32). Other factors also impeded his progress. Guthrie later admitted that in 1933 his “experience of the classics was limited” (*Life* 91). “In Belfast and Glasgow,” Guthrie recalled, “we were apt to regard Shakespeare as far too high-falutin and ‘fancy’ for us” (92). While Guthrie sought to compensate for his personal

inexperience by hiring Margaret Macnamara as an “adviser on the text and prosody of Shakespearean plays” (“Old Vic and Shakespearean Text” 8), it was nevertheless apparent that in his first Old Vic season Guthrie had “little relish for the verse, or trust in it” (Trewin 158). Guthrie’s own linguistic insensitivity was compounded by the inadequacies of his leading actor. The film star Charles Laughton, according to Trewin, “could not fit his husky sibilant tones” to Shakespeare’s language but would instead “treat the verse as if he were drawing a garden rake across intractable soil” (159).

The 1933-34 season at the Old Vic drew large houses, primarily due to Laughton’s celebrity. This public, however, was no longer made up of the theater’s South Bank neighbors but instead consisted primarily of “serious and predominantly young working people from all over London” (Guthrie, *Life* 111). This alienated the Vic’s traditional customer base. “One tough old regular—Miss Pilgrim,” Forsyth reports, “started collecting signatures for a petition: to send young Mr. Guthrie back over the river where he belonged” (134-35). Lilian Baylis had not been completely comfortable with Guthrie’s methods and had positively feuded with Laughton. At the end of the season she eagerly accepted Guthrie’s resignation.

After leaving the Vic, Guthrie spent “two educative years in the theatres of London and New York,” which were unmarked by any great success (Trewin 163). Henry Cass followed Guthrie as resident producer of the Old Vic, and led the theater for two seasons. George Rowell is dismissive of Cass’s capabilities. “Perhaps his lasting legacy to the Vic,” Rowell writes, “was convincing Lilian Baylis that Guthrie had a great deal more to him than she had previously allowed” (125). In 1936 Baylis offered Guthrie

the opportunity to return, and he quickly agreed. This time their relationship would be much better. Jonathan Bate and Russell Jackson write that “Baylis came to rely upon him so much that Guthrie effectively guided the fortunes of the Old Vic for the next ten years” (Bate 148). Guthrie spent only a small portion of this decade, however, in collaboration with Baylis, who passed away in 1937. He assumed leadership of the organization following her death.

As he began his second period of service, Guthrie continued to recruit celebrity talent. In place of Laughton, he now convinced Laurence Olivier to come work at the Old Vic. Olivier played Toby Belch in a production of *Twelfth Night* that demonstrated the director’s growing penchant for creative staging. Guthrie cast Jessica Tandy as both Viola and Sebastian and, according to the *Times* review of 24 February 1937, employed theatrical sleight-of-hand during the play’s recognition scene:

Mr. Tyrone Guthrie has used Miss Jessica Tandy, who is normally Viola, to represent Sebastian also, wherever the young man appears separately from her; and, where at the end the two are on the stage together, Miss Tandy, as Sebastian, is embracing Olivia at one moment, and, as Viola, is chattering to the Duke at another, while an interchangeable double flits about the stage under cover of masking gentlemen in cloaks. It is ingeniously done. (Rev. of *Twelfth Night* 12)

An outrageous gimmick, this device also advanced the play’s theme of confusion regarding gender identity.

In 1933, Guthrie proclaimed that he would stage all Shakespeare plays on a permanent architectural structure. He quickly retreated from this position, however, when the Wells Coates set proved unworkable. In his second tenure at the Vic, Guthrie offered no such sweeping statements of intent but instead made cautious and sporadic attempts to

replicate early modern conditions. In April 1937, Guthrie staged a *Henry V* starring Laurence Olivier which, according to Tony Howard, inspired the director's later "experiments in open-stage Shakespeare" (149). It was a sophisticated example of what Audrey Williamson calls the "banner class" (*Old Vic Drama* 147) of Guthrie's productions and built on the success of his 1933 *Richard II* at Stratford-on-Avon. Because *Henry V* was "staged around that national 'big day'—the Coronation of George VI in May" (Forsyth 157), there was a natural tendency toward patriotic spectacle. The *Times* reported in its review of 7 April 1937, "The stage of the Old Vic glows with colour from emblazoned shields and surcoats richly embroidered and from banners which fall forward and fold themselves into tents for the camp scenes." This pageantry was not, however, supported by the kind of traditional stagecraft which Guthrie had employed in his 1933 *Henry VIII*. The "polychromatic splendour" was "set off not by realistically painted vistas but by a simple arrangement of curtains." The *Times* critic suggested that the "appeal" was therefore "to a more adult aestheticism" (Rev. of *Henry V* 14). Williamson writes that the setting "was simple and suggestive as regards background and relied on curtains or lighting to offset the movement and clash of war" (*Old Vic Drama* 90). While she agrees that this production "did not lack the picturesque" owing to its "imaginative use of banners," Williamson asserts that Guthrie showed admirable restraint in his depiction of the English army at Agincourt and ties this prudence to the Elizabethan revival. "It was William Poel," Williamson writes, "who first revolted against the type of spectacular production which twisted the whole point of the play by bedecking the English side with all the glittering pageantry of overwhelming numbers

and equipment.” Guthrie, she claimed, “observed this balance, and never over-weighted the play with a panoply of steel” (89). Instead, in the scene before Harfleur, Guthrie with “only a handful of actors, a shifting light and no visible scenery” was able to suggest “a whole body of men on the move” (90).

Henry V also tested the limits of Guthrie’s challenge to Shakespeare’s authorial intent. The director had, as Robertson Davies notes, a frequent tendency to orchestrate meaning “against the lines” (“Taming” 39). Guthrie believed *Henry V* to be “a crypto-satirical portrait” and considered its protagonist “a vulgar, swaggering bully” (*Ten Great Plays* 145). Olivier shared this view and writes that he was “influenced by the 1930s dislike of all heroism” to play “against the declamatory style” by “undercutting it” (*Confessions* 102-03). Guthrie and Olivier, Forsyth writes, “more or less agreed that they would play the play tongue-in-cheek. There would be winks and nudges and definitely no heroic militarism” (Forsyth 157). Despite their initial decision to use the play “to attack jingoism” (Howard 149) they eventually realized that this ironic approach was, Olivier writes, “hopeless of course” (*Confessions* 103). It was Guthrie who first came to this conclusion. He then insisted on having Henry played “properly” and demonstrated the Saint Crispin’s Day speech with what Olivier calls “bloody heroics” (*On Acting* 96). Guthrie said, “If you don’t do it like that and enjoy doing it like that, you won’t carry the audience with you” (qtd. in Olivier, *On Acting* 96). Olivier eventually acknowledged that Guthrie “was right” (*On Acting* 96). This acceptance of a literal interpretation of the lines led Olivier to one of his greatest successes on both stage and screen. “The part that I had fought against fought for me,” the actor writes. “Henry took me by the hand and hurled

me into the theater history books” (*On Acting* 103). Olivier and Guthrie both came to believe that, as Guthrie later wrote, the “experiment of presenting a production in which Henry should be unsympathetically portrayed would be bound to fail” (*Ten Great Plays* 145).

The most successful offering of the 1936-37 season was *Hamlet*. This revival is today best known for Olivier’s interpretation of the title role, which Tony Howard calls “the most famous Freudian performance of the century” (Howard 142). Guthrie and Olivier personally consulted with Ernest Jones, who had developed an Oedipal reading of the play from an expository footnote in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Freud 204). “Three of us—Tony Guthrie, Peggy Ashcroft and I—went to see Professor Jones,” Olivier writes. He adds, “Ever since this meeting I have believed that Hamlet was a prime sufferer from the Oedipus complex” (*Confessions* 102). At the time of the Old Vic production, however, this Freudian dimension “went generally unremarked” (Trewin 164). Jones did not feel that his ideas had been adequately expressed on stage. “You will not of course expect me, who have known Hamlet himself,” the professor wrote to Guthrie, “to be content with any human substitute” (from unpublished letter, qtd. in Forsyth 156). It was not until the 1948 film version of the play that Olivier’s Hamlet was widely recognized as Oedipal. The Old Vic set design, by contrast, attracted a good deal of immediate attention and acclaim.

The *Times* in its review of 6 January 1937 referred to *Hamlet*’s set as “simple and without affectation” (Rev. of *Hamlet* 10), but J.C. Trewin describes it as far more elaborate. “Guthrie had provided an extraordinary kind of up-and-down set,” Trewin

recalls. “The actors were skipping about on Alpine peaks during most of the evening. At the end the Queen fell backwards from a high rostrum into somebody’s arms . . . she was scared stiff every time” (Trewin qtd. in Rossi, *Astonish* 33). Indeed, what Niels B. Hansen describes as “the Queen’s highly dramatic dying fall of fifteen feet” (114) is a maneuver which today would only be attempted in a theme park stunt show. As Trewin suggests, it “might have been excessive” (Trewin 164). Dorothy Dix, the actress originally cast as Gertrude, apparently thought so. She “fell ill (perhaps from a fear of excessive heights?) and was replaced by Esme Church early in the run” (Williamson, *Old Vic Drama* 85).

The Old Vic was invited to stage *Hamlet* outdoors at Kronborg Castle, Elsinore during the summer of 1937. Expectations were high for this Danish visit. A *Times* correspondent wrote from Elsinore before the first performance, “there is a feeling here that theatrical history, and something more than theatrical history, is to be made on this day, June 2.” Theatrical history would be made, but not in a way anyone expected. The *Times* journalist observed that “the courtyard is, of course, open to the skies and there is no alternative indoor site” (“*Hamlet* at Elsinore” 14). Rain came, however, and a substitute venue was found, one that would shape the future of Shakespearean production on two continents.

The Elsinore *Hamlet*

The Old Vic *Hamlet* at Kronborg Castle was planned as an early modern reconstruction which would freeze Shakespeare’s play in a distant historical moment, the kind of “museum” production often bitterly derided by postmodern critics. Local officials

stopped the tower clock so that its noise would not interfere with the scheduled outdoor performances, an action which to Robert Shaughnessy “seems almost too perfect a metaphor for a general collusion in the suspension of history” (111). Largely by chance the Elsinore *Hamlet* also came to demonstrate the practical value of open staging for twentieth-century theater. This Danish excursion therefore illustrated two conflicting conceptions of the Elizabethan revival: the “theme park” vision of ersatz historical “authenticity” and the modernist quest to find advantages in early modern practices which could help keep theater alive in the cinematic age. Ultimately, the events in Denmark advanced the more progressive of these paradigms. Rather than celebrating archaism, the Elsinore *Hamlet* presaged a new avant-garde.

The *Daily Telegraph* billed this revival as “Hamlet in his own home” (4 June 1937, qtd. in Shaughnessy 108). It was intended as “a site-specific event exploiting the convergence between the cultural authority of the play and the magic of this ‘authentic’ location” (Shaughnessy 108). There were, of course, problems with the notion of Kronborg as a historical setting for Shakespeare’s play. The castle was built centuries after Saxo-Grammaticus wrote the legend on which *Hamlet* is based. This tragedy is, however, notoriously fluid in its mixture of medieval and renaissance elements, and the Danish palace existed at the time of *Hamlet*’s composition. Kronborg’s construction in 1580 allowed boosters of the Old Vic tour to engage in the “wild speculation” that Shakespeare might have traveled to the site as a boy player with a group of English players who performed there at the court of Frederick II (Shaughnessy 109).

Elements of the outdoor setting recalled one kind of early modern theatrical venue. “What this stage resembled,” Hansen writes, “was perhaps not so much the Globe Theatre with its tiring-house and its roof supported by pillars as the pre-Elizabethan acting space consisting of a platform set up in an enclosed courtyard” (113). This design took advantage of Kronborg’s sixteenth-century façade. “The open plan without any kind of backdrop,” according to Hansen, “allowed the castle to play a quite prominent part in this performance” (Hansen 112). Many elements of theatrical modernity, however, intruded into this putatively Renaissance endeavor. The production’s set, “which was essentially the same as had been used for the indoor performance in London” (114), was more complex than the simple configuration of the Globe or Blackfriars. This “stage consisted of several platforms at different levels, the highest of which was a kind of rostrum, a cube of about 6’ x 6’ x 6’, which towered above the rest of the set. The various levels were connected by a quite elaborate set of stairs” (113). The assembled personnel also far exceeded the capabilities of an early modern touring company. Besides the cast of seventeen acknowledged in the *Times* review of 4 June 1937 (“*Hamlet* at Elsinore” 14), the company included as Danish volunteers “a hundred of the Corps of Officer Cadets” to serve as “extras” (Guthrie, *Life* 187). The installation of “flood lighting and sound amplification” also limited the production’s historical accuracy (Shaughnessy 112). Hansen describes the set as having been configured on “an open plan” (112). While this is true to the extent that there was no proscenium, photographs (Hansen 118) reveal that the entire audience was placed in front of the stage, thereby ignoring one of the key features of early modern staging—the presence of an audience on three sides.

The first night was to be a gala event. A special train was scheduled out of Copenhagen to bring VIPs to Elsinore. Among these were the Danish royal family, who had been invited, Shaughnessy notes, “without any obvious sense of irony” (112). Their anticipated presence raised the stakes for all involved, and the weather did not cooperate. The performance was scheduled for eight o’clock and, Guthrie recalls in his autobiography, “at seven-thirty the rain was coming down in bellropes.” This presented a significant dilemma. “It was out of all question to abandon the performance,” Guthrie notes, “the special train had already steamed out of Copenhagen” (*Life* 190). What happened next has become the stuff of legend. Olivier, recalling the event in 1986, almost paraphrases the Saint Crispin’s day speech. It was, Sir Laurence claims, “a night that they will always remember. ‘Were you there that night at Elsinore? I was.’” The actor then adds mischievously, “It is amazing how many people now think they were there” (*On Acting* 87). Frantically searching for an alternate performance space, Guthrie came upon the ballroom of the Marienlyst Hotel and decided, “We would play in the middle of the hall with the audience seated all around us as in a circus. The phrase hadn’t been invented, but this would be theatre in the round” (Guthrie, *Life* 190).

Division of labor necessitated that Guthrie have no involvement in the staging of this impromptu *Hamlet*. He writes that “Larry conducted a lightning rehearsal with the company, improvising exits and entrances, and rearranging business. George Chamberlain and I, assisted by the critics . . . arranged eight hundred seventy basket chairs in circles around the ballroom” (*Life* 190). Olivier modestly recalls, “[Guthrie] left it to me to set it up and rehearse the new moves around the strange area that was now to

accommodate us” (*On Acting* 86). Donald Spoto portrays the actor as behaving far more aggressively. “Olivier sprang to action,” Spoto writes, and “fairly sparkled with ad hoc ingenuity” (114). Whatever the extent of the leading player’s contribution, the performance was surprisingly successful.

Guthrie did not initially have very high expectations for this improvised *Hamlet*. He said to Olivier at intermission, “Thought we’d just do one act and apologize,” but this was no longer possible. Everybody was “taking it *far* too seriously,” Guthrie explained, the company would have to “go through to the end” (qtd. in Rossi, *Astonish* 96). The impact of this extraordinary effort was, J.L. Styan writes, “miraculous” (*Shakespeare Revolution* 184). J.C. Trewin, among those critics pressed into rearranging chairs by Guthrie, said in 1974, “It remains to this day the most exciting performance of *Hamlet* I’ve ever seen” (qtd. in Rossi, *Astonish* 34). Styan sees it as a defining moment in the development of the open stage. “With the audience seated almost round the players as in a circus,” he writes, “the weaknesses of the proscenium stage were sharply revealed.” Located around the playing area in intimate proximity, “the Danish audience recovered its primary function, itself becoming part of the play” (Styan, “Elizabethan” 218). Guthrie expressed a similar conclusion when he wrote that at “its best moments that performance in the ballroom related the audience to a Shakespeare play in a different, and, I thought, more logical, satisfactory and effective way than ever can be achieved in a theatre of what is still regarded as orthodox design” (*Life* 192). The Elsinore experience strengthened in Guthrie “a conviction, which had been growing with each production at the Vic, that for Shakespeare the proscenium stage is unsatisfactory” (Guthrie, *Life* 191).

When asked if he thought the experience had been “significant” for Guthrie, Olivier responded, “Oh, for everybody, for the world” (qtd. in Rossi, *Astonish* 96).

As in the case of many legends, some of the facts regarding the Elsinore *Hamlet* have been massaged to conform to a desired mythology. Shaughnessy refers to “compression on Guthrie’s part for the sake of melodramatic effect” in the director’s description of these events from *A Life in the Theater*. Analyzing other contemporary accounts, Shaughnessy concludes that “the Kronborg performance had been abandoned by the early afternoon.” The decision to move indoors was therefore not nearly as last-minute as Guthrie suggests. Shaughnessy also asserts that “Guthrie simplifies for rhetorical effect” in his description of the ballroom where his company performed. Rather than being so bare a space as Guthrie claims, “other reports confirm that there was a narrow cabaret stage at one end of the ballroom at the Marienlyst Hotel, whereupon cane chairs represented the thrones of Denmark; the staging combined the use of this with the floor, and the audience were seated on three sides rather than ‘all around.’” Shaughnessy believes that Guthrie distorts his account in order to not “compromise the simplicity of the opposition between the claustrophobic frontality of the picture frame and the radical spontaneity of a mode of performance so early in its infancy that it yet lacked a name” (Shaughnessy 113). Guthrie’s definition of the Marienlyst arrangement as “theatre in the round” (*Life* 190) also betrays his preference for a more circular configuration than that normally associated with Elizabethan staging, a predisposition that would later manifest itself in the 240-degree arc of the Stratford tent.

Some evidence also challenges the notion that the first night of *Hamlet* was a tremendous success. The *Times* reported the next day that “it would be absurd to offer a serious criticism of the performance.” While the premiere “was a very gallant and much appreciated act on the part of a hard-worked Old Vic company,” the reviewer looked forward to seeing the production outdoors “in all its glory” the following evening (“Weather Unkind to British Players” 12). Shaughnessy interprets such contemporary response to mean that it was only “as time went on” that “the first night began to acquire a legendary status” (115). Guthrie himself was candid in analyzing the shortcomings of the ballroom presentation. “The audience thought it a gallant effort and were with us from the start,” he wrote, “but *Hamlet* is a very long play. After two hours of improvisation the actors became exhausted and a little flustered. The finale was a shambles, but not quite in the way the author intended” (*Life* 190). Ivor Brown, however, in an article for *Theatre Arts Monthly* from November 1937, saw in the opening night at Elsinore the same kind of ground-breaking achievement which was later attributed to this event by critics like Styan:

This production, which had no more preparation as far as lighting and stage-craft were concerned than a charade at a house-party, was, in my opinion, a great success. It was close, intimate, enthralling. We were all part of Claudius’ court. The final duel was so much in our midst that we feared for our own safety as well as Hamlet’s . . . That performance in a room in the Marienlyst Hotel at Helsingor made me wonder more than ever why we make such a fuss about lights and atmosphere and all the rest of it when presenting Shakespeare. If we sit close, if we sit all round him, like the audience in his own Globe . . . Shakespeare will not fail us for a moment. (Brown, “Very Spot” 877)

Brown believed the ballroom performance to be far superior to the full production staged outdoors as originally planned the following night. The overbearing and intrusive elaborateness of that second evening's scenography outweighed any advantage in its geographical setting, so that "*Hamlet* 'on the spot'" became "very like *Hamlet* in a modern theater, whereas *Hamlet* in a ballroom had been strange and different and perhaps more truly Elizabethan" (Brown, "Very Spot" 877). J.C. Trewin agreed that the "next night the same production, but in the Kronborg courtyard, a platform at one end and everything done normally, seemed almost boring by comparison; excitement had gone" (qtd. in Rossi, *Astonish* 34).

Alec Guinness, who played Osric at Elsinore, said at Guthrie's memorial service, "I think it was the excitement, improvisation and experience of that particular night which sparked off his passion for the open stage, and his dismissal of the proscenium arch" (qtd. in Rossi, *Astonish* 292). Shaughnessy similarly describes the Kronborg adventure as "the pivotal event which, by his own account, led to Guthrie's eventual repudiation of the picture-frame stage" (Shaughnessy 108). "Eventual" is, however, a key word in Shaughnessy's formulation. Elsinore was not for Guthrie the theatrical equivalent of Saint Paul falling off a horse on the road to Damascus. It would be many years before he would seriously attempt to replicate the open-stage configuration he had discovered in that hotel ballroom. Yet one detail of Guthrie's reaction to that first performance suggests that he was deeply moved. According to Olivier, Guthrie said immediately afterwards that *Hamlet* had "flowed through the ballroom like warm strawberry jam" (qtd. in Olivier, *On Acting* 88). The metaphor was significant for Guthrie. Jam was one of few

indigenous products in County Monaghan, the site of Guthrie's estate at Anna-ma-Kerrig. In the last years of his life, Guthrie became involved in a plan to locally manufacture "bramble jelly and rhubarb-ginger and violet plum jams" as a means of encouraging young Irish workers to remain in their rural homes and not emigrate to foreign cities (Shepard 19). He wrote that he "deplore[d] the centripetal tendency of modern civilization, the remorseless devouring of her children by metropolis" (*Theatre Prospect* 29). Homemade confiture symbolized for Guthrie the potential triumph of manual craftsmanship over mass-production and of human community over industrial anonymity. Guthrie's reference to "warm strawberry jam" in describing the Elsinore *Hamlet* suggests that this production's open staging and intimate embrace of its audience inspired in him similar aspirations.

The Old Vic after Elsinore

Back at the Old Vic in the fall of 1937, Guthrie made a minor architectural adjustment possibly inspired by his Elsinore experience. The *Times* reported shortly before the 1937-38 season began, "During the vacation a number of improvements have been made at the Old Vic. The pit-stalls have been reseated . . . and the orchestra pit, when there is no music in production, can now be filled in and additional stalls provided" ("Improvements at the Old Vic" 10). Besides increasing potential revenue by adding seats, this change also allowed Guthrie to more closely approximate the intimacy of a thrust configuration by bringing the audience closer to the forestage. Guthrie's productions in this season, however, did not employ the scenic minimalism of his later open-stage efforts.

A Midsummer Night's Dream, which opened on Boxing Day 1937, represented the polar opposite of the simplistic staging that Guthrie had discovered at Elsinore. The design was a deliberate throwback to the pictorial tradition of the nineteenth century. "A programme note of the producer warned us that the style of the production would be early Victorian," Williamson recalls, "and that it would attempt to make a union between the worlds of Shakespeare, the music of Mendelssohn and the architecture of the Old Vic" (*Old Vic Drama* 77). Guthrie incorporated the corps de ballet (under the direction of Ninette de Valois) and orchestra from Sadler's Wells into *Midsummer* (Rowell 126). The result, according to Trewin, was "an album of Victoriana with full score" (174).

Williamson describes the luxurious spectacle:

Ninette de Valois's white-skirted fairies, soaring and alighting like winged thistle down, seemed natural denizens of these enchanted groves, and Oliver Messel's gauze screens, painted with the calyxes of giant bell-flowers, reduced them to insubstantiality and misty grace. His was a land of insects' wings and moonlight, cobwebs and flowers; his Oberon glittered darkly in the midnight shadows, his Titania, in white ballet tarlatan, was radiant with dew and rose petals . . . The Hermia of Alexis France was a tiny Queen Victoria; but Theseus glowed like plated Mars, plumed Nubian slaves guarded his court, and the pillars of his palace, wreathed with garlands and suffused in a flicker of coppery light, had a Grecian Classicism. It was a land outside time, a land of enchantment; and its success lay in the fact that one accepted it as such. (*Old Vic Drama* 78-79)

Dancers were rigged to soar about the stage, and these "flying fairy ballets in the Romantic period tradition" (Williamson, *Old Vic Drama* 77) were the highlight of the production. The *Times* reported with amazement on 28 December, "The flying fairies seem not to be on wires but in sweeping flight. White muslin, pink roses, silver crowns, moonlight and wings . . . These *are* fairies and there's an end of it." (Rev. of *A*

Midsummer Night's Dream 10). The *New Statesman and Nation* similarly raved on 1 January 1938, "The finale, with fairies flying with lighted tapers is triumphant. Altogether this is the prettiest as well as the most amusing of Christmas entertainments" (Rev. of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* 148). Although William Poel would have winced, Guthrie's *Midsummer* was immensely successful with both audiences and critics. It was, according to Rowell, "the most universally popular production of Guthrie's term of office" and was therefore "chosen for the princesses Elizabeth's and Margaret's first visit to the theatre" (Rowell 126). Bate and Jackson similarly note that this *Midsummer* "was of all Guthrie's Old Vic productions the one which commanded the greatest popular appeal" (149). It was revived the following Christmas by popular demand (81).

Two keys to Guthrie's success were Mendelssohn's traditional music and the presence of balletic fairies. In later comments, Guthrie revealed a conflicted attitude toward these related conventions. This ambivalence perhaps represents his more general anxiety regarding compromise with commercial expectations. "Sentimentality has found a powerful ally in Mendelssohn," Guthrie wrote in 1962. He acknowledged that the composer's "fairy music is exquisitely pretty" and "good enough to impose a particular conception of the play upon at least three generations." But he complained that Mendelssohn was "impossible to associat[e] with any kind of fairies except exquisitely pretty, tiny, female things, tippeting about in white muslin ballet skirts with tinsel stars on the ends of their 'wands.'" Such sprites, Guthrie insisted, were "a long way from Shakespeare's idea of Fairy-land" (*Ten Great Plays* 65). They were, however, exactly the

kind of fairies Guthrie had staged in 1937. His willingness to use a popular device which he considered trite and inappropriate suggests that a pragmatic and cynical ethos often guided Guthrie's endeavors.

While he came to believe passionately in open staging and a permanent architectural set, Guthrie was not a starry-eyed idealist. He generally sought an accommodation with mainstream tastes that would make his ideas acceptable. One occasion when he failed to do so came during his brief final term at the Old Vic in 1951-52. That season Guthrie mounted another *Midsummer*, this time in a "deliberately simple" (Trewin 223) setting by Tanya Moiseiwitsch intended to be "as different as possible from the Mendelssohnian splendours of the pre-War production" (Rowell 144). The approach was "strictly functional" (Williamson, *Old Vic Drama* 2 87) and reflected Guthrie's growing allegiance to an Elizabethan ideal. Neither press nor public were ready for it. The *Times* dismissed this *Midsummer* on 27 December 1951 as "not enchanting" (Rev. of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* 2), and Rowell writes that Guthrie's bare-stage experimentation came "at the expense of the Box-Office" (144). Critics like Nathan Cohen have sometimes accused Guthrie of pandering to audiences by offering them lavish spectacle (Cohen, Nathan "Stratford" 264, 273-74; "Theatre" 235). The fate of this production suggests, however, that if Guthrie had not appeased the public visually he might never have been able to advance those aspects of his work which genuinely challenged the representational paradigm of the proscenium stage.

Guthrie's 1938 production of *Hamlet* starring Alec Guinness reflected in its design an echo of the simplicity which the director had discovered at Elsinore. It used "as

a permanent setting, two severely classical pillars” (Williamson, *Old Vic Drama* 106). According to the *Times* there was “a permanent framework with stepped platforms” (“*Hamlet* in Modern Dress” 12) as in the 1937 *Hamlet*, but photographs (Williamson, *Old Vic Drama* 110) reveal a far simpler configuration than the “extraordinary kind of up-and-down set” full of “Alpine peaks” which Guthrie had employed at that time (Trewin qtd. in Rossi, *Astonish* 33). This production is notable as Guthrie’s first major foray into modern costuming. It was the first time the Old Vic had used modern dress in a play by Shakespeare (“*Hamlet* in Modern Dress” 12). Norman Marshall calls it the “most successful of all the modern-dress productions” of this era (*Producer* 176). In 1933 Guthrie had proclaimed, “Modern dress I do not greatly care for” (qtd. in Trewin 177). He chose to pursue this style only after his Elsinore epiphany and at a time when, at least in this production, he appears to have been moving toward the simplicity of early modern staging. This raises the general question of the relationship between modern dress and the Elizabethan revival.

“Shakespeare in plus-fours” (Trewin 95) had been widely viewed as a notorious gimmick when Barry Jackson first used modern dress at the Birmingham Repertory Company in the early 1920s (Kennedy, *Looking* 109-11). Today a common practice, costuming Shakespeare’s plays in twentieth-century garb provoked widespread outrage as recently as the 1960s. “Reason hardly enters into this matter,” Guthrie complained of the negative reaction to the 1963 modern-dress *Hamlet* at his namesake theater in Minneapolis. Always an amateur Freudian, Guthrie sought a psychological explanation. He noted that “furious passion is aroused; and in my experience women feel it far more

strongly than men. Can it be that their anger is a manifestation of the Father-Complex? Shakespeare is the Father-figure and those who ‘interfere with’ or ‘belittle’ his work are insulting Father” (*New Theatre* 104). Opponents of modern dress might suggest that, by staging Shakespeare’s plays in a peevishly untraditional manner, Guthrie challenged the playwright’s paternal authority in an Oedipal manner no less Freudian than the protective behavior of those women whom he diagnosed as suffering from a “Father-Complex.”

Some practitioners, however, interpret modern dress not as an assault on tradition but as a return to early modern practices. Ralph Alan Cohen, founder of the American Shakespeare Center at the reconstructed Blackfriars playhouse, writes, “Since Shakespeare presented his plays largely in an anachronistic present, we argue that in dressing our plays in contemporary dress or in some melange, we are operating in the same spirit” (Cohen, Ralph, “Keeping” 8). In a 1963 article for *Drama Survey* Guthrie similarly asserted that “the assumption that Shakespeare ‘saw’ his characters in Elizabethan dress can also mean that he ‘saw’ them dressed not in Elizabethan but in contemporary style” (“*Hamlet*” 74). Both twentieth-century and early modern costumes were therefore valid for Guthrie. “Failing Elizabethan dress,” he wrote, “it seems to me that modern clothes are the next most logical choice” (*New Theatre* 102). Harley Granville Barker had objected to modern dress for Shakespeare principally because it rendered certain passages anachronistic, such as that in which Cleopatra calls for Charmian to cut her laces (*Prefaces* 3: 42-43). Guthrie acknowledged, with specific reference to Ophelia’s description of Hamlet as “ungartered,” that “it must be freely

admitted that there will be some incongruity between modern, or even semi-modern, dress and certain archaisms in the play's language" ("*Hamlet*" 74). He insisted, however, that the benefits of modern dress outweigh this defect.

Guthrie believed that when Shakespeare's characters are presented in contemporary costumes, audiences can better identify their status. "Almost instantaneously and with barely any conscious effort," Guthrie writes, "we can place them as high or low, rich or poor, soldier or civilian" ("*Hamlet*" 75). Such a theatrical wardrobe therefore "brings the tragedy back from the remoteness of a long-bygone era, and from the vague territory of theatrical, quasi-operatic Romance, and compels us to regard the characters as men and women subject to the same passions, the same confusions and perplexities, as ourselves" (76). This is particularly important for progressive practitioners exploring Elizabethan staging conventions. Modern dress provides a means, as Ralph Alan Cohen describes, "for a company who is interested in original practices" ("Keeping" 2) to avoid the taint of "museum theatre" (9). Guthrie expressed a similar concern when he wrote of his 1963 designs for *Hamlet*, "We wish to stress the modernity of the play, not to exhibit it as an antique" ("*Hamlet*" 74).

Besides modern dress, the 1938 *Hamlet* featured another costume motif which would become common in Guthrie's work. Trewin claimed that the production had "the atmosphere of some Ruritanian palace levee" (177). "Ruritania" comes from Anthony Hope's novel *The Prisoner of Zenda* and refers to an imagined country, what Shaughnessy calls a "fictitious late nineteenth-century Middle-European social world" that serves as "a synonym for the comically self-important but politically impotent nation

state” (139). In the 1930s films like *Duck Soup* used this kind of fictional European locality to mock the chauvinistic nationalism which had led to World War I. After the next war Guthrie regularly returned to this costume pattern. Observers identified Ruritania as a setting for Guthrie’s modern-dress productions of *All’s Well That Ends Well* at both Ontario (1953) and Stratford-on-Avon (1959); *Troilus and Cressida* at the Old Vic (1956); and *Hamlet* at Minneapolis (1963). Critics frequently tied Guthrie’s use of this concept to a perceived anti-militarist agenda. Kenneth Tynan, for instance, claims that both *All’s Well* and *Troilus* were “set in a Shavian Ruritania faintly redolent of *Arms and the Man*” (118), and Marshall writes of *Troilus* that by “dressing his production in this way Guthrie accentuated the most contemporary aspect of the play, Shakespeare’s anti-heroic attitude to war” (“Guthrie” 101). This supports Guthrie’s assertion that the use of twentieth-century dress could “stress the modernity” (“*Hamlet*” 74) of a Renaissance play. As Ruritania had stood in 1930s popular culture for the folly of nationalism that caused the First World War, Guthrie used this setting after the second global conflict to mock bellicosity and advance his agenda of eliminating political borders, an objective which Shaughnessy links ideologically to the director’s desire to abolish the proscenium (93-94; 135).

In March 1939, Guthrie directed a *Taming of the Shrew* at the Old Vic which foreshadowed his later 1954 revival at the Stratford Festival. This earlier production, according to Williamson, was “a roaring knockabout Italian harlequinade, decked out with all the commedia dell’Arte paraphernalia of fantastic clothes, clown’s make-up, acrobatic tumbling and truncheon-beating”(Old Vic Drama 118). It had, however,

“nothing whatever to do with Shakespeare’s play” (119). Trewin felt that Guthrie “broadened” the humor of the comedy in a manner “that might have defeated even Christopher Sly.” The director constructed “a world pulpy with custard-pies, with Petruchio wearing red, white and blue corsets at his wedding, and Grumio as a clown with a sausage string” (Trewin 178). If nothing else, this comic exuberance suggests that Guthrie was not overly reverential in his treatment of Shakespeare.

Shortly before the end of the 1938-39 season, Guthrie was officially appointed administrative director of both the Old Vic and Sadler’s Wells. “Because of duties of organization,” Williamson writes, “he therefore relinquished, for the time being, his position as active producer of the Old Vic Drama Company” (*Old Vic Drama* 122). Guthrie’s artistic endeavors were further impeded by the start of World War II. All theaters shut down at the beginning of the conflict. The Old Vic reopened briefly in the spring of 1940, at which time Guthrie collaborated with Lewis Casson and Harley Granville Barker on *King Lear*. The theater then closed again for the duration, and was heavily damaged by the blitz (Rowell 129). Trewin writes of Guthrie’s attitude toward theatrical reform during this period that while it “had become increasingly clear to him that [the ideal] stage should not be clenched by the picture-frame; that there should be no kind of realistic background,” the outbreak of war meant that “these arguments about production became academic. The task was simply to find a stage and to put a play upon it” (184). I believe, however, that Guthrie’s war-time experience encouraged his adoption of a non-scenic alternative.

During the Second World War, the Old Vic's endeavors were restricted primarily to small-budget touring productions, with only occasional London engagements at the New Theatre (Williamson, *Old Vic Drama* 147). "The presiding genius of these tours was Tyrone Guthrie," Williamson writes, "and it was his resourcefulness that adapted both drama and opera to the conditions under which the companies had to work" (*Old Vic Drama* 213). Typical of these efforts was a "portable *Macbeth*" with which "Sybil Thorndike and Lewis Casson traveled within ten weeks to thirty-eight Welsh mining towns" performing "on stages that varied between an echoing cinema and the table-cloth of a Miners' Welfare Hall" (Trewin 189). Guthrie's 1941 *King John* was designed for such a tour with "spare but suggestive scenery" (Williamson, *Old Vic Drama* 147). Yet this production also represented for Williamson "all the stylized yet picturesque imagination that distinguishes Guthrie's productions of what one might call the 'banner class'" (*Old Vic Drama* 147). "Guthrie staged it," Trewin writes of *King John*, "with no concession to realism, in heraldic curtains and sweeping banners, with a great display of armor and gonfalons, and a too whimsical use of comic bouncing hobby-horses before the walls of Angiers" (188). The *Times* was more effusive in its praise:

The play calls for the stir of drum and trumpet and the flaunting of flags to give point and colour to political and dynastic argument which, without their aid, is apt to weary and confuse, and Mr. Tyrone Guthrie and Mr. Lewis Casson have brilliantly supplied them. The scenery is not elaborate; curtains with heraldic breasts and devices supply the background, but by an ingenious use of mime and the principles of ballet, by effects of grouping and lighting, by the sweep and fall of banners, by formalized attitude and gesture, by, indeed, using properties and protagonists as an artist uses colour and composition, the producers convey the full impression of the impact of great events and make the play throughout not only exciting but beautiful to watch. (Rev. of *King John*: 6)

Guthrie would later use similar devices to bring pageantry to other sparsely decorated platforms. In contrast to his 1941 *King John*, Guthrie's postwar productions of *Henry VIII* at Stratford-on-Avon, *Richard III* at the Canadian Stratford, and *Henry V* and *Richard III* in Minneapolis employed bare stages not by necessity but by design.

By the end of the war Guthrie was exhausted by administrative duties and desired to return full-time to artistic work. Late in 1944 Laurence Olivier, Ralph Richardson and John Burrell took over leadership of the Old Vic from Guthrie as an administrative "triumvirate" (Spoto 174). Guthrie stayed on to serve as a theatrical director but left in 1945 over a dispute with Olivier. He was to direct the actor in a production of *Oedipus Rex*. Guthrie became enraged, however, when Olivier improbably insisted on presenting this tragedy on a double bill with Sheridan's *The Critic* (Bate 158). Guthrie exclaimed "over my dead body" and walked out in protest (qtd. in Rowell 136). Away from the Vic, Guthrie was free to realize his dream of an open stage. He did so in an unconventional theatrical venue.

The Edinburgh Festival

The Edinburgh International Festival of Music and Art began in 1947. The first year was a success, but the Festival's organizers felt that Scotland had been underrepresented in the category of drama. They therefore sought someone to stage an indigenous theatrical classic in 1948. Guthrie because of his paternal ancestry and previous experience with the Scottish Players was, Ivor Brown writes, "the obvious choice as commander of these operations" (*Satyre* 27). Locating a masterpiece of Scottish drama was not easy as there were few works to choose from. Guthrie finally found Sir

David Lindsay's *Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaits*. This play, written around 1540, is an allegory of the Reformation, which "originally took a whole day for its presentation" (Davies, "Ritual" 7). Guthrie engaged the Scottish playwright Robert Kemp to edit the *Thrie Estaits* down from its running time of "six or seven hours" to a more manageable "two and a half" (Brown, *Satyre* 30). Kemp also somewhat modernized the play's language, although the published script remains as difficult to read as Chaucer's Middle English. Besides featuring an archaic style, the play's idiom also proclaims its regional origins. In a *New York Times* review, W. A. Darlington described the *Thrie Estaits* as "written in a dialect so Scottish that parts of it deprived the English or American visitor of any advantage over other foreigners in the matter of language" ("Visit to Scotland" X3). Yet this obscure work, which "had not been performed for four centuries" (Pettigrew 75), became the surprise hit of the Edinburgh Festival. "After opening night there was a rampage for tickets," recalls Stanley Baxter, who performed in the *Thrie Estaits*. "It was a success such as one dreams of in our business" (Baxter qtd. in Rossi, *Astonish* 126). Guthrie's daring and original approach to staging was largely responsible for this unexpected triumph. Eleven years after Elsinore, the director finally found an opportunity to explore the configuration he had discovered in a ballroom of the Marienlyst Hotel.

Guthrie and his associates searched Edinburgh for a performance space for their production. All the city's theaters "were either already booked or quite unsuitable for what he had in mind" (Forsyth 203). They finally came upon the Assembly Hall of the Kirk of Scotland. Guthrie's great-grandfather had once served in this building as

“Moderator General”: the head of the Scottish Church and a kind of “nonconformist pope” (Stanley Baxter qtd. in Rossi, *Astonish* 124). Upon entering the building, Guthrie immediately knew that he had found his venue. “The sole credit I take in connection with the whole business,” Guthrie claimed, “is that, when we came to the Kirk Assembly Hall, I knew we were home” (qtd. in Brown, *Satyre* 28). It was an odd choice, as the Hall had never been used for secular purposes (Rossi, *Astonish* 124). But it made sense for Guthrie. “With his penchant for provocative shock,” Forsyth writes, “it was a god-given opportunity to turn the sacred stamping [sic] ground of respectable Scottish dogmatism into a theatre” (Forsyth 204). Guthrie could not resist the temptation to work, Robert Speaight wrote, “Under the disapproving statue of John Knox himself” (*Shakespeare* 235).

The Edinburgh Festival provided Guthrie with the opportunity to employ early modern conventions outside the limitations of a proscenium theater. Kennedy writes that it was “Guthrie’s first real chance to use an Elizabethan design” (*Looking* 154), and Roger Lewis suggests that the *Thrie Estaits* allowed Guthrie to develop “the principles of his non-proscenium arch theatre, which was first seen at the impoverished ballroom setting of Olivier’s *Hamlet*” (141 n). While Marshall suggests that the stage in Edinburgh was “Elizabethan in character, but not in detail” (*Producer* 229), photographs (Forsyth 164) show that Guthrie’s Assembly Hall configuration featured the major structural attributes of the early modern stage. There was a balcony over a curtained area which served as a discovery space. There were also dog-legged staircase units on either side of the balcony, leading to the stage below. Guthrie would integrate similar units into his

design for the Stratford Festival. The historical accuracy of this scenic element is open to question (Hildy, *Shakespeare* 232 n), but such staircases unquestionably increase a director's ability to move action seamlessly about the platform stage without relying on modern devices such as mechanized lifts or turntables.

In front of the *frons scenae* was "a fifteen foot wide 'peninsular' platform which Guthrie built to project twenty-five feet into the auditorium" (Styan, *Shakespeare Revolution* 187). Brown describes this area as "lower than the Elizabethan platform-stage, being reached from the auditorium by a few easy steps." This meant that it was "approachable in a way that Shakespeare's loftier stage was not. The characters could enter down the aisles and through the rows of spectators and go off in the same way" (Brown, *Satyre* 29). Guthrie would later use the house for entrances and exits in this same manner at the Stratford Festival. Another characteristic feature of the *Thrie Estaits* was Guthrie's stylish handling of crowd scenes and pageantry. Brown reports that "the eye was continually taken by the pomp and panoply of medievalism on Guthrie's bustling bannered stage" (*Satyre* 33). Guthrie's penchant for such spectacle did not begin in the Assembly Hall, but had been a feature of his productions since the 1933 *Richard II* at Stratford-on-Avon. The absence of scenery, however, made this aspect of his work more pronounced in Edinburgh, as would also be the case in Guthrie's later open-stage efforts.

The most significant feature of the *Thrie Estaits* was its relationship to the audience. Forsyth writes that the production employed "what we now call a 'thrust' stage," and that Guthrie was motivated by "the desire to strike a better relationship between players and audiences" than was possible in a proscenium format (205). The

Edinburgh configuration gave Guthrie, according to Brown, exactly what “he wanted, a platform stage open on three sides” (*Satyre* 29). Guthrie believed that open staging could create a “recognizable community” out of audience and actors (Forsyth 207). He wrote that the audience in the Assembly Hall “focused upon the actors in the brightly lit acting area, but the background was of the dimly lit rows of people similarly focused on the actors” (Guthrie, *Life* 311). This created a sense of ritual participation which for Guthrie was an essential component of early modern staging.

One governing precept of Guthrie’s work on the open stage was his doctrine of constant motion. He wrote that because performers could “not face every member of the audience all the time” speeches must be “spoken by the actor either on the move, or rotating on his own axis, so that at different moments everyone in the house could see his eyes and the expression of his face” (*Life* 208). Baxter recalls that in the Assembly Hall “the rule was simply to keep turning in circles and never to go to one part of the hall for too long” (qtd. in Rossi, *Astonish* 125), and Speaight confirms that the cast was “kept in movement so that they should never have their backs for too long to any one section of the house” (*Shakespeare* 235). Nathan Cohen, writing of Guthrie’s work in Canada, derisively describes this practice as the “actor circumnavigating the stage from right to left, turning his back first on this group, then that, and then going to the reverse directions, thereby ensuring each section of the audience a fair opportunity to be deprived” (“Stratford” 269). Guthrie’s admonition to the Edinburgh cast that they needed to be “turning really all the time through 220 degrees” (qtd. in Rossi, *Astonish* 125) seems odd given that the Assembly Hall audience did not extend behind the *frons scenae*

(Forsyth 164). Constant motion is only necessary in a theater like that of the Stratford Festival, in which the arc of the audience is greater than 180 degrees. In a configuration where audience does not extend behind the tiring-house façade, significant portions of the upper and lower stage allow an actor to be equally visible from all parts of the house. Directors at key moments such as soliloquies can therefore place stationary performers in these strong positions. Such was the case in the Staunton Blackfriars' 2005 production of *The Comedy of Errors*, in which David Loar delivered an arresting version of Egeon's long speech in the first scene of this play while remaining completely still. All thrust configurations involve a careful balancing of sight lines. A given audience member may often see the face of only one actor in a two person scene, and directors must take care that no section of the house views, for instance, nothing but the back of Hamlet's head during the course of an entire evening. This does not mean, however, that all of the performers need to be moving all of the time. Guthrie, breaking new ground in an era when there was no modern tradition of non-proscenium acting, probably overcompensated at Edinburgh in his desire to provide equal visual satisfaction to all three sides of the audience.

The *Thrie Estaits* became "the biggest dramatic success the Edinburgh Festival ever had" and was "constantly revived" during the coming years (Cushman 15). Most observers cited Guthrie's staging as the primary reason for the production's triumph. The *Times* noted in its review of 26 August 1948, "Mr. Tyrone Guthrie makes a beautiful and exciting spectacle of the old play. The stage projects itself into the midst of the audience and is kept alive in part by the play's own natural vigor but in part also by the producer's

adroit groupings of the brightly coloured figures” (Rev. of *The Three Estates* 6). For Darlington in *The New York Times*, Guthrie’s brilliant staging compensated for the antiquated Scottish dialect. Difficulties in linguistic comprehension “didn’t matter” because “the play was so full of color and bustling action that it conveyed its meaning almost completely without the help of words” (Darlington, “Visit to Scotland” X3). Guthrie’s Assembly Hall configuration gained fame as what Marshall calls the “most interesting and successful example of an open platform stage” (*Producer* 218). It became the city’s “principal theatrical venue” (Cushman 15) and was used for Old Vic stagings of Shakespeare and Jonson at future Edinburgh Festivals (Marshall, *Producer* 219).

The Thrie Estaits was, like the Elsinore *Hamlet*, a defining moment in Guthrie’s theatrical journey. “It excited him incredibly,” Stanley Baxter recalled, “because he realized from now on mainly what he was going to do was work on open stages” (qtd. in Rossi, *Astonish* 125). Davies writes that this “was Guthrie’s new style of production, or rather the fulfillment of what he had been heading towards for several years” (“Ritual” 7), and Marshall concludes that Guthrie’s Edinburgh experience made him “a fervent believer in the principles of open staging, so that when he became director of the Shakespeare Festival at Stratford, Ontario, he designed for it a stage on much the same lines as the one built for the Assembly Hall” (*Producer* 219). There is some question as to Tanya Moiseiwitsch’s involvement in the construction of this “near approach to the Elizabethan platform stage” (Marshall, *Producer* 218). While Kennedy claims that it was she who “covered the center of the Assembly Hall of the Church of Scotland with a thrust stage” (*Looking* 154), Forsyth does not mention Moiseiwitsch in connection to this

venture, and Guthrie's first reference to the designer's work in Edinburgh comes with the 1954 Festival production of *The Matchmaker* (*Life* 233). T.J. Edelstein's chronology of Moiseiwitsch's work in *The Stage is all the World* also does not list her involvement in 1948 (129). She therefore probably did not design the first Edinburgh production of *The Thrie Estaits* but instead, as Pettigrew and Portman suggest, used this production's configuration "as a kind of starting point" for her later Elizabethanist designs, including that of the Canadian Stratford (75). She collaborated with Guthrie to recreate as much as possible of the Edinburgh experience in their 1949 production of *Henry VIII* at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre.

Henry VIII

Guthrie staged Shakespeare and Fletcher's collaboration on the life of the most famous Tudor king at Stratford-on-Avon in 1949 and 1950, and again at the Old Vic to celebrate Elizabeth II's coronation in 1953. Robert Hardy acted in all three stagings and recalls, "*Henry VIII* went on forever" (qtd. in Rossi, *Astonish* 122). The production generally remained intact during this four-year span, although some of the more distracting "Guthrionics," such as a bit of business in which a "sneezing courtier" was "suffered to turn Cranmer's carefully composed oration in honor of the infant Elizabeth into comedy," were toned down after the first season (Rev. of *Henry VIII*, 1950 8). Anthony Quayle was in charge of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre and invited Guthrie to stage *Henry VIII* in 1949. "I saw the *Henry VIII* as a progression in the general way his thinking was leading him," Quayle recalls, noting Guthrie's growing "tendency to simplify Shakespeare productions, to find a fluid yet permanent architectural setting, and

to dispense even with the distraction of lighting changes” (qtd. in Rossi, *Astonish* 25).

Quayle claims that “all Tony [Guthrie]’s life was spent in moving gradually towards full expression at Stratford and Minneapolis” and that *Henry VIII* was an important milestone in this quest (26).

Tanya Moiseiwitsch designed the production, but Guthrie was deeply involved in this process. The goal was to “*ignore* the proscenium arch” and recreate as much as possible the Elizabethan freedom of the *Thrie Estaits*. Guthrie “designed the ground plan,” Moiseiwitsch recalls, which “showed an asymmetrical setting of stairs going up to a platform above with alcoves below” (qtd. in Rossi, *Astonish* 31). The set was completely non-representational. Moiseiwitsch and Guthrie intended it “to serve equally well for council, chamber, court, or street” (“The Queen to See *Henry VIII*” 4). Muriel St. Clare Byrne writes that when “the audience entered the theatre, instead of seeing a curtain, they had before their eyes a lighted permanent set which remained unchanged and unhidden until the end” (“Stratford” 120). The production thereby imitated the practice of Elizabethan theaters, which made no attempt to hide their unworthy scaffolding from public view.

Henry VIII perhaps represented Guthrie’s greatest attempt to reduce the intrusion of electronic illumination. The production was, according to Robert Cushman, “staged in unvarying light” (15), and Trewin writes that Guthrie “kept throughout to the steady truth of uncoloured lights” (212). Byrne mitigates this view slightly, writing that the lighting “had no colour and remained unaltered throughout, except when imperceptible light cues varied the emphasis” (“Stratford” 120). Other than these “imperceptible” touches,

Guthrie generally sought to reproduce the original Globe's convention of universal lighting, in which the stage was lit uniformly by sunlight from above. This effect was largely lost at Stratford-on-Avon, where the proscenium configuration did not allow light from the stage to spill onto the public. While it would have been possible to leave the house lights up, decades of tradition argued against such a choice, and the audience was left in the dark. Even if the audience had been illuminated, the great distance between stage and public would have lessened the sense of shared experience and active participation which spectators had felt at Elsinore and Edinburgh. This was one of many ways in which Guthrie felt frustrated by the physical limitations of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre. Anthony Quayle offered him a co-directorship during this period, but Guthrie would only consider this if he were allowed to build a new theater (Bate 149). When Quayle asked what he should then do with the existing structure Guthrie replied, "Who cares? It's a dreadfully old-fashioned theatre. You can only do old-fashioned work there. Push it into the Avon!"(qtd. in Rossi, *Astonish* 26).

Guthrie was not alone in his dislike for the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre. George Bernard Shaw called the original edifice, built in 1879, "the worst building in the world for the performance of Shakespeare's plays." When it burned down in 1926 Shaw announced, "I am extremely glad to hear the news, Stratford-upon-Avon is to be *congratulated*" (qtd. in Pettigrew 72). The replacement, built in 1932, offered little improvement. It was instead, according to Pettigrew and Portman, "a disaster—ugly, uncomfortable, [and] a director's nightmare" (72). W. Bridges-Adams, Stratford's director at the time of the reconstruction, had rejected the notion of a thrust stage as

“insanity” and insisted instead on a “normal” stage (qtd. in Howard 145). As a result the second building, according to Tony Howard, “has blighted British Shakespeare ever since.” The 1932 configuration had “only a tiny forestage and the actors were cut off from the stalls by a gaping orchestra pit” (Howard 145). Ben Iden Payne, who replaced Bridges-Adams in 1934, sought to introduce Elizabethan costumes and staging to Stratford-on-Avon. Trapped within the confines of the picture-frame, however, these efforts took on the feel of historical reenactments in the nostalgic spirit of “merrie-Englandism” (Howard 146). A similar fate befell Tanya Moiseiwitsch when she attempted an Elizabethan design for Anthony Quayle’s 1951 production of the second historical tetralogy at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre. As Kennedy writes, “for all her good intentions, in essential ways Moiseiwitsch’s unit set in 1951 was little different from Poel’s ‘four-poster’ set for *Measure for Measure* in 1893. Both were pictures of an Elizabethan stage rather than the thing itself” (*Looking* 157).

Recent attempts to replace the main theater at Stratford-on-Avon have, as in the case of Ben Iden Payne’s attempts to employ early modern practices, become conflated with anxieties concerning ersatz “authenticity.” Alan Riding reported in *The New York Times* on 22 April 2006 that Adrian Noble’s “plan to tear down the Royal Shakespeare Theatre and build a new one as part of a plan to create a Shakespeare ‘village’” had met with resistance because “British newspapers immediately interpret[ed] ‘village’ to mean theme park.” There may, however, still be hope for the British Stratford. Riding notes:

Directors, actors and audiences have long bemoaned the existing theater, notably its wide proscenium stage and the alienating distance between performers and

public. As a result, a new plan has been drawn up to address this problem: the Art Deco building will remain intact, but its auditorium will be transformed to create a thrust stage, with audience on three sides. (7)

Guthrie would have welcomed this news, but in 1950 he was too impatient to wait for the bureaucratic process that could have led to a new stage at Stratford-on-Avon. Guthrie understood that, as Pettigrew and Portman write, progress in the twentieth century had been limited because “its theatres were still nineteenth-century buildings, and the proscenium continued to impose its inevitable demands even on those who wished to escape them” (73). To move forward Guthrie would need to design and build a new kind of performance space. He soon had this opportunity in another Stratford half a world away.

The Founding of the Stratford Festival

Several related ideological concerns motivated Tyrone Guthrie in his founding of the Stratford, Ontario, Shakespearean Festival in 1953. Foremost among these was Guthrie’s belief in the function of theater as a spiritual and, in a broad sense, “religious ritual” (Guthrie, *In Various Directions* 29). Guthrie believed that “Theatre is the direct descendant of Fertility Rites, War Dance, and all the corporate ritual expressions by means of which our primitive ancestors, often wiser than their progeny, sought to relate themselves to God, or the gods” (“Long View” 193). Modern theaters were not amenable to this ritual function, and the opportunity to devise an alternative configuration in which the audience would nearly surround the actors as in ancient times was a major factor in Guthrie’s decision to come to Ontario. He also conceived of theater as a means of

preserving community in a society increasingly alienated by mechanization, where “each year machines [do] more of the work which was formerly done by humans” (*New Theatre* 165). Guthrie saw the possibility of a genuinely shared experience between performers and public as theater’s unique advantage over film and as the primary justification for the live stage’s continued existence in the cinematic age. The intimate relationship between actor and audience required for this survival was not possible in a proscenium theater, and the open stage at Stratford offered Guthrie the chance to create a theatrical model which could compete with cinema and television. Under these more favorable circumstances, Guthrie believed “that a Theatre, where live actors perform plays to an audience which is there in the flesh before them” could “survive all threats from powerfully organized industries, which pump prefabricated drama out of cans and blowers and contraptions of one kind and another” (“Long View” 191).

Guthrie also sought to bridge the “social chasm” (*Life* 197) which he believed had come to separate actors from audience since the rise of the proscenium stage. Theater practitioners, he felt, were often treated as “the lower classes” by their affluent public (“Theatre at Minneapolis” 32). Guthrie designed his thrust stage to break down this social barrier as it abolished the physical partition of the proscenium wall. Another egalitarian goal of Guthrie’s was to expand the demographic of the audience. Theater should not, he felt, “be aimed at a cultural minority” (*New Theatre* 177) because “everyone, literally everyone, is part of human culture” (171). This program of inclusion led Guthrie to champion theatrical development in Canada, a nation which in 1953 had little dramatic

tradition. He hoped that at Stratford classical plays would be “interpreted into a Canadian idiom, [and] given a Canadian style” (172), thereby expanding access to theater for both audience and artists.

Guthrie’s stated goals in founding the Stratford Festival contrast sharply with the interpretation of this event developed in recent decades by critics like Richard Paul Knowles and Dennis Salter. While Guthrie saw himself as an anti-authoritarian rebel breaking down barriers of class and geography, these later scholars portray him as a cultural imperialist serving an elitist and reactionary agenda. This more recent view perceives the establishment of the Stratford Festival as “discursively constructed as the founding of a Shakespearean National Theatre in Canada after the British (imperialist) Model, in which Shakespeare was used to serve the interests of cultural colonization by a dominant—and on occasion explicitly capitalist (or anti-communist)—elite” (Knowles, “Nationalist to Multinational” 26). Rather than breaking down social barriers and expanding access, the Stratford Festival offered a “product presented for the pleasure of a privileged and culturally dominant group of consumers” (Knowles, “Shakespeare 1993” 215). Instead of enabling Canadian practitioners to find an indigenous means of expression through classical texts, Guthrie’s efforts, in this interpretation, led these “postcolonial actors” to “disavow their particular historical conditions” (Salter 114). This left these performers with a sense of “divided identity” (122) which prevented them from achieving artistic or political independence.

The discrepancy between Guthrie’s expressed intent and the opinion of his efforts held by some postmodern critics originates in contrasting interpretations of the

Elizabethan revival's ideological significance. These scholars perceive reconstructed early modern practices as separating Shakespeare from the material circumstances of contemporary audiences. Salter succinctly expresses this view when he writes that "the Stratford stage has sought to transport Canadian theatre—and the culture it represents—backwards in time to the very spirit of the Elizabethan age. It has often provided Canadians with the comforting illusion that they have secured unique access to Shakespeare himself" (121). This kind of escapism, however, was never the Elizabethanists' main objective. William Poel, Nugent Monck, and Tyrone Guthrie did not seek to turn their theaters into the kind of historically accurate amusement park derided by W. Bridges-Adams in 1919 as "Ye Olde Shakespeare Bunne Shoppe" (Bridges-Adams 29). This was particularly true at Stratford where there was no "attempt [at] an Elizabethan pseudo-antique style" (Guthrie, "Shakespeare at Stratford" 128). Guthrie notes, in what may have been a direct response to Bridges-Adams, "We were determined to eschew *Ye Olde*" (*Life* 319). Instead Guthrie, like Poel and Monck before him, sought a very contemporary response to the immediate challenges facing theater in the twentieth century.

Ritual and community

"Ritual," J.L. Styan writes, was "Guthrie's favorite word" (*Shakespeare Revolution* 205). Indeed, Guthrie's writings reveal an almost obsessive concern with theater as a spiritual rite. His vision was religious but far from orthodox. "It is my belief," he wrote, "that, in trying to serve the theatre faithfully, I am offering some sort of service to God" (*In Various Directions* 23). Guthrie's vision incorporated Christianity, as when

he wrote of the “priest in Holy Communion” as “an actor impersonating Christ in a very solemn drama” (“Long View” 192), but he also expressed dissatisfaction with modern religion. “Christian culture,” he lamented, “has taken over many of the ideas underlying dionysiac and other more primitive rites of spring. We have purified them, or it could equally be said, emasculated them, by the elimination of much grossness and sexuality” (*In Various Directions* 31). Guthrie looked back to ancient Greece for more meaningful religious rituals, professing that “we, like the Athenians, have a sneaking belief in many gods” (26). He saw a common origin for Greek religion and Christianity, and for Greek and modern drama as well, in prehistoric rituals. These were originally celebrated with human and then later animal sacrifices until finally, “Instead of an actual sacrifice, the offering took symbolic form. A *story* of sacrifice was enacted in honor of the God in a tragedy.” Guthrie believed that “Macbeth, Hamlet . . . even Willy Loman . . . are all, like the protagonists of Greek tragedy, victims at a ceremony of sacrifice” (33). When Guthrie’s *Oedipus Rex* proved the most successful production in the Stratford Festival’s second season, Brooks Atkinson wrote in *The New York Times* that “it would be ironic if Sophocles emerged as the godfather of a Shakespeare festival” (“Bard in Canada” X1). In fact it was hardly “ironic,” considering Guthrie’s emphasis on the ritual quality of theater and on the unbroken continuity he perceived between primitive rites of sacrifice and modern tragedy.

Guthrie saw the thrust stage as essential to recovering theater’s sacred aspects. He perceived its non-realistic qualities to be inherently connected with its function as a ritual space. “The attraction for me of the ‘open’ stage,” Guthrie wrote, “as opposed to the

proscenium, is primarily this: that it stresses the ritual as opposed to the illusionary quality of performance” (“Shakespeare at Stratford” 131). This lack of illusion was enhanced by the presence of audience on three sides. “The fact that an audience sits *around* the stage,” Guthrie noted, “makes it easier to apprehend what is, in fact, the purpose of theatrical performance,” which was “not to create the illusion that a palpable fiction is a fact, but rather to recreate in ritual terms an ordered and significant series of ideas” (*In Various Directions* 69). A sense of community and participation was vital to Guthrie, who believed that theater was “essentially a sociable, communal affair” (*In Various Directions* 69). The audience, Guthrie wrote, must feel “invited to participate” and should therefore be “arranged [so] that spectators can see one another around, and beyond, the more brightly lighted stage” (*New Theatre* 69). He had discovered at the 1948 Edinburgh Festival that such a configuration allowed the audience to “assist in” the performance instead of merely observing it (“Sir Tyrone Guthrie” 14).

Anti-industrialism

Guthrie believed that interactive ritual was especially important to a modern society in which people had been alienated by technology. Like William Poel and Nugent Monck, Guthrie bemoaned the industrial transition from “handcraft to mechanical processes” with its accompanying shift in emphasis “from quality to quantity” (*Life* 324). While Poel and Monck expressed these sentiments by aligning themselves with the Pre-Raphaelites, Guthrie was drawn to a later, analogous phenomenon: the “Folk Art revival.” According to Guthrie this movement “aimed to keep alive simple and ancient expressions, in danger of disappearing with the change-over from a predominantly

agricultural to a predominantly urban and industrial society” (43). Guthrie feared that, because of the assembly-line mentality, “the joy will be taken out of work” and “a deadly standardization will be imposed, not just upon commodities, but on ideas” (324). This anti-industrial bias partly explains Guthrie’s emphasis on visual detail in the early years of the Stratford Festival, when he sometimes seemed perversely determined to spend as much money and effort as possible on props and costumes. Such was the case in 1953’s “incident of the shoes,” an episode of Festival lore so well known as to be chronicled in the business magazine *Industrial Canada* (House 63).

In two different accounts of the Festival’s founding, from *A Life in the Theater* and *Renown at Stratford*, Guthrie describes at length the problem of securing adequate footwear for performers. This challenge is also addressed by Guthrie’s designer Tanya Moiseiwitsch, who rejects the traditional theatrical notion that such apparel is relatively unimportant. This conventional wisdom, she insists, is “a fallacy on the open stage” because, in a theatre like Stratford’s, “shoes can let down the whole effect” (Moiseiwitsch 114). Moiseiwitsch may be partly right, but Guthrie’s insistence that for *Richard III* he “required shoes of a shape, and in materials and colors, which bore no resemblance to the shoes mass produced for the public” (*Life* 323) seems excessive. I believe that the real significance of the shoes for Guthrie lay in his rejection of industrialism. Guthrie laments that “Canada, like the United States, is organized for mass-production” and that it is “almost impossible to get people to bother to make something for which there is no mass-demand, for which no blueprint exists, which requires craftsmanship.” Finally Guthrie found “an aged Jewish craftsman,” who was

“delighted to feel that his skill was valued again,” to make shoes for *Richard III*. “Too old for the rush and flurry of competitive mass-production,” Guthrie moralizes, “he was still a first-rate tradesman” (“First Shakespeare” 14). A similar “little bootmaker” (*Life* 325) was found to provide footwear for *All’s Well That Ends Well*. For Guthrie the difference between the labors of these elderly cobblers and the industrial output of modern shoe factories had a parallel in the performing arts. Live theater was “the source of the custom-made drama,” whereas film and television only created “the sort of drama produced for cheap mass-distribution,” which “cheapened the art of acting by making it over-familiar” (“First Shakespeare” 31). Stratford had no tradition of live theater, and Ontario law at the time of the Festival’s founding “defined a theatre simply as ‘a place where moving pictures are shown’” (Pettigrew 16). Guthrie may have used his apparent obsession with quality and authenticity in props and costumes to emphasize the genuine craftsmanship of his theatrical medium in contrast to cinematic mass-production.

The challenge from cinema

Guthrie understood that from a practical point of view theater had to change if it was to survive in the cinematic age. “We have all been spoilt by movies,” he wrote.

Guthrie then elaborated:

Perhaps our eyes have been opened by the movies and television. We expect to see the actors, we expect to hear them, so spoilt are we. And if you are sitting at the back of a theatre that holds 3,000 people you don’t see the actors at all, and you only hear them if they are relayed by a loudspeaker. It is a disappointing and dreary experience which people simply do not support. (“Theatre at Minneapolis” 34)

As opposed to a “dreary” experience in the cheap seats of a large proscenium auditorium, the thrust stage offered the kind of “close-up” perspective which the film-going public had come to expect.

Guthrie also believed, in accordance with Gary Taylor’s later assertion regarding the relationship of cinema to the Elizabethan revival (274), that the open stage’s lack of scenic illusion spared the theater from having to compete with film in terms of verisimilitude. Guthrie claims, “Most thoughtful people realized the moment the movies had passed the bioscope stage, that the death-knell was ringing for theatrical realism” (“Theatre in Minneapolis” 46). He elsewhere notes, “I lost interest in naturalism when I began to believe that the cinema was a better medium for naturalistic expression than the theatre” (*Life* 200). Guthrie said of the stage he built for the Stratford Festival that, in contrast to cinematic illusion, “there is no possibility of scenery at all. Any scenery is created in the imagination of the audience by the words. And that is the right way.” Such an approach was impossible in traditional theaters “because of the architecture of the buildings.” A proscenium audience is “placed all on one side” while “looking at a picture frame” and is therefore “conditioned by the shape of the auditorium and 10 generations of playgoing to expect a picture” (Guthrie qtd. in “A Regisseur Reflects” 14). These visual expectations increased once audiences began to regularly frequent movie houses. The open stage shifted this paradigm of perception, and allowed the public to judge live drama on its own terms without unfavorable comparisons to cinema.

Guthrie believed that theater would prosper only if it offered its public something film could not by giving spectators the chance to impact the quality of performance

through their “assistance” and response. His communal vision was developed partly in response to cinema. “Theatre-going,” he claimed, “is a sociable, a shared experience” because “the audience, unlike the audience for movies or television, has an active part to play, has to do its share towards creating the performance, [and] can make or mar the occasion” (*New Theatre* 70). The power of the public in this regard is greatly increased by the intimacy of the thrust configuration. Knowles is correct when he writes that at Stratford the stage and the building “are, to a large extent, themselves the message.” I disagree, however, with what he takes this message to be. While Knowles believes that this “stage and its auditorium impose physical conditions that once again construct audiences as passive consumers of the production-as-product and that support the replication of capitalist and patriarchal structures” (“Shakespeare 1993” 219), I feel that this interpretation overlooks the real sense of empowerment through active engagement which Guthrie’s open stage provides its public. This effect is not afforded by cinema or proscenium theater—modes of performance which, in my view, tend far more to “construct audiences as passive consumers” in the service of “capitalist and patriarchal structures” than does the thrust stage at Stratford.

Colonialism

In dealing with his Canadian collaborators, Guthrie was not above using his position as a “looming patriarch of British Theatre” (Salter 120) to exert “to the full the aura of exotic authority brought all the way from old England” (Forsyth 226). Yet Knowles’s interpretation of the Festival’s creation as “the solidification of a delayed colonial celebration of a 19th-century brand of Canadian nationalism configured on an

imperialist British model” (“Nationalist to Multinational” 20) should be at least partly mitigated by Guthrie’s expressed notions with regard to Canadian identity, sentiments which reflect his broader attitude toward colonialism in general. Guthrie strove to make the Stratford project as much as possible “an effort for and by Canadians” (“Shakespeare at Stratford” 127). “It was Dr. Guthrie,” Herbert Whittaker wrote in 1958, “who established the Festival’s particular flavor of Canadianism,” a characteristic which “was more responsible for the success of the Stratford Shakespearean Festival than any other factor” (xxiii). Guthrie’s writings display sensitivity on the topic of cultural hegemony. He hoped that Canadians would be able “to assimilate classical works of art as part of their own heritage, not just regard them as imports, acquired at second-hand from overseas” (“Long View” 167). Guthrie acknowledged that in “the first year, although there were only four British actors, the weight they pulled was out of all proportion to their numbers.” But he pointed to greater equity in 1954, when in *Measure for Measure* “two of the three chief characters were played by Canadian actors” and in *The Taming of the Shrew* both the leading players were Canadian” (“Long View” 145). Brooks Atkinson of *The New York Times* acknowledged Guthrie’s attempts to use local talent, writing in 1953, “Most of the actors—and very good ones too—are Canadian professionals” (“Canada’s Stratford” X1).

Some critics have dismissed Guthrie’s “drive for a Canadian character” as “so much rubbish” (Cohen, Nathan “Theatre” 236). Dennis Salter, for instance, cites Michael Langham’s 1982 observation that “there was never anything Canadian about Stratford . . . that was a diplomatic thing Guthrie cooked up” (Salter’s ellipsis) as proof of Sir

Tyrone's insincerity (quoted in "Acting Shakespeare" 121). Langham, however, did not work in Stratford until 1955, when he directed *Julius Caesar* before taking charge of the entire Festival from Guthrie (Forsyth 252). He therefore could have had only limited knowledge of what transpired during the first two seasons, which was the time of Guthrie's greatest involvement. Knowles suggests that Guthrie quickly abandoned any aspirations of promoting Canadian nationalism. "As early as 1954," he observes, "Guthrie admitted, 'I don't know how far it may be possible to interpret a classical play in a distinctively Canadian way'" ("Nationalist to Multinational" 24). This quotation of Guthrie is from "A Long View of the Stratford Festival" published in *Twice Have the Trumpets Sounded*. The defeatist attitude Knowles attributes to Guthrie is, I believe, called into question by the director's suggestion, immediately preceding the passage cited by Knowles, that "a Festival's claim to be a Canadian institution might be based upon the fact that the company of actors was overwhelmingly Canadian" ("Long View" 166).

In this same essay, Guthrie rejects the notion that Canadian actors should eliminate regionalisms from their speech. This is significant in terms of Knowles's critique of the Stratford Festival's colonialist leanings. In "Shakespeare, Voice, and Ideology: Interrogating the Natural Voice," Knowles claims that voice training which advocates so-called "neutral" speech "clearly reinforce[s] North American Anglophilia as embodied in 'ye olde' Shakespeare Festivals across the continent, in imitation of British voice and other training" and therefore betrays its "ideological underpinnings" as a means of cultural repression (103). Guthrie agrees. He not only claims that "it would be quite wrong for Canadian actors to try to pronounce the words of a classical play in an assumed

‘English’ accent” (“Long View” 185). Guthrie goes further, suggesting that “the plays of Shakespeare should be presented by Canadian actors speaking in a recognizably Canadian manner.” He believes that “the most distinctive characteristic of Canadian actors is their speech” and prefers this indigenous vocalization to either British accents or “the *macedoine* of dialects which passes for English on the rare occasions when Shakespeare’s heard on Broadway” (175). Guthrie’s advocacy of regional Canadian speech is therefore, by the terms of Knowles’s own analysis regarding the ideology of voice on the stage, progressive rather than reactionary.

Guthrie’s praise of Canadian speech and of Canada in general may have been, as Cohen and Salter assert, no more than public relations. If Guthrie was insincere, however, he was at least consistent. A decade later he expressed similar concerns regarding cultural imperialism when planning his namesake theater in Minneapolis. “We certainly did not want it to appear,” he wrote of this venture, “as if once again Britain were trying to instruct the colonists”(*New Theatre* 43). Elsewhere during this same period Guthrie explained:

Just because I come from Britain it is extremely important that I don’t seem to be shoving British products down their throats. The American theatre is always being grand-mothered by us. We come over and say ‘Old darlings, you really don’t know anything about it! We have been at it for five centuries. Let me show you!’ And it doesn’t do. These are grown-up people who are developing their own theatre. If you are working in the Middle West this must be . . . an expression of the Middle West. (“Theatre in Minneapolis” 40)

Guthrie’s comments on his work in the United States, and his earlier hope that the Stratford Festival would provide “Canadian artists” with a means to “express what the Canadian climate, the Canadian soil and their fellow Canadians have made of them”

(“Long View” 171) suggest greater enlightenment on Guthrie’s part toward issues of national identity than his detractors have acknowledged.

Elements of Guthrie’s own biography may have attuned him to the complications of cross-cultural collaboration. Robert Shaughnessy suggests that Guthrie’s “Anglo-Irishness” and his awareness of “Ireland’s troubled passage towards a post-colonial national identity” made him particularly sensitive to issues of imperialism (91). Guthrie’s views on the Irish question were passionate. His Protestant family’s life had been turned upside down when their county was awarded in 1922 to the Irish Free State rather than to the British-ruled North (Forsyth 37). Guthrie compared the inequitable sectarian divide in Northern Ireland with racial segregation in the Jim Crow South (Guthrie, “Sir Tyrone Guthrie Speaks” 150) and frequently argued for Irish unification (“Guthrie Apology” 7). This personal connection to the Irish troubles helped make Guthrie throughout his career a champion of local empowerment and expression. He wrote of his early theatrical experiences in Belfast and Glasgow, “While I was in Ireland and Scotland I believed that indigenous drama was a valuable element in both national development and international understanding” (*Life* 347). Guthrie acted on his principles in 1926 when he resigned a secure job with the BBC to produce “theatre on a shoestring” with the nationalist Scottish Players (Forsyth 66-68) and similarly championed local expression while working in Australia, Canada, and the United States (Rossi, *Astonish* 177).

Guthrie insisted, however, that the only way for practitioners in these countries to develop their own traditions of dramaturgy and performance was to immerse themselves in the classics of western theater. “I believe,” Guthrie wrote in 1953, “that it is only

through the classics that either artists or audience can be adequately trained” (“Is Canada Ready” 27). This belief, perhaps understandably, has provoked the ire of some postmodern Canadian critics. “Guthrie even went so far,” Margaret Groome laments, “as to suggest that a distinctive Canadian theatre would emerge *only* out of a study of Shakespeare and other classics” (“Stratford” 126). Yet Guthrie’s logic was not completely spurious. He reasoned that, since Canada had no indigenous tradition of written English drama, any attempts to establish a canon for performance must be based on imitation. If Canadians were to “go on writing and producing realistic comedies of Canadian life” these would “remain mere copies of a naturalistic theatre which is essentially the product of nineteenth-century culture in Europe; and is already bygone.” Far better, he claimed, for a “distinctive national style, whether of acting, producing, writing or criticizing plays” to “be founded on the study of the classics” (“First Shakespeare” 28). Guthrie’s intentions were noble, but his Eurocentric viewpoint offended later critics writing from a multicultural perspective.

It may be impossible for any representative of a dominant culture to completely rid himself of imperialist impulses, particularly when dealing with that culture’s former colonial subjects. I believe, however, that the colonialist aspects of Guthrie’s work at Stratford have been exaggerated by critics like Salter and Knowles, who have simultaneously overlooked the more important ideological significance of his achievement. Guthrie’s larger agenda of empowering audiences and actors through communal ritual, his quest to develop a new mode of theatrical expression in response to the technological dominance of cinema, and his egalitarian desire to expand the

demographic base of theater audiences and break down the social and physical barriers separating public from performers far outweigh any taint of cultural imperialism that clings to his efforts.

The Stratford Stage

Tyrone Guthrie came to believe that the possibilities of any theatrical endeavor are determined by the architecture of the space in which it is performed. Guthrie wrote in 1970 of his last *Oedipus*, which he staged in the Clancy Auditorium at the University of New South Wales, “We have to do it in a hall so hideous, so un-intimate, so impracticably planned and acoustically so reverberant that I can’t see it being a success” (from unpublished letter, qtd. in Forsyth 319). He was attracted to the Stratford project principally because there was no theater to start with. Guthrie could therefore “begin from the beginning—literally from the ground up” (Styan, “Elizabethan” 219) and engineered a radical departure from traditional performance spaces. The Ontario endeavor represented, for Robertson Davies, “the forefront of a development of the theatrical art which has its roots deep in what is best in the classic theatre, and which sweeps aside much of the accumulation of rubbish which has cluttered the theatre we inherited from the nineteenth century” (“Ritual” 8). Margaret Groome has accused the Stratford Festival of contradiction in simultaneously portraying itself “as in direct descent from the best of the classical tradition and as a progressive enterprise” (“Stratford” 128). But for Guthrie and his supporters this was precisely the point. The Festival stage would incorporate elements of early modern practice (and of Greek theater and the pre-historic

rituals which preceded it) in an effort to create a new kind of venue which would serve the needs of the postmodern age. It would be, Davies wrote, “the theatre of the future” (“Ritual” 7).

In my discussions of the Stratford stage, I will generally use the present tense to refer to those features implemented at the time of the Festival’s founding. Where discrepancies exist, I will make distinctions between the original 1953 tent configuration and the permanent Festival Theatre which opened in 1958. Later architectural adjustments at Stratford are beyond the scope of this study, but the Festival Theatre retains to this day the essential design that Guthrie devised in 1953. The main acting area at Stratford is a five-sided platform which rises “out of a semi-circle of concrete called ‘the gutter’” (Pettigrew 78). The platform is connected to the concrete floor by three steps. The top two of these are eighteen inches wide, while the bottom step has a breadth of three feet (Pettigrew 78). These steps run around the entire circumference of the platform, and are therefore more like continuous levels than stairs. Pettigrew and Portman describe the resulting playing area as “surprisingly small, being about eleven feet deep and eighteen feet wide” (78). Cecil Clarke, however, suggests that the broad “steps or levels” leading up to the platform are in fact part of the playing area, and should be calculated when figuring the dimensions of the stage. He therefore measures the “total width of the stage, including the three levels” as thirty feet and the “total overall depth for acting” as thirty-nine feet (46-47). Photographs (Styan, *Shakespeare Revolution* 195; Kennedy, *Looking* 162; *The Stage is all the World* 83) show that the lowest and broadest

of these steps leading up to the platform is spacious enough to serve as an acting area in its own right, and that the other two can effectively be employed for the placing of actors on staggered levels.

Some aspects of the Festival stage suggest that Guthrie cared more about its practicality as a modern theater than about how well it reproduced the practices of Shakespeare's day. Pettigrew and Portman write that Guthrie "was influenced by the football stadium" to include "two tunnels, or vomitoria, which allow actors access to the side and the front of the stage from the underworld beneath it," thereby "making possible the 'speedy clearance'" of actors and avoiding the "piling up and slowing down of traffic" (78). This expanded upon the practice of actors entering and exiting through the house which Guthrie had discovered in Edinburgh, and he considered these vomitoria "vitally important" (Guthrie, "Theatre at Minneapolis" 44). Although Guthrie describes the Stratford stage as being "based on Shakespeare" (43), he did not hesitate to incorporate into its design this architectural element which has no apparent precedent in early modern theaters.

While not a slavish reconstruction, "the Stratford stage does have Elizabethan precedents" (Pettigrew 77). Like the Globe and Blackfriars, the Festival Theatre has an onstage balcony, a trap door, and multiple upstage portals for entrances and exits. These attributes, however, are orchestrated at Stratford in a unique manner which derives from the stage's relationship to its auditorium. The published image which most clearly illustrates the complexities of this design is probably the photograph of an original model which appears in *The Stage is all the World* (83). The best verbal description of this

configuration comes from Robertson Davies, who writes that the “plan of the theatre is like a large deep-dish pie, from which all but one large slice has been removed; this slice, projecting to the center of the amphitheatre, is the stage area” (“Director” 119). The audience originally wrapped around 240 degrees of the space, an arc reduced to 220 degrees with the construction of the permanent building (Somerset xiv). This meant that a *frons scenae* placed parallel to the downstage border of the platform, as is the case at the reconstructed Globe and Blackfriars, would seriously obstruct the vision of a large number of spectators. Clarke explains the required architectural adjustment:

The balcony of the Elizabethan stage was straight across the back. The balcony of the Stratford theatre comes out from the back of the stage in a V shape, the point being at the front . . . It is supported by seven pillars which follow the V shape of the balcony; one right at the point, one at either side halfway back and four across the back with 5 ft. between the two center ones to provide an entrance from under the back-center of the balcony. (47)

The onstage balcony does not therefore rest on an even horizontal line but instead “point[s] at the center of the auditorium rather like the prow of a ship” (Pettigrew 7).

This irregular design means that the Stratford stage does not have a traditional, curtained discovery space such as Guthrie had employed at Edinburgh. Clarke claims that the balcony structure forms “a small inner stage” underneath it (47), and Davies similarly asserts that the upstage “erection of columns” creates “a balcony above them and an inner stage behind them” (“Director” 119). Pettigrew and Portman dismiss this notion and claim that “Moiseiwitsch and Guthrie never thought of [the underbalcony] as an acting area because of difficulties with sight lines” (78). Clarke may be correct when he suggests that the pillars create an interesting playing space “suitable for comedy and

mystery moments” (47). The position of the audience and the triangular structure of this unit, however, mean that the area beneath cannot be closed off with curtains and used to reveal key theatrical images, as has been common practice in reconstructed Elizabethan theaters from Monck’s Maddermarket to the Staunton Blackfriars.

Guthrie credited the Stratford Festival’s success largely to the structure of its stage. “The Canadian companies,” he wrote, were “no better than an average company at the Old Vic or Stratford, England. But the productions, in my opinion, have seemed livelier and fresher because of the design of the theatre” (*Life* 336). This architectural triumph was widely hailed by contemporary observers. Henry Hewes, writing in 1955, proclaimed that if “the Festival had accomplished nothing else but the evolution of Tanya Moiseiwitsch’s functionally Elizabethan stage it would have justified its existence” (26). Walter Kerr announced in the *New York Herald* on 7 July 1957 that Guthrie and his collaborators had “given us the only really new stage and the only new actor-audience experience of the last hundred years on this continent” (qtd. in *Edinburgh* 511). Many later scholars also consider the Stratford stage a tremendous success. Pettigrew and Portman claim that “the distinctiveness of the Stratford achievement, and its impact in terms of world theatre were clearly due to the Festival Theatre’s remarkable stage and its relationship to the auditorium” (68). Cushman calls Guthrie’s thrust stage “revolutionary” and writes that the “idea had long been talked about, dreamed about, but never before put so publicly and aggressively into practice” (11). Dennis Kennedy asserts, “Until the creation of the Stratford Shakespearean Festival in Ontario the Elizabethan stage movement had been more notable for its failures than its

successes” (*Looking* 152). He favorably contrasts the modernism of the Stratford stage with what he perceives as the archaism of early modern reconstructions in Oregon and San Diego, the “Elizabethan tiring-house facades” of which have, for Kennedy, “‘Ye Olde Oake Shakespeare Bunne Shoppe’ inscribed within the architecture” (153).

From the beginning, however, Guthrie’s Stratford stage has had its detractors. Nathan Cohen was the most persistent of these during the Festival’s early decades. He contended that the “open stage had its tyrannies no less repressive to Shakespeare than the proscenium arch” (“Theatre” 235) and that “in exchange for the swiftness of scene changes . . . the price exacted by the open stage is considerable and inequitable” (“Stratford” 269). Cohen believed that Guthrie’s model necessitates “a ‘go, go, go’ treatment” (“Theatre” 235) marked by “movement, preferably on a large and lively scale, on all three sides simultaneously” which frequently distracts spectators from the business of a play (“Stratford” 268). Richard Paul Knowles writes of Stratford after Guthrie that such “movement—particularly the strong diagonal flow that is called for by the placement of the side doorways and downstage vomms—is powerful when used selectively to point climactic action but is also potentially repetitive and, in the case of intimate scenes, destructive” (“Legacy” 42). Open staging poses challenges not encountered in a proscenium theater. Pettigrew and Portman write that the director working in thrust “has to become a sculptor rather than a painter” (83) because of the three-dimensional perceptions of the side audience. Many theater artists accustomed to the picture-frame are not up to this challenge. Knowles observes that at Stratford many “directors, some of them very prominent ones, simply give up and direct shows to the theatre’s central aisle,

treating the stage as they would any other” (“Legacy” 43). Pettigrew and Portman acknowledge that directors at Stratford have often “failed to cope” with the complexities of the Festival Theatre (83). One can therefore reasonably ask whether the advantages of open staging outweigh these increased difficulties.

A primary justification offered for the thrust stage by Guthrie and his supporters was the greater intimacy possible in this format, a goal clearly achieved at the Stratford Festival. Clarke wrote following the 1955 season, “The front row of the audience is, at the nearest point, 4 ft. away, and never more than 6 ft” (Clarke 46). Nathan Cohen, however, dismissed Guthrie’s assumption that “intimacy of an actor-audience relationship is determined by geographic proximity” as “a fallacy” (“Stratford” 270). Cohen instead insisted, “You can be 600 feet away from a stage and be overwhelmed by a play’s direct impact. You can be 20 feet away and able to see the actor’s most minute expressions and not be affected by it at all” (“Stratford” 273). He did not, however, clearly explain how this should be the case. Most playgoers prefer to be closer to the stage, all other factors being equal. The higher ticket prices charged for such seats by commercial theaters proves this point with the inexorable logic of the marketplace. The problem then becomes how to stage a show in accordance with a theater’s sight lines so that increased proximity is not overshadowed by poor visibility. This task remains harder at Stratford today than in other thrust venues because of the Festival Theatre’s 220-degree configuration.

Nathan Cohen’s most serious indictment of the Festival stage was that it compromised reception of the text. “Speech is the heartbeat of Shakespeare’s grandeur,”

Cohen wrote. “We do not come to ‘see’ Shakespeare, but to ‘hear’ him. And ‘hear’ him is precisely what is such a problem in the Festival Theatre, since only one-third of the audience can listen to what an actor is saying and see the gestures accompanying his speech at the same time and in the same way” (“Stratford” 269). Partly, the cause of this defect is once again the extreme audience arc of the Stratford stage. Problems with audibility are necessarily more frequent if actors must occasionally turn their backs almost completely upstage to address spectators sitting behind the onstage balcony. But this accusation of aural deficiency is also related to the visual hegemony inherent in Guthrie’s reliance on spectacle and clever staging. Much of Guthrie’s work stressed, as Brooks Atkinson wrote, “theatrical originality” at “the expense of poetry” (Rev. of *Merchant of Venice* 13). Harold Clurman claimed in his 1956 *Nation* review of *Tamburlaine* that, for Guthrie, “the text as meaning (and as poetry with a life of its own) hardly exists” (99). Inattention to language was a flaw in Guthrie’s approach, but some critics have extrapolated this to mean that the open stage is inherently hostile to textual transmission. Kenneth Tynan concluded from Guthrie’s example, “Only those forms of theatre in which words are secondary—such as musicals, dance drama, and commedia dell’arte—have much to gain from the three-sided stage” (qtd. in Pettigrew 84), and Claudia Cassidy wrote of Guthrie’s “outthrust stage” in Minneapolis that it was “more suited to the theater of movement than to the theater of the mind” (rpt. in Guthrie, *New Theatre* 121). This linguistic shortfall relates to Guthrie’s personal eccentricity as a director. It is not, however, representative of the open stage in general. Because of the public’s closeness to the playing area and the style of direct address which this format

encourages, audiences in thrust venues like Chicago Shakespeare and the Staunton Blackfriars often hear and understand much better than they would in a proscenium theater. The ability of these thrust spaces to avoid amplification testifies to this greater audibility. Most picture-frame houses of similar size find it necessary to mike their actors.

Guthrie's Stratford Productions

Tyrone Guthrie's Shakespeare productions at the Stratford Festival showcased both the strengths and the weaknesses of his directorial approach. The Festival's inaugural *Richard III* in 1953 "was in a processional style to which the stage seemed ideally suited" (Cushman 20). Cushman notes that Alec Guinness "delivered the opening soliloquy sitting cheerfully astride the balcony, thus allowing the architecture of the Festival stage to declare its crucial importance from the very first moment of the very first show" (20). Guthrie creatively exploited the permanent set throughout the evening. "The balcony was put to good use," Pettigrew and Portman write. "An attempt to storm it during the battle was beaten back and one soldier was thrown from it, and later in the performance Richmond was swung up and hoisted over his soldiers' heads on to the balcony, which then became a kind of victory platform for the new king" (5). It was, Cushman notes, "the first of many great evenings for the flourishing of banners" at Stratford (20), and Guthrie's penchant for pageantry was matched by his desire to shock the audience. Davies writes that the director "did not shrink from the presentation of violence and physical indignity" and suggests that Guthrie sought a deliberate parallel between the behavior of Richard's henchmen and the activities in a "Nazi torture

chamber” or “the interrogation offices of the Third Reich” (“Director” 92). “Three of Richard’s victims,” Cushman relates, “condemned to execution on trumped-up charges, were dragged on stage having clearly been tortured” (20). Davies recalls that the “audience cringed” when for “a slight show of defiance Vaughan was flung to the ground and kicked in the groin” and that “the final disappearance of Vaughan and Grey into an oubliette” (“Director” 90) allowed Guthrie to utilize the trapdoor, another of the theater’s Elizabethan accessories.

The premiere was a success. Even Nathan Cohen wrote in 1966, “The first night at Stratford was the most memorable single experience I ever had in the theatre.” He recalled of the opening soliloquy, “That was when the way the stage worked first began to mean something to me, when Guinness scuttled down one of the staircases, made his way into the funeral retinue, and the play was suddenly rolling.” While “the battle scenes, with men in visors and armor with lances and spears tumbling over the balcony, spilling over the stage from every direction” were impressive, Cohen also wished that he “could hear more of what the actors were saying. Magnificent as it all was, and it was, it seemed odd that so much of the language was being lost” (“Great First Night” 25). Brooks Atkinson praised the production as “exciting” and “imposing” but similarly feared that the play was in danger of being overwhelmed by Guthrie’s spectacle. “Shakespeare’s bloody drama of evil and consequences,” he wrote, “comes off at second best amid such overpowering externals” (Rev. of *Richard III* 22).

All’s Well That Ends Well followed *Richard III* and was the “opposite in every possible way from that smashing Plantagenet masque of blood” (Whittaker xiii). It was,

according to *Time* magazine on 27 July, the “real hit” of the first Festival season (Rev. of *Richard III* and *All’s Well That Ends Well* 32). Joseph Price, in his stage history of the play, writes that Guthrie’s production was the “first significant performance of *All’s Well* in America” (65). The director chose the play partly because of his sympathy for Shakespeare’s comic heroine, a compassion which suggests a feminist viewpoint. Guthrie wrote in 1964 that “because she intelligently and energetically pursues the man of her choice and finally captures him” Helena was traditionally thought “to be a forward and artful article. This view will always prevail where it is believed that the female’s duty is to be no more than a submissive adjunct to the physically stronger and more intelligent male” (“10 Favorites from Shakespeare” 18). Price sees a connection between Guthrie’s treatment of the play and William Poel’s in 1920. “Poel’s interest in *All’s Well*,” Price writes, “went beyond that of the antiquarian. He saw in the play a social theme with modern significance” (45).

This contemporary relevance in Poel’s era had hinged on the changing role of women in society following World War I. Guthrie, directing the play in the aftermath of a second global conflict during which women had been even further integrated into the commercial workforce, was similarly responsive to issues of gender equity. Price sees Guthrie’s use of twentieth-century costumes in this production as an effort to connect Helena’s plight with that of postwar women. “The fantastic turns of the plot, of Helena’s traps,” Price suggests, “became much more acceptable in modern dress to a contemporary audience which had been saturated with aggressive heroines, often ‘career women’ who had won reluctant males in innumerable romantic comedy films during the 1930s and

1940s” (52). Helena’s actions, for Price, presumably echo those of Katharine Hepburn in *Bringing up Baby*. Poel used contemporary costuming to analogous ends in 1920 (Speaight, *William Poel* 233), and both Poel and Guthrie placed the King of France in a wheelchair. While Neil Carson writes that this was “an idea Guthrie seems to have borrowed from William Poe[l]” (54), he offers no evidence for this conjecture. Guthrie was a frequent playgoer in 1920 but did not likely attend Poel’s under-publicized, semi-professional production. The only direct connection between Poel’s *All’s Well* and Guthrie’s treatment of this comedy is that Edith Evans cross-dressed to portray Captain Dumain for Poel in 1920 (Speaight, *William Poel* 233) and played the Countess of Rousillon for Guthrie four decades later in his 1959 production at Stratford-on-Avon (Byrne, “Shakespeare Season” 559).

As in the case of *Richard III*, Guthrie cleverly utilized his neo-Elizabethan stage for *All’s Well*. Carson writes of the gulling of Parolles in Act Four, scene one that “Guthrie’s handling of the scene on the open Stratford stage demonstrates the wide range of ‘scenic’ effects which can be achieved by the actor alone.” With no scenery or light cues, the performers were able to “establish the darkness, the dangerous ‘no man’s land,’ and the atmosphere of impending calamity with the simple conventions of a child’s game” by “pretending to avoid barbed wire as they made their way in feigned stealth” through the stage’s many pillars (Carson 55). Carson notes “the way in which the ‘scenery’ on a permanent, non-localized stage can be said to materialize and then melt away in the imagination of the spectators” (56). For Robert Shaughnessy, this theatrical freedom was tied to Guthrie’s quest for social and sexual liberation. The 1953 *All’s Well*,

Shaughnessy writes, was “conceived as an uncertain movement from repression to liberalization and enlightenment” (138). He sees Guthrie’s rediscovery of the comedy in its first American production as tied to the director’s mission to free Shakespeare from the vestiges of a nineteenth-century pictorial tradition:

In one way, the simultaneous rediscovery of *All’s Well* and non-illusionist staging at Stratford offers itself to be read as a demonstration of a quasi-Foucauldian scheme of repression and liberation: Guthrie’s production liberated the play which had been closeted and repressed by Victorian prudery, in a dynamic movement from shame and concealment to frankness, openness and visibility. (137)

Shaughnessy’s thesis seems at first over-theorized, but he supports it with substantive examples from Guthrie’s staging. Helena and the invalid King represent “the principal thematic antitheses of the production: male and female, youth and age, authority and integrity, and, above all, the paralysis of illusionism and the mobility of the open stage” (145). Their celebratory dance after the monarch is healed therefore manifests “a rare vision of optimism and hope, and a testament to performance’s capacity to escape the disciplinary strictures of text, production and stage.” Guthrie’s 1953 *All’s Well* presages for Shaughnessy “a new, and as yet unrealized, era of theatrical health, happiness and liberty” (146).

If *All’s Well That Ends Well* represented the zenith of Guthrie’s directing career at Stratford, then 1954’s *The Taming of the Shrew* was its nadir. William Hutt, who played Hortensio, believed that “Tony thought less of the play than he actually should have” and that the director “sometimes tended to be lightly frivolous if he thought a play was not as good as it should be” (qtd. in Rossi, *Astonish*182). Guthrie therefore set out to “reverse

the traditional interpretation” (Hutt qtd. in Rossi, *Astonish* 184). Rather than a bold and brash suitor, Petruchio was portrayed “as a shy, bespectacled young man with severe doubts about his prowess at shrew-taming” (Cushman 24), and Katharina was equally “timid” (Whittaker xvi). Cushman notes that this “interpretation might charitably be described as unorthodox” (24). For Davies, it was an example of “playing against the lines,” a device which “can be used to excess, and it may be said that Dr. Guthrie [wa]s extremely fond of it” (“Taming” 39).

Besides being burdened with Guthrie’s deliberate contrariness, the production suffered from what most observers agreed was an excess of comic gags. This *Shrew* was set in California around 1900, and Norman Marshall writes that “Petruchio was a yahoo cowboy with a ten-gallon hat and a six-shooter, but bespectacled like Harold Lloyd” (*Producer* 182). Numerous observers made similar connections to the silent screen. Whittaker noted that “a number of the actors revealed a flair for the kind of slapstick which reminded reviewers that Mack Sennett, once master of slapstick for all America, was a Canadian born” (xvi). Brooks Atkinson also compared the style to that of “a Mack Sennett cartoon” but unlike Whittaker he was not amused. Atkinson wrote, “Never have so many actors worked so hard for so long to produce such a sophomoric prank.” He asserted, “Since [Guthrie] has tossed most of the dialogue away in the frenzy of a hokum performance, logic suggests that he should also rid himself of the play and get a new author.” In frustration Atkinson asked, “Why dedicate a theatre to Shakespeare if you have to discard him in order to entertain the groundlings?” (Rev. of *Taming of the Shrew* 22). Guthrie’s interpretation for *The Taming of the Shrew* was wrong-headed, his Wild-

West setting puzzling, and his excess of comic shtick ill-advised. All of these elements nevertheless demonstrate that Guthrie did not feel bound by theatrical tradition and had no holy reverence for Shakespeare's authorial intent. No one could accuse this production of being "museum theater."

Guthrie's next Shakespeare at the Stratford Festival was 1955's *The Merchant of Venice*. Guthrie cast Frederick Valk, a Jewish refugee who had fled the Nazi terror, as Shylock. The director chose, however, not to highlight the play's anti-Semitic aspects. Instead, Guthrie pursued what Davies called "the adult's fairy-tale conception of the play" which made it "like a story from *Bandello* or *Boccaccio* richly brought to life" ("Merchant" 56). There were broad characterizations and comic pageantry:

The scimitar-flourishing Moor is contrasted with a Prince of Aragon who seemed to be the most obscure and most hemophilic of all the Hapsburgs. The caskets were carried by girls dressed in costumes of golden, silver and leaden hues—Miss Lead being so sadly unequal to her heavy task that she often had to be helped by Portia's servant, Balthazar. (Davies, "Merchant" 58)

While it was more successful than 1954's *Taming of the Shrew*, not everyone was pleased with this *Merchant*. "Mr. Guthrie treats the play as a court masque," Nathan Cohen complained. "There are no poetic values, simply theatrical effects. The show is a painless way to kill an evening, but it contains no hint, aside from the intrinsic racism, of the play's virtues and agitations" ("Tyrone Guthrie" 425). For scholars of popular culture, the production is perhaps most memorable for the presence in the cast of the young William Shatner who, Davies wrote, "played Gratiano as a bore, with a ready and rattling laugh." He was, however, "a young bore, to whom all may be forgiven for his gaiety." "What

such a man would be at forty,” Davies opined, “we are not obliged to enquire” (“Merchant” 66). Future generations of American television viewers would witness this very phenomenon.

1955 was Guthrie’s last year in charge of the Stratford Festival. In 1957, the final season in a tent, he returned as a guest director. His production of *Twelfth Night* indulged in the same kind of heavy-handed comic business which had marred 1954’s *Taming of the Shrew*. “Mr. Guthrie does go on endlessly,” Brooks Atkinson complained. “Give Tyrone Guthrie a trap door and he is as happy as two larks.” The critic warned his readers, “Don’t expect much from the romantic scenes.” The director had “lost his heart to the . . . clowns,” which resulted in a *Twelfth Night* that was “funny but also formless, over-extended and tone-deaf” (Atkinson, Rev. of *Twelfth Night* 16). This was Guthrie’s final staging of Shakespeare at Stratford. He would return in later years to direct Operettas in the Festival’s Avon Theatre (Forsyth 352) but never again worked on the open stage which had revolutionized Shakespearean production.

Conclusion

Until his death in 1971, Guthrie continued his career as a freelance director in Britain, America, and elsewhere. He also searched constantly for opportunities to build new theaters on the open-stage model in what Nathan Cohen calls an “obsessive quest for another Stratford ‘miracle’” (“Stratford” 276). In 1963, he opened the Tyrone Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis. While the Minnesota playhouse bears the director’s name, it does not represent his architectural vision as fully as did the performance space at Stratford. Shakespeare was not to be the principal focus in Minneapolis. “The Theatre in the Twin

cities must attempt to cope with a more varied repertoire,” Guthrie wrote, adding that it therefore “must aim to be more flexible.” A permanent set like the one in Stratford was deemed unsuitable for this broader catalogue of drama. Guthrie and Moiseiwitsch instead developed a design “of two immense sliding doors or screens, which, when closed, formed a sort of corrugated wall. They were on wheels and could slide apart.” Guthrie, wary of imitating a proscenium, insisted that these doors would not “disclose a picture” but would rather “open merely to permit wagons, previously set with furniture and properties as required, to be pushed out onto the stage” (*New Theatre* 74). This compromise with the pictorial tradition increased in 1980, when Artistic Director Liviu Ciulei redesigned the performance area, making its “size, shape, and height” adjustable by means of “accordion walls” and “interchangeable floor panels.” The goal of this remodeling was to give “stage designers greater freedom” (“Guthrie Theater”). There had been no need for production-specific “stage designers” at Stratford, where the permanent set built by Guthrie and Moiseiwitsch provided an unchanging functional background for all Festival endeavors.

Guthrie was hindered in his work at Minneapolis by disagreements with the project’s architect, Ralph Rapson, who opposed the director’s plan for close proximity between actors and audience. Rapson visited the Stratford Festival but came away unimpressed. Guthrie reports that the architect exclaimed, “All those **people** all **around** me” in a fit of claustrophobic panic (qtd. in Guthrie, *New Theatre* 73). Guthrie had hoped to steeply rake the Minnesota auditorium in approximation of the “stacked gallery configuration” which Frank Hildy considers an essential component of early modern

playhouses (Hildy, “Reconstructing” 13). The disagreement with Rapson led instead to an odd compromise in the auditorium’s design. *The New York Times* reported on 11 September 1962, “While seats to the left of the stage will be arranged with the conventional orchestra and balcony separation, those to the far right will rise in steep, continuous inclines from the foot of the stage to the top of the theatre” (“Guthrie Inspects” 28). Guthrie was thus prevented from completely achieving the effect of intimacy he had desired in Minneapolis.

Whether because of deficiencies in design, poor quality of performance, or simple bad luck, the inauguration of the Guthrie Theater with *Hamlet* in 1963 was not the kind of success the Stratford premiere had been a decade earlier. Guthrie blamed the opening night house, which was “a ‘fashionable’ audience, drawn by the occasion, not by any desire to see a great tragedy.” Guthrie recalls ruefully, “After six minutes, some of the sillier Society Ladies began fidgeting with their scarves and admiring their own rings and necklaces; after ten, the coughing began; after twenty, it was clear that the excitement had evaporated and the battle to win the attention which the play demands had been lost.” This same type of public had attended the first night of the Stratford Festival but the play in that case had been *Richard III*, which Guthrie staged as a highly accessible melodramatic pageant. Guthrie writes that as the evening began in Minneapolis, “I realized with painful clarity just what a risk we had taken by opening with *Hamlet*” (*New Theatre* 109).

Critics, however, blamed not the audience but the production. Claudia Cassidy wrote in the Chicago *Sunday Tribune* on 19 May 1963 that Guthrie’s *Hamlet* was

“amateurishly acted and clumsily directed, with little indication of the freedom within disciplined form that is the basic classic style” (rpt. in Guthrie, *New Theatre* 120). In a common criticism of Guthrie’s work, she noted “incessant, often meaningless movement, distracting stage business, and highly personal interpretations by the director” which “made *Hamlet* interminable” (122). She concluded that “the Minneapolis *Hamlet* obscures and destroys a great play. It is drab and misleading” (123). Most other critics were more positive, although all expressed some qualms. The most favorable national review came from Kevin Kelly of the *Boston Globe*, who wrote on 9 May, “Under the scheme of Guthrie’s direction this *Hamlet* is magnificent.” Kelly found the production to be “a vital encounter” rather than the “wordy drama” he had anticipated (rpt. in Rossi, *Minneapolis* 85). Yet even Kelly expressed “a slight reservation” regarding George Grizzard’s performance in the title role. Grizzard, Kelly felt, had “a path still to cut” before he would be ready to play Hamlet (86). Herbert Whittaker in the *Toronto Globe and Mail* on 9 May was more equivocal. He hailed Guthrie’s “rare and unusual creativity as a stage director” (rpt. in Rossi, *Minneapolis* 79) and generally approved of the production’s “parade of fine theatrical tricks” (80). But Whittaker also noted that “good speech” was “not yet a matter of full accomplishment by the Minneapolis company” and claimed that Guthrie’s use of a full text was “hard on them—and often on their audience” (80).

This generally lukewarm response to the inaugural *Hamlet* was typical of Guthrie’s experience in Minneapolis. He never quite captured the magic he had found in Ontario. “The Stratford Festival triumph,” Forsyth acknowledges, “was undoubtedly the

peak of his life's achievement" (259). Michael Langham, who served as Artistic Director at both theaters, observed, "[Guthrie] made far less impact in Minneapolis than he had in Stratford. I was quite shocked to find how mildly he was revered locally. It wasn't as if a great man had come to Minneapolis and made something fantastic happen, which is what I'd felt at Stratford" (qtd. in Rossi, *Astonish* 284). Guthrie's one major success in Minnesota was an adaptation of the *Orestia* titled *The House of Atreus*. When this production premiered at the Guthrie Theater in 1967, Forsyth writes, it "was a phenomenon. It opened to an amazed, disturbed and - in the classical sense - an ecstatic audience" (293). Predictably, however, *The House of Atreus* failed to survive transplant to a proscenium theater on Broadway. According to Forsyth, Guthrie "had grave doubts about" this relocation but agreed to it against his better judgment because, late in life and suffering from heart trouble, "he was tired." *Atreus* on Broadway turned out to be "what Tony had feared, a great mistake" because the "production did not suit the theatre" (Forsyth 301).

The final years of Guthrie's life were dominated by his ill-conceived plan to locally manufacture traditional Irish jams near his estate, Annagh-ma-Kerrig, in an attempt to revive the local economy. This project devoured his time and finances. Guthrie's writings and theatrical endeavors from this period frequently show signs of being hastily produced in order to secure what Forsyth calls "money for jam" (284). Guthrie died on 15 May 1971. In announcing his death the estate's steward, Seamus McGorman, proclaimed, "A great tree has fallen out the sky" (qtd. in Rossi, *Astonish* 150). When Guthrie's theatrical associates assembled in June for a memorial service at

St. Paul's, Covent Garden, they noticed while entering the church that, indeed, "a tree that had stood for many years by its door had fallen down" (Forsyth 343).

Tyrone Guthrie's legacy regarding the recovery of early modern theatrical practices is significant but complex. While Nugent Monck's Maddermarket Theatre accommodated a few token spectators right and left of its platform, Guthrie was the first to build a performance space that embraced the Elizabethan paradigm of an audience significantly distributed on three sides of the stage. Guthrie's desire to emulate the circular sites of prehistoric rituals, however, led him to design his theater at Stratford, Ontario with seating that wrapped behind the stage, surpassing the normal 180-degree arc of three-quarter round. This led to problems of sight lines and audibility which exceed those of more typical open-stage arrangements. Observers who have experienced thrust staging primarily through the Stratford Festival have therefore frequently been led to reject this configuration as inherently unfriendly to the delivery of text in performance.

Guthrie's penchant for exotic pageantry similarly convinced contemporary critics like Nathan Cohen that luxurious spectacle was an unalterable attribute of the open stage. Some later scholars, most notably Margaret Groome and Richard Paul Knowles, have likewise seen the thrust-stage movement as an adjunct of the visually-dominated commercial paradigm rather than as an alternative to this theatrical status quo. While props and costumes take on some added significance whenever there is no production-specific set, the banners and elegant gowns which overwhelmed many of Guthrie's productions were primarily a manifestation of this director's personal aesthetic. Such splendor is not a necessary component of Elizabethan staging.

Because he was a British director who sought to stage the works of an English playwright “within the particular conditions of Canadian postcoloniality in the postwar years” (Shaughnessy 123), Guthrie has been accused of cultural imperialism. As Shaughnessy writes, “Guthrie’s attempt to transplant a supposedly universal conception of Shakespeare into the Canadian context has been read as a neo-colonial maneuver willingly abetted by the forces of anglophile nostalgia” (124). While it is impossible to know what latent urges might have motivated Guthrie’s actions, he did not consciously pursue an agenda of cultural hegemony. Colonialism and imperialism, Shaughnessy observes, “were not the terms in which Guthrie and his Canadian collaborators regarded the Stratford Festival” (124). Nevertheless, this notion has combined with the director’s perceived bourgeois dependence on lavish production values to lead many critics to ascribe an ideologically regressive agenda to Guthrie’s work.

In much the same way, William Poel has been interpreted as reactionary because of his alleged fetish for historical reconstruction. In both cases theater practitioners who considered themselves radical reformers have been received as retrograde conservatives because of their personal eccentricities. This may be the fate of all who seek a new theatrical form through the imperfect process of experimentation. Later companies like Chicago Shakespeare and the American Shakespeare Center at the Blackfriars Playhouse have built on these earlier efforts. They have, to a large extent, achieved the promise of the open stage without falling prey to Guthrie’s vices.

CHAPTER V

THE NEW GLOBE

Introduction

In the early twenty-first century, discussions of Elizabethan staging inevitably center on “Shakespeare’s Globe,” the outdoor playhouse on the south bank of the Thames which officially opened in 1997. This reconstructed Globe was the brainchild of the late American actor Sam Wanamaker. Marilyn Stasio chronicles his inspiration:

Wanamaker came by this obsession the way visionaries do: he was struck dumb by the perfect beauty of the idea. On his first visit to London in 1949, he went in search of the remains of the Globe, expecting some fitting monument to the historic theatre. Instead, he found a burned-out brewery with a crummy plaque that read: “This is on or around where Shakespeare had his Globe.” Astounded, he made up his mind then and there to erect a proper monument—a full-scale, working replica of the theatre itself. And that is exactly what he did with the rest of his life. (54)

This is a great creation myth, but like most legends it involves a good deal of oversimplification. “Wanamaker,” Frank Hildy declares, “did not set out to rebuild the Globe” (“Reconstructing” 29). His initial plan instead involved what Barry Day calls “a modern building which simply reflected the *form* of Shakespeare’s Globe,” a design composed of “a brick drum with galleries, a roof and stage lighting” (32) in a style similar to that of “the present Swan Theatre at Stratford” (126). This structure was to be part of Wanamaker’s “grandiose plans for developing huge stretches of Bankside” (Day 79), in which the area was to be converted into “a London equivalent of Paris’s Left

Bank” (31). Wanamaker encountered great resistance to this idea and turned for support to the international academic community. With their involvement the reconstructed amphitheater at the center of the project took on ever greater importance. Toward the end of his life Wanamaker “reduced his vision for the south bank from the incredible to the merely improbable” and decided to build only the Globe complex, abandoning the rest of his development scheme (Day 126).

The scholars who determined how the new Globe would be built stressed the notion of “authenticity.” They saw a historically accurate performance space as a tool for better understanding early modern drama. Andrew Gurr, a leading academic advisor, writes that “the first principle of the Bankside Shakespeare project is that it is worth trying to reconstruct Shakespeare’s Globe as closely as possible to its original form because of all the things that an accurate reconstruction might be able to tell us about the plays” (“Rebuilding” 11). Gurr suggests that Renaissance play-texts “might be seen as a form of software, designed to fit a particular machine or piece of hardware, and we need to reconstruct the hardware the plays were designed for so that we can see more clearly how these supremely rich and intricate programs were designed to work” (11-12).

Academics associated with the project also hoped that the new Globe would enable investigation of Shakespearean staging practices. Their discourse frequently adopts a scientific vocabulary. For Alan Dessen, the Globe would be “a laboratory for investigating how the original scripts would or could have been staged” (195). Gurr describes the new Globe as “a test-tube, the basis for experiments aimed at getting a

better idea of how Shakespeare expected his plays to be staged” (“Staging” 159) and elsewhere as “a laboratory” in which “the tangible environment can be recreated and experiments conducted” (*Rebuilding* 25).

The new Globe, however, has provoked much controversy. Opponents of the project do not accept the historicist rationale of Gurr and Dessen. For many of them, the stated objective of studying the past actually masks the project’s true agenda, which is to use Shakespeare’s cultural authority as an ideological weapon. The appeal to the Globe as a universal symbol of essential artistic excellence participates in a reactionary quest to stifle societal change, according to Terence Hawkes:

The potential of “origin” as an agent of affirmation, confirmation and limitation makes it a powerful ideological tool. If we can persuade ourselves that in some way origins generate authenticity, determine, establish and reinforce essentials, then we can forget about change and about the history and politics which produce it. A covert, idolatrous agenda backs temptingly into view. The “original” Globe Theatre! That firmest of rocks on which the true unchanging English culture is founded! To bolt the shifting uncertain present firmly to that monument must be a project worth encouraging. Let Europe loom, the pound wilt, Shakespeare’s wooden O offers a peculiarly satisfying bulwark against change. (142)

While Hawkes sees the Globe as a monument to a supposed “true unchanging English culture,” anti-American sentiment directed at the Chicago-born Wanamaker compounds suspicion of the Bankside endeavor. “Naturally it would be an American who longs for this,” writes Marjorie Garber. She compares Wanamaker’s quest to “the Rockefellers rebuilding colonial Williamsburg or Disney reconstituting the psychic realms of fantasyland, frontierland, and tomorrowland in the conservative suburbs of Los Angeles” (Garber 246). Hawkes suggests that “the centrality of Shakespeare to American culture”

connects the reconstructed playhouse to the military and economic goals of Yankee imperialism. The new Globe, he writes, “shares certain features of other rather more threatening transatlantic missions periodically set up in our midst” and therefore may represent “the continuation of American foreign policy by other means” (153). John Drakakis likewise considers the new amphitheater “as subtle an example of the operation of a cultural imperialism as one could wish to see” (39).

Some critics who do not overtly connect the new Globe to an agenda of “cultural imperialism” nevertheless denounce historical authenticity as a means of empirical investigation. Marion O’Connor mocks what she terms the “rhetorical stable of quasi-scientific terminology around ‘Shakespeare’s Globe’ on Southwark” and rejects “even the notional possibility of testing anything in theatrical reconstructions, for all that the rhetoric around them is riddled with talk of tests.” The concepts of “theatrical reconstruction as laboratory and of dramatic revival therein as experiment” have no value for O’Connor because “if experiments are to determine the effect of variable factors, they must establish constant factors” (“Useful” 32). Such “constant factors” are impossible for several reasons. Too little is known about the original Globe, and the project’s designers are inevitably affected by the prejudices of their age and therefore unable to impartially recreate the past. Even if these difficulties could be overcome and an accurate Globe rebuilt, the public frequenting such a theater must be necessarily “inauthentic.”

Proponents of reconstruction have long recognized that the mindset of a modern audience is the Achilles’ heel of their endeavor. While writing in 1979 in support of a proposed Detroit Globe, John Russell Brown acknowledged that “a true Elizabethan

audience is, needless to say, unobtainable.” He suggested that this deficiency could be offset by recreating the broad-based spectator demographic which existed in Shakespeare’s day. “We could take steps,” he wrote, “to give prominence to what might be called [the public’s] economy-class element. The young and the poor—and also the addicted and the fearless—should be able to behave as they did in the Globe Theatre” (Brown 20). Brown does not consider the extent to which the “addicted and the fearless” of Detroit in the 1970s would comport themselves differently than their early modern counterparts. Andrew Gurr proposed to mitigate an audience’s modern tendencies by indoctrinating all visitors to the Bankside Globe with an extensive “exhibition displaying the life and times of sixteenth-century playgoers” (*Rebuilding* 25), through which spectators would have to pass as a “proper prelude to the experience” (161) before gaining “access to the great reconstruction itself” (160). Coaching an audience in this manner, however, would likely skew the results of any performance experiment. Ultimately, the new Globe’s planners realize the limits of authenticity. “Everyone connected with the project,” writes William Worthen (who is skeptical of the endeavor), “is well aware the Globe can only be a complex *contemporary* undertaking, one which evinces an understanding of the working of history that is fully our own” (“Reconstructing” 34). Yet Gurr and his colleagues believe that, while inevitably limited, the new Globe is still a valuable tool for understanding Shakespeare’s plays and their original stagings.

Both sides in this debate see themselves as advocating historical particularity in favor of universal essentialism. Opponents of the new Globe see the playhouse as seeking

to deny cultural specificity through its function as a “timeless” monument. Drakakis believes that Wanamaker’s project participates in the “deification” of Shakespeare as “universal, transcendent, and eternal” (25), and Hawkes similarly describes the Globe’s attempt to “determine, establish and reinforce essentials” (142). For Raphael Samuel, the new Globe is a “reactionary folly” (233) which offers a false continuity with the early modern age (214, 247). While she does not completely reject the Bankside project, Ros King notes that “the very existence of the Globe looks like an attempt to deny one of the basic tenets of current literary theory: that there is irreducible difference between different societies and historical periods” (122).

Many of the Globe’s supporters, however, justify their position in terms of this very emphasis on the material particularity of specific cultural moments. Gabriel Egan writes, “If it is found that playhouse design is an important determinant of the drama then the reconstructed Globe may be defended as a historicist tool which undermines the claim that Shakespeare’s work transcends historical and cultural difference” (15). Scholars in favor of the project sometimes rebut criticism from theater practitioners by appealing to this notion of temporal specificity. In reference to the controversy surrounding the placement of stage pillars, which many actors and directors feel unduly obstruct sight-lines, Paul Nelsen writes, “What credence can we give to instinctive responses by modern actors to staging issues? The precepts of new historicism certainly stand ready to discredit any such inference” (334). Chastising performers for refusing to follow Elizabethan staging practices at the Globe, Alan Dessen claimed in 1998 that “most Actors are essentialists” (195) and that this tendency “bedevil[s] stage historians, because

actors and directors regularly assume that various performance choices in Shakespeare's time would be identical or, at the least, comparable to 1990s choices" (195-96).

The tendency of both positions in this dispute to reject essentialism suggests some commonality between these two opposing camps. The scholars who champion the Globe and those who deride it share the assumption that the primary function of this playhouse is to look backward in an effort to recover the past. Neither side was therefore prepared for what has happened since 1997. The Globe today is neither an empirical laboratory of historical experiment nor a conservative monument to "Merrie Olde England." Instead it is, as Bryan Appleyard writes in 2006, "the beating heart of theatrical London" (8). In February 2003, Liz Hoggard noted in the *Observer*:

Globe productions . . . are winning impressive reviews. Last November, [then Artistic Director Mark] Rylance was presented with an Evening Standard Special Award for the Globe. And this month, the theatre's all-male *Twelfth Night*, directed by Tim Carroll last summer, is up for two Olivier awards—Best Revival and Best Actor, for Rylance's gender-crossing performance as Olivia. (Hoggard 5)

This hard-won critical acclaim combines with the popular and economic success the playhouse has enjoyed since it opened. It is "the only classical theatre in Britain that is making money rather than losing it" (King 123). The *Daily Telegraph* reported in early 2006 that the Globe "had made a pre-tax profit of about £ 1.5 million every year since it opened a decade ago" and had "filled 85 percent of its 1,500 places every year" ("Shakespeare's Globe Makes £ 1.5 Million" 9). Andrew Gurr admitted in an interview with the *Independent* in May 2005 that the amphitheater "has been a much more

substantial achievement than we thought it was going to be.” For Gurr, the new Globe’s surprising theatrical viability is “probably the biggest discovery in Shakespeare in the past 10 years; a real revelation” (qtd. in McCormack 3).

The reconstructed playhouse may help reverse a hundred-year trend in which performances of Shakespeare have, for Simon Shepherd and Peter Womack, gone from being celebrations of “carnavalesque popular culture” to bastions of “middle class respectability” (Shepherd 116). During the twentieth century, according to Shepherd and Womack in 1996, well-meaning practitioners championed new approaches to Shakespeare as part of “a struggle for serious, independent and progressive drama” (Shepherd 118). While this movement was “anti-commercial” it also tended to be “anti-populist.” The authors cite Harley Granville Barker’s supercilious essay “From *Henry V* to *Hamlet*” to support their case and, while I believe they underestimate the genuinely populist (if imperfect) efforts of practitioners like Nugent Monck and Tyrone Guthrie, Shepherd and Womack are largely correct in asserting that during the modern and postmodern eras Shakespeare on stage became progressively more elitist. This is “the contradiction which stalks the subsidized classical theater” ensuring “that Shakespeare always should, and never can, be given back to the groundlings” (118). The new Globe may offer a solution to this stalemate. By encouraging a casual atmosphere and vociferous audience reaction, the playhouse appeals to a demographic more likely to frequent a sporting event than a play. The absence of lighting effects and elaborate sets means that no production can proceed without the consent and participation of the public. Actors can see spectators as well as these patrons can see the stage, and the proximity and

visibility of the audience connects them to performers in a way not possible in traditional venues. By granting playgoers more power and responsibility in performance, the Bankside amphitheater may serve as a model for attracting people to new theaters built along similar lines. If so it will fulfill the prophecy of its founder, Sam Wanamaker, who predicted that “the Globe will make the *theatre* (not only Shakespeare) once again popular, public and accessible: the working-class man will feel less constrained and inhibited there than in the plush, enclosed space of a bourgeois theatre” (qtd. in Holderness, “Interview” 21). This supposed monument to the past may actually be the playhouse of tomorrow.

In this chapter, I will examine the factors that have contributed to the Globe’s success as well as those shortcomings which might profitably be avoided in future reconstructions. I will first, however, examine the complexities surrounding historical “authenticity” and review some earlier attempts to recreate the Globe. I will also study the planning of the Wanamaker project and suggest how subsequent efforts might alter this process to better create viable modern theaters on an Elizabethan model.

The Quest for Authenticity

Upon reviewing the historical record for the first time, one is struck by how little evidence exists of the original Globe’s size and appearance. Jean Wilson notes that even the archaeologists from the British Museum who in 1989 excavated the historical Globe site (a few hundred feet from the reconstructed amphitheater) assumed that more was known about this early modern structure than is actually the case:

The archeological community did not realize that not only had none of the great Renaissance playhouses survived the Commonwealth, but that there was only one contemporary picture of a playhouse interior. The unconscious assumption that the familiar image of the Elizabethan playhouse (usually the Globe) was based on a great deal of available evidence was the more natural for the nearby site of the projected reconstruction of the Globe. (Wilson 166)

These scientists did not believe that Wanamaker and company would try to recreate Shakespeare's playhouse unless there was a fair degree of certainty about its original design. In reality the new Globe was "based, according to preferred definition, on rigorous scholarly inquiry into a variety of sources leading to informed deduction, or guesswork" (Wilson 166-67). Andrew Gurr acknowledges that the project "evolved through nothing much more specific than the 'best guess' technique" ("Shakespeare's Globe" 35). This kind of "guesswork," however, was far from haphazard and involved the rigorous efforts of dozens, if not hundreds, of scholars over many decades. The challenge was the quantity and quality of data surviving from the early modern era. Before the discovery of archaeological remains, experts largely based their understanding of the Globe on four contradictory illustrations of its exterior; one drawing of the interior of a different but roughly contemporary amphitheater; and the building contract for a third playhouse which makes frequent allusions to the Globe.

In 1790 Edmund Malone became the first major figure to postulate the appearance of the original Globe, which he identified as a hexagonal structure. Malone had access to Philip Henslowe's papers documenting the impresario's dealings at the Rose and Fortune theaters, but Andrew Gurr suggests that this archive does not attest to a six-sided shape and that Malone's reasons for embracing this model are unclear ("Shakespeare's Globe"

27). One possible explanation may be that Malone was influenced by Hester Thrale, a friend of Samuel Johnson's. Thrale claimed to live on land which contained the ruins of the Globe and that these remains were exposed during an expansion of her husband's brewery. Malone wrote, in a supplementary volume to the second edition of Shakespeare's plays edited by Johnson, that "the *Globe*, though hexagonal at the outside, was probably a rotunda within" (qtd. in Clout 43). This mirrors Thrale's assertion from her manuscript autobiography that the playhouse "tho' hexagonal in form *without*, was round *within*" (qtd. in Clout 36). Malone is connected to Thrale through their common association with Johnson, and Martin Clout believes that Malone's "reiteration of the Globe's hexagonal form" was "most probably derived from Dr. Johnson" with "Thrale's excavation as the source of that information" (44). Clout also suggests that there is "some evidence of an early archaeological intention" behind the brewery dig (39).

Scholars have long rejected Mrs. Thrale's theory. According to C. Walter Hodges in 1953, she saw "not the ruin of the Globe, but of some old tenements a little way off to the south of it, which were demolished in 1767" (*Globe Restored* 20). Her cause is not helped by the fact that Thrale's current champion, Martin Clout, operates on the fringes of the research community. Barry Day describes him as a "self-proclaimed Shakespearean scholar and historian—mainly because other academics d[o]n't consider him to be one of their number" (152). Nevertheless, the 1989 discovery of Globe remains on the site of Mrs. Thrale's one-time property challenges the traditional view of her account. "It may be," Jean Wilson writes, "that generations of male theatre historians owe one intelligent and well-educated eighteenth-century lady a profound apology" (181).

Even if Thrale did observe a portion of the Globe's ruins, however, her description of them as six-sided remains doubtful. She did not claim to have seen the entire shape of the structure, but only one "angle of the outer gallery foundation and one or two angles of the inner gallery foundation." It was only by speculating what the Globe's shape would be "if the angle of the outer gallery foundation was repeated around the theatre" that she arrived at her hexagonal conclusion (Clout 41). The irregular shape revealed by the Rose excavation makes any attribution of regular foundation patterns to Elizabethan playhouses highly speculative (Gurr, "Shakespeare's Globe" 44).

Malone's six-sided Globe was replaced in nineteenth-century conceptions by the circular amphitheater represented in "the 1610 map by Jodocus Hondius, which had first appeared in John Speed's *Theatre of the Empire of Great Britain* in 1611" (Hildy, "Reconstructing" 19). Hondius portrays the playhouse as "a round building which either sits on top of a giant foundation or has some kind of skirt around its lower story" (Hildy, Email). This image was the basis for William Poel's 1897 model of the Globe, which contains an "additional corridor" (White 158) that corresponds to the expanded base in the Hondius map. The 1912 Earl's Court Globe designed by Edwin Lutyens followed Poel's design by incorporating "a covered walk way around its lower section as a way to explain this skirt seen in Hondius" (Hildy, Email). I.A. Shapiro, in a groundbreaking 1948 *Shakespeare Survey* article which systematically analyzed the visual evidence from early modern engravings, writes that Hondius's "emphatic representation of [the Globe] as circular is contemporary evidence not to be brushed aside" (32). Other contemporary representations, however, do not include the odd protuberance at the amphitheater's base.

After the Folger Shakespeare Library opened in 1932, widespread reproduction of C.J. Visscher's 1616 "View of London," a copy of which was owned by the Folger, led to this engraving's supplanting the Hondius map in scholarly notions of the Globe (Hildy Email). Visscher portrays the amphitheater as a six or eight-sided polygon. Slightly more than three sides are visible, and it is difficult to ascertain how many remain unseen. Gurr describes the Visscher Globe as "a three-storeyed octagonal structure, as tall as it is broad, sloping inwards towards the top" (*Rebuilding* 35). According to John Orrell, a principle designer of Wanamaker's project, Visscher's image "formed the basis of countless redrawn pictures of the Globe" ("Original" 102). Visscher inspired, for instance, the theater John Cranford Adams designed as part of the Folger Library in Washington, DC as well as Adams's plans for a reconstructed amphitheater (Gurr, "Shakespeare's Globe" 31-32). Shapiro's article discredited Visscher as a source. It demonstrated that this engraving was not "an original work" and that "the reliability of all versions of Visscher's view is suspect" (Shapiro 27). "There are so many inaccuracies in its representation of Southwark," Shapiro wrote, "that it seems doubtful if Visscher was ever there, and in fact there seems to be no evidence that he either worked in or visited London" (27-28). Despite falling out of academic favor, the Visscher image continued to circulate. The cover illustration of C. Walter Hodge's *The Globe Restored* features a God-like hand holding the Visscher Globe in its palm.

According to Shapiro and later academic consensus, Visscher lifted his image of the Globe from *Civitas Londini* (Shapiro 31), a view of London composed in 1600 by "the professional surveyor John Norden" (Orrell, "Original 97). Yet, paradoxically,

scholars soon embraced this source of Visscher's polygonal amphitheater as evidence that the Globe was circular. This was possible because Norden's work actually contains two images of the Globe. In a broader panorama the playhouse appears as polygonal, but in a smaller "inset map of London" it is round (Shapiro 28). Shapiro writes of the panorama that because it "shows all four theatres as polygonal its accuracy of detail must be immediately suspect, for evidence of, at the very least, one 'round house' among the Bankside theatres is overwhelming" (29). The evidence to which Shapiro refers consists of the Hondius map and an undated engraving by Francisco Delaram which, because of the uncertain identity of the playhouse represented therein, suggests "that the Beergarden *or* the Rose *or* the Globe was cylindrical" (25). For Shapiro, the polygonal structures in the panorama of *Civitas Londini* are "purely conventional" and do not represent the actual appearance of the Bankside playhouses. The panorama itself, "or at least that part which depicts Southwark," is probably "by another hand" than Norden's (30). Shapiro takes the representation of the Globe in the inset map to be accurate because "apart from engravings whose authenticity is suspect, all the positive evidence confirms Norden's representation of these theatres as round" (28).

To a certain extent Shapiro's reasoning is, like the playhouse design he champions, circular. Visscher is wrong because he copied from Norden's panorama, which is wrong because it shares an image with Visscher. In reality, all of the contemporary images of the Globe discussed thus far have credibility problems. Andrew Gurr, collaborating with archaeologist Simon Blatherwick in an article for the journal *Antiquity*, writes that "pictorial evidence about the first Globe, by Norden, Visscher,

Hondius, Delaram and others, is imprecise and unreliable, depicting it with equal unreliability as circular, hexagonal, or octagonal” (Blatherwick 327-28). A more trustworthy source is “Wenceslas Hollar’s ‘Long View’ of both sides of the Thames” (Gurr, “Rebuilding” 39). A native of Prague, Hollar was a “Bohemian artist” in the geographical sense of the term. Before the Civil War, Hollar was “drawing master to the young prince, later King Charles II.” During the conflict, he served for a short time in the same royalist garrison as “the aged architect Inigo Jones” (Hodges, *Shakespeare’s Second Globe* 12). Hodges writes that Hollar’s intention in his “Long View” was to “publish a faithfully executed panorama of [London], from an etching he would make of it on a series of seven large plates. When printed and put together it would be offered as one of the longest, most accurate, and most comprehensive portrait views of any great city ever made.” Hodges adds that Hollar “was an expert at topographical pictures of this kind” (*Shakespeare’s Second Globe* 11). Future scholars have been grateful for this expertise because “Hollar’s chance picture is the one and only image [of the Globe] from the hand of a reliable draughtsman which has survived” (Hodges, *Shakespeare’s Second Globe* 14).

There are problems, however, even with this most credible of contemporary illustrations. Hollar did not move to England until 1637 (Hodges, *Shakespeare’s Second Globe* 20). The amphitheater pictured in his “Long View” is therefore the second Globe, built after the original was destroyed by fire in 1613. While contemporary building regulations and other documents suggest that this later structure was built upon the foundations of the first, there is no way of knowing exactly how much the second Globe

differed from the playhouse constructed in 1599 (Gurr, *Rebuilding* 41). Another complication is that Hollar's evidence actually consists of two distinct representations. The first is the original drawing the artist made in London "at a time near the beginning of the English Civil War" (Hodges, *Shakespeare's Second Globe* 11). The second is the 1647 etching Hollar made from this illustration in Antwerp (Orrell, "Original" 104). This latter depiction includes features not found in the primary sketch, which seem to have been added from a combination of memory and invention. Most notoriously, the Globe in Hollar's etching is topped by an onion-shaped cupola, which is "certainly not [in] an English style" and seems to owe more to the artist's "youth in Bohemia" than to anything he would have seen on Bankside (Hodges, *Shakespeare's Second Globe* 73). Hollar's etching labels two playhouses. One is called "The Globe" and the other, intended to represent the Hope Playhouse which also featured animal combats, carries the inscription "Beere bayting." The names written on the two playhouses in the "Long View" were accidentally reversed by the artist in 1647. According to Hodges, Hollar "had not indicated their names on his drawing and had evidently misremembered which was which" (*Shakespeare's Second Globe* 33). While experts long ago "established beyond a reasonable doubt" (33) that this was a simple error of transposition, it is nonetheless unsettling. Because of the etching's comparative unreliability, Globe reconstructors have focused instead on Hollar's original drawing. This image too has provoked some controversy, because its original pencil lines have been partially inked

over, leading scholars to disagree as to which lines should be used to estimate the amphitheater's dimensions. This would be a point of great contention during the final stage of the Wanamaker project.

While contemporary representations of the Globe's exterior are contradictory and confusing, there are at least several options to choose from. No such luxury exists for reconstructing the playhouse's interior. As John Peter wrote in the *Sunday Times* at the height of a dispute over the placement of onstage pillars, "We simply don't know what the Globe stage was like. There is no, repeat no, actual evidence." All we have is a "drawing, not of the Globe but of the Swan, by the Dutch traveler Johannes de Witt [often printed De Witt]," which Peter describes as "an extremely amateurish piece of work with muddled perspectives and almost certainly done from memory" ("Dramatic" 14). The Swan was "an amphitheater built close to the Globe on Bankside and only four years before it" (Gurr, *Rebuilding* 35). The drawing Peter refers to was drafted in 1596 by Aernout van Buchell from a sketch by de Witt (38). Copies were discovered in 1888 by Karl Theodore Gaedertz in the library of the University at Utrecht (Gurr, "Shakespeare's Globe" 28). Graham Holderness notes that, while the new Globe's planners have been wary of "Disneyfication," the "touristic component of the Shakespeare industry" in the late sixteenth century ironically provided much of what we now know about English playhouses through the testimony of foreign "tourists" like de Witt ("Bardolatry" 8).

The Swan drawing portrays what we have come to think of as an Elizabethan tiring-house façade, in front of which an elevated stage protrudes into the yard of an amphitheatre. There are two upstage doors in the *frons scenae*, but there is no central

entrance or “discovery space.” The new Globe has such an alcove, but its existence is unsupported by this sole extant representation of interior playhouse design. Problems of visibility related to this feature in the current theater have led Richard Proudfoot to quip, “For those who are seated in the side galleries on all three levels and in the Lords’ Room above the stage, the discovery space might more aptly be named ‘concealment space,’ as they can see nothing” revealed in this opening (215). The stage in the de Witt drawing is partially covered by a roof which is supported by two large pillars. “The front of the stage,” Wilson notes, is “unprotected” by this structure (71). Hodges accepted this “forward pent-roof over half the stage” as accurate (*Globe Restored* 30) and included a similar partial covering in his 1953 design for a reconstructed Globe (59). Paul Nelsen instead takes the appearance of a half-roof in de Witt to be a distortion caused by “the crude perspective of the illustration.” The stage at the Swan must have been completely covered, Nelsen believes, because a demi-roof would “have shed rain directly onto the stage,” a possibility which he considers untenable (326). While the drawing’s perspective is imperfect, it clearly depicts the pillars as placed no more than half-way down stage (Gurr, “Shakespeare’s Globe” 29). At the new Globe these posts are much further forward, which creates a series of challenges for actors and audiences that I discuss at length later in this chapter.

Besides contemporary illustrations, scholars have long relied on a key piece of documentary evidence. In 1600, Philip Henslowe hired Peter Streete (sometimes spelled Street) to build the Fortune playhouse. Streete had constructed the Globe in 1599, and Henslowe wanted him to build the Fortune largely in imitation of this earlier

amphitheater. The contract for this work has survived, and Hildy calls it “the Rosetta Stone of Shakespearean playhouse studies” (“Reconstructing” 3). Many scholars, however, express frustration with its contents. Wilson laments that in the Fortune contract “the Globe is used as a point of reference and comparison, which is unfortunate, because instead of illuminating both theatres, this tends to cloud our knowledge of both. Except where specified, everything is to be ‘like the Globe’: but we have no idea what the Globe was like” (75). Orrell similarly complains of the contract’s “exasperating and repeated allusions” to the Globe, references which are largely meaningless without more knowledge of this structure (“Designing” 52-53).

Because the Fortune contract tends to give “particular details only—or mostly—where the model of the Globe was to be departed from” (Orrell, “Designing” 53), it might be easier to reconstruct the Fortune than the Globe. This is what the “German scholar and translator of Shakespeare Ludwig Tieck” attempted in the 1830s, when he “proposed to use the specifications found in the original builder’s contract for the Fortune, surviving in the Henslowe papers, for a theatre he wanted to build in Dresden” (Gurr, “Shakespeare’s Globe” 27). Tieck and Gottfried Semper published architectural drawings based on this plan in 1836. The Fortune contract’s details allowed them to successfully design the theater’s exterior and auditorium. “It was when they came to the stage, however,” Hildy writes, “that these two men ran into trouble” (“Reconstructing” 6). The preconceptions of their era led Tieck and Semper to “carry the stage across the full 55’ width of the yard and into the side galleries, converting them into conventional *wing spaces*,” a configuration which produced “an audience arrangement that was essentially frontal and

—predictably—not significantly different from the arrangement to be found in the early nineteenth century” (8). Plans reproduced by Gurr for the proposed Elizabethan “Mermaid Theatre” in the 1930s show a similar design (*Rebuilding* 32). The power of the proscenium had apparently not lessened during the intervening century. As it was, lack of funding scuttled both projects. Neither Tieck’s plan nor the Mermaid ever went beyond the drawing board.

After the discovery of the de Witt drawing in 1888, no significant new evidence of early modern playhouse design appeared for over a century. Scholars had to content themselves with reinterpreting the existing data, alternately favoring one model or another according to prevailing trends. Then in 1989 archaeological excavation began at the site of the Rose, followed shortly thereafter by a smaller dig at the Globe. Because the majority of its site lies beneath an occupied apartment house, progress at the Globe has been tantalizingly frustrating. “It reveals,” complained Wanamaker’s lead architect Theo Crosby, “just enough to be irritating” (qtd. in Day 207). The excavation of the Rose, by contrast, produced data from two separate incarnations of this playhouse, the original 1587 construction and a 1592 remodeling, which challenged many elements of the scholarly consensus and gave new authority to discarded models. C. Walter Hodges, for instance, had long argued for rectangular stages in Elizabethan playhouses, and took these platforms to be the descendants of similar scaffolds used in Medieval street performances (*Globe Restored* 34-50). He therefore rejected the tapered stages advocated by John Cranford Adams. Yet Hodges noted with chagrin in 1990 that the Rose dig revealed this theater’s stage to be “tapered, just as Adams showed it” (“What is Possible”

43). Egan observes that “the theoretical reconstruction to which the uncovered Rose bore closest resemblance was, to everyone’s surprise, the discredited Globe of John Cranford Adams,” which had been inspired by Visscher’s polygonal image (11). Gurr derides the down-sized Globe at the 1912 “Shakespeare’s England” exhibition as a “Lutyens fantasy” inspired by the whims of its architect (“Shakespeare’s Globe” 46). Hildy notes, however, that the Rose revealed by the excavations “turns out to be much closer in size to Lutyens’s Globe than to any of the reconstructions proposed since” (“Reconstructing” 23). Sometimes evidence from the digs pointed away from the current consensus, but not toward any previous theoretical model. “Upon first glance the remains of the Rose controverted the most basic assumptions about playhouse design,” Egan writes. “The groundplans of both phases were irregular polygons, and so chaos prevailed where order was expected” (Egan 10-11). Gurr notes “the surprise and discomfort we had in registering how different was the fourteen-sided and tulip-shaped second Rose” from what scholars had expected (“Shakespeare’s Globe” 44).

With so many flaws in the conventional wisdom revealed by just a small amount of archaeological evidence, one can reasonably ask whether the chimera of historical accuracy is worth pursuing. Andrew Gurr writes of ““authenticity”” in the aftermath of the excavations, “[It is] a concept which even now, or perhaps especially now, I have to quarantine in quotation marks” (“Shakespeare’s Globe” 46). Hugh Richmond suggests that, rather than trying to rebuild the Globe authentically, it would be better to create a theater that merely captures the general qualities of an Elizabethan playhouse. He writes that “the generic character of such a performance space transcends the value of any single

example.” Richmond further argues that “the recreation of such a generic space need be far less circumstantial than the third Globe aspires to be to inaugurate a more authentic, or at least a more appropriate, mode of Shakespearean production than that customary at present” (162).

The problem with Richmond’s logic is that there is no way of knowing which particular Elizabethan elements will significantly impact performance until they are recreated. Seemingly trivial attributes may ultimately prove important. Egan may exaggerate when he proposes that “the true historicist value of an authentic reconstruction can be measured by the number and detail of apparently insignificant features which are created” (14), but there is no way of knowing which features will prove significant until they are tested. Hildy asserts, for instance, that modern theaters which attempted to replicate the general principles of early modern staging missed a tremendous opportunity by not stacking their public in layers. “Spatial relationships and the way we perceive the volume of a space in a fan-shaped auditorium,” he notes, “are very different from those same elements in a stacked gallery configuration” (Hildy, “Reconstructing” 13). Another consideration easily overlooked is the aural impact of authentic building materials. “We cannot be sure of the acoustic effect of the Globe’s peculiar combination of sounding-boards, plaster, woodwork and human bodies,” Gurr writes. “It is important to get that kind of detail right” (*Rebuilding* 166). John Russell Brown likewise cites his experience living “in a large sixteenth-century house, full of timber beams up to thirty feet long” in which “movement, sudden action, noise, and quietness seem to have special force or magnification” as evidence of “the special acoustics of a building like the Globe” (21).

Brown urges that “materials used in the building should be as close to the original as possible,” because this sonic effect is not obtainable in “neat boxes of plastic, brick, and concrete” (Brown 21).

One important and unexpected discovery at the new Globe has been the formidable energy created by an audience standing in close proximity to the stage. This is a feature not adopted in earlier theaters built on Elizabethan models. Nugent Monck and Tyrone Guthrie discounted the potential of this convention and felt that modern audiences would not tolerate it. “No one believed,” writes Hildy, “that five hundred to seven hundred people would pay to stand at every performance, but they do.” Gurr calls these patrons “understanders” (*Rebuilding* 46), a term which derives from Ben Jonson’s punning reference in the “Induction on the Stage” from *Bartholomew Fair* to the “*understanding gentlemen o’ the ground*” (qtd. in Hodges, *Globe Restored* 44). Their response at the new Globe has been enthusiastic. “I was a groundling for all four plays,” writes Lois Potter of the 1999 season, “[and] agree that it is by far the best way to see them.” She notes that “you can choose whether to be the type who stands for anything or the type who sits in judgment” (Potter, “Stage” 81). Hildy observes that the Globe experience “has made us rethink the nature of audience comfort in a theatre space” (“Why Elizabethan” 117).

Whatever its accomplishments, however, the new Globe will never be truly “authentic.” One can view this fact harshly, as does Wilson when she writes that “to claim that this ‘Globe’ is any more authentic than Olivier’s ‘Globe’ in *Henry V* is to mislead” (182). Or one can adopt the philosophical approach at which C. Walter Hodges

arrived after half a century spent trying to rebuild Shakespeare's playhouse. Hodges was fond of drawing low railings around his depictions of Elizabethan stages, and continued to do so even after he had been convinced that this feature was historically inaccurate. He explains:

Mistakes like mine with the railings, if indeed it is one, when added together begin to form an unconscious pattern which belongs to the period in which the work was created, and so eventually they become interesting and valid in themselves. If the reconstruction of Henslowe's Fortune Theatre which Ludwig Tieck had planned to build in Dresden in 1836 . . . had in fact been built and had survived, it would today stand as a splendid example not so much of an Elizabethan London theatre, but of nineteenth-century German Romanticism. It would be as it were two historic buildings in one, and an excellent theatre besides. ("What is Possible" 48)

I would add that the true value of reconstruction lies not in finding out how specific factors might have impacted early modern performance, but rather in discovering how Elizabethan conventions can energize theatrical representation today. As Potter wrote in 1999, "However inauthentic a recreation of the seventeenth-century experience, the Globe seems to me to offer a perfectly authentic—and enjoyable—twentieth-century one" ("Stage" 81).

Earl's Court and the Chicago World's Fair

William Poel began the modern quest for Elizabethan playhouse reconstruction in 1893 with his "Fortune fit-up." This structure attempted to recreate an early modern stage within the confines of the proscenium theaters where Poel staged his revivals. Marion O'Connor refers to the fit-up as a "flagrantly fake Elizabethan stage" and a "tawdry specimen of low-budget Victorian stagecraft" ("Theatre of Empire" 71). Poel recognized

its limitations and knew that “he needed an entire playhouse” to better replicate Shakespearean conditions (Hildy, “Why Elizabethan” 105-06). He therefore set out to design one. In 1897, exactly one hundred years before Wanamaker’s amphitheater opened on Bankside, Poel drafted plans for a replica of the Globe based on the Hondius illustration. The de Witt drawing also apparently influenced Poel’s design, as its roof covered only half the stage (White 156). These plans were built into a model in 1902, and this miniature Globe was used in promotional efforts by the London Shakespeare Commemoration League to fund the reconstruction of a full-sized playhouse (Hildy, “Why Elizabethan” 105-06).

In 1900, Poel petitioned the London County Council for a grant of land on which to build an outdoor amphitheater (Poel, *Shakespeare in the Theatre* 228). Current regulations prohibited a structure of this kind in London, so the League’s campaign shifted toward the erection of a “Shakespeare Temple” (a name that suggests literal bardolatry), which would include a memorial statue (229). Tentative agreement was reached on this plan in 1905. Poel then attempted to include within this memorial a scaled-down theater he defines as “a building in which Shakespeare’s plays could be acted without scenery.” This modest Elizabethan performance space was scuttled by the objections of Herbert Beerbohm Tree (231), and the “Shakespeare Temple” scheme eventually fizzled. In 1908, Poel’s idea for a reconstructed Globe merged with the developing notion of a National Theatre (233). This was the kiss of death, as Poel’s vision became “hopelessly entangled” in disputes related to this venture (Gurr, *Rebuilding* 27). “It would be tedious to relate (except for purposes of satire),” Robert

Speaight writes, “the subsequent activities of the National Theatre Committee” (Speaight, *William Poel* 214). When this theatrical institution was finally formed after World War II, it no longer had any commitment to Elizabethan reconstruction.

Meanwhile, Poel’s Globe caught the attention of “Mrs. George Cornwallis West, the former Lady Randolph Churchill, who was the American-born Jennie Jerome, mother of Winston Churchill” (Hildy, “Why Elizabethan” 106). She engaged the services of the architect Edwin Lutyens to build an amphitheater from Poel’s model for the “Shakespeare’s England” exhibition at Earl’s Court in 1912 (106). Lutyens was known for recreating architectural styles from earlier eras, including the Tudor period. He was also a theatrical designer, who had planned the original sets for the premiere of J. M. Barrie’s *Peter Pan* in 1904. According to Marion O’Connor, Lutyens was an elitist who used his architectural gifts to advance the interests of the British ruling class. The architect modeled the children’s home in *Peter Pan* after his own family’s dwelling, and O’Connor notes that he omitted any reference to the servants or their quarters. She sees similar “erasures” in Lutyens’s efforts at “Shakespeare’s England” (76). For O’Connor, this exhibition served a reactionary agenda by representing only “one version of English history. It was a version that so emphasized one class as to exclude most of the nation and so emphasized continuity as to occlude change” (94).

Certain aspects of “Shakespeare’s England” support O’Connor’s thesis. She describes a courtly tournament held at the exhibition as an opportunity for “the ruling class of 1912” to confirm their status through a “display of expenditure and equestrian abilities” (93-94). By these means, O’Connor suggests, “the celebration of the past” at

Earl's Court was turned into "a justification of the present" (91). O'Connor's interpretation of Frank Benson's participation in this tournament is, however, perhaps simplistic. The *Times* wrote on 3 July 1912 that "Mr. F.R. Benson" would serve as "the Herald and 'producer' (in theatrical parlance)" for this event ("Elizabethan Tourney" 11). O'Connor describes Benson as an "Oxford graduate whose Shakespearean touring company played at Cheltenham Ladies' College in morning dress" (92), thereby implicating him in what she perceives as the tournament's function of solidifying class privilege. This reading overlooks Benson's status as a Socialist and follower of the Pre-Raphaelite revolutionary William Morris (Speaight, *William Poel* 59-60).

Benson's activities at "Shakespeare's England" reflect, I believe, the complex ideological relationship of the Elizabethan revival to the status quo. On the one hand, nostalgia for the early modern period suggests a longing for absolute monarchy. The presence of the royal family at "Shakespeare's England," as reported in the *Times* on 22 July 1912 ("The King and Queen" 10), combines with the contemporary support of Prince Philip for the new Globe in Southwark (Day 158) to suggest that British royalty have sometimes used Elizabethan reconstruction to legitimize their status. The naïve sense of national community created by events like "Shakespeare's England" may qualify as what John Drakakis calls "the manufacture and periodic mobilization of a reactionary populism—usually in support of royal weddings and foreign quarrels—which, even at the relatively urbane level, works to obscure historical difference" (26). Yet the Pre-Raphaelite brand of Socialism to which Benson, Poel, and Nugent Monck subscribed rejected the dominance of technological positivism. The real center of power during the

twentieth century was not the constitutional monarchy to which Benson paid playful homage at the “Shakespeare’s England” tournament, but instead the scientific-industrial complex which he and his fellow Pre-Raphaelites rejected. The Elizabethan revival cannot therefore simply be interpreted as the reactionary embrace of a feudal world picture. It was instead primarily a progressive attempt to find solutions to the injustices of the modern age.

The actor-manager Patrick Kirwan, who later headed the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre at Stratford-on-Avon, staged brief selections from Shakespeare’s plays in the Globe replica at Earl’s Court. The most notorious feature of these spectacles was the presence of costumed performers in the pit, who “impersonated an Elizabethan audience” (O’Connor, “Theatre of Empire” 88). Shepherd and Womack write that “prentices and orange-wenches cavorted in supposedly authentic garb. The rehearsed behavior of these picturesque groundlings was naïve and disorderly” (Shepherd 115-16). For O’Connor, these faux Elizabethan spectators were “on display as objects of popular-audience identification.” They emphasized “the merriment of the Elizabethan chapter in the national story” as “a matter of machismo, imperialism, and Shakespeare” (91), providing the presumably male Edwardian spectator with “an image of himself as virile, patriotic Englishman” (87). Imperialism may have informed portions of “Shakespeare’s England.” A lake on the grounds, for instance, included a replica of Francis Drake’s ship, the *Revenge*. Winston Churchill, then First Secretary of the Admiralty, used a re-enactment of Drake’s sailing to meet the Spanish Armada as the occasion for a speech urging “a massive expansion of the British Navy in the North Sea” as part of the build-up to World

War I (85). Yet while O'Connor describes "the Globe and the *Revenge*" as "the pair that dominated the visual display" (91) at Earl's Court, her connection of Kirwan's imitation groundlings to an imperialist agenda is tenuous. Their exuberant behavior hardly seems in the same league with Churchill's ode to naval power. Shepherd and Womack propose a subtler ideological function for the pseudo-audience at "Shakespeare's England."

Despite the oft-quoted passage from *Hamlet*, early modern references to "groundlings" are very rare and if the word "was in ordinary use at all, it seems to have meant a kind of fish" during Shakespeare's era (Shepherd 111). It was not until the nineteenth century that the term came to commonly represent ill-behaving "understanders" in Elizabethan playhouses. The "groundling" is therefore "a class myth, whose structure has as much to do with the period of its formation (the nineteenth century) as with the period on to which it is projected (the sixteenth)" (Shepherd 112). Shepherd and Womack note that the rise of the groundling in critical thought coincided with the demise of the theatrical "pit." This "was the ground-floor area directly in front of the stage, where there were no seats, but unreserved places on backless benches" (112). Beginning with the re-design of the Haymarket in 1880, this model gradually gave way to the paradigm of "the modern West End, where there is no crowd ethos, where the seats nearest the stage are also the most expensive ones, and where theatre, considered a social event, is dominated by the upper middle class" (Shepherd 114). Shepherd and Womack write, "The groundlings had been got rid of; and it is easy to see that their appearance in the accepted picture of Elizabethan theatres is an ideological reflex of their expulsion from Victorian ones" (115). By portraying poorer spectators as barbaric and ill-

mannered in critical writings about the early modern era and in the reconstructed venue at Earl's Court, the theatrical and academic establishment marked the playhouse in general, and Shakespeare in particular, as the preserve of the upper classes. Working-class audiences got the message, and have largely stayed away from performances of Shakespeare for the past century.

Poel's reaction to the reconstructed Globe at "Shakespeare's England" was not favorable. Lutyens made several changes to Poel's design, shrinking the size of the overall structure and reducing the depth of its platform stage. In an article for the *New Age* on 22 August 1912, Poel briefly observed "several errors" in the appearance of the Earl's Court amphitheater (rpt. in *Shakespeare in the Theatre* 208). Some years later, he more specifically noted in a letter to the *Times* that "the dimensions of the building were not the same" as those of the original Globe (according to his model), and that Lutyens's structure "lacked the essential feature of an Elizabethan playhouse—that is, the projection of the platform into the middle of the arena." Poel attributed these presumed deficiencies "to economic reasons—namely, want of space together with a desire to add to the seating capacity within the playhouse" ("Shakespeare Memorial Theatre" 10). He reserved his sharpest criticism for the performances at "Shakespeare's England" and, particularly, for their nostalgic atmosphere. "The obsolete but picturesque phrase 'Ye Olde' has perhaps something fascinating in it to the modern aesthetic temperament," Poel wrote in the *New Age*, but he rejected this fascination with the antique. "To the Elizabethan the Globe was a new building," Poel insisted, "there was nothing 'Olde' about it." He especially resented "the movement of the costumed figures who are supposed to impersonate the

‘groundlings’” (rpt. in *Shakespeare in the Theatre* 208). O’Connor claims that Poel “took antiquarian offense” to this imitation audience (“Theatre of Empire” 88), but his objections do not seem especially archaist. Poel merely rejected the “theme park” atmosphere of the Earl’s Court event, the very attribute which O’Connor elsewhere laments in connection to theatrical reconstructions (“Useful” 32).

“Shakespeare’s England” was the closest Poel ever came to seeing the Globe rebuilt. He failed in his other efforts at reconstruction, and the resulting frustration led him to refuse a Knighthood in 1930. In explaining this decision he wrote to Robert Speaight, “I have no other way of protesting against the perpetration of false art, except by disassociating myself from those who were content to regard the building of a Shakespeare playhouse as being solely a business proposition” (qtd. in Speaight, *William Poel* 254). Nor were later British attempts to erect an Elizabethan amphitheater successful. “More than half a century after Poel made his proposal,” Speaight wrote in 1954, “the Globe Theatre remains a blue-print. Is it too much to hope that by the time the quarter-centenary of Shakespeare’s birth is celebrated in 1964, the blue-print may have been converted into a building?” (*William Poel* 215). As it turns out, this was too much to hope, but the project would eventually be realized. In 1934, the same year William Poel died, Sam Wanamaker first encountered Shakespeare’s Globe.

British writers have sometimes exaggerated the hard-boiled dangers and privations of Wanamaker’s upbringing. The actor was born in Chicago in 1919, and Barry Day writes that this “was the era of Al Capone and prohibition. Gangster John Dillinger was shot outside the cinema Sam and [his brother] Bill used to frequent. You

couldn't live in the ghetto and not be able to look after yourself" (45). The Biograph, where Dillinger met his demise, is actually located in a fashionable neighborhood near Lincoln Park, far from the "ghetto." While Day later notes that Sam lived "on the wrong side of town" from this fashionable Lakefront district (48), Wanamaker's ability to attend Drake University in Iowa and the Goodman Theatre School suggests that he was not a street urchin. This does not, of course, minimize the sacrifices Wanamaker's working-class parents made to send Sam and his brother to university, or the very real physical toughness that Wanamaker needed to fend off beatings from anti-Semitic schoolmates (45). He was, however, no Bugsy Siegel (although both men shared a passion for real-estate development).

As the child of Ukrainian immigrants, Wanamaker "had no interest in Shakespeare" (Wanamaker qtd. in Holderness, "Interview" 21) when he first encountered the playwright's work in the "Elizabethan Village" of 1934's Chicago World's Fair, known as the Century of Progress Exhibition. Instead Wanamaker was attracted by the promise of "free spectacle—English Morris-dancing and Queen Elizabeth and her courtiers" (Wanamaker qtd. in Holderness, "Interview" 21). More salacious entertainments were also available in the "Elizabethan Village." John Martin reported in *The New York Times* that there was "a sideshow in which Lady Godiva repeats her historic equestrian accomplishment hourly for Peeping Toms" (X2). 1934 was the second year for the Century of Progress, and the first Exhibition had been very different. It was "unrelentingly futuristic" in its championing of modern technological developments (Hildy, "Why Elizabethan" 108). R.L. Duffus questioned the efficacy of extolling man's

“too fanatical inventiveness” at a time when “a century of dazzling scientific advancement has culminated in unemployment and misery [and] chaos” (SM1), but the 1933 Century of Progress Exhibition remained relentless in its celebration of the modern. While Wanamaker visited a recreation of Elizabethan England in 1934, the previous year had been dominated by a very different European import.

The New York Times reported on 15 July 1933, “More than 100,000 Chicagoans and World’s Fair visitors, massed on and near the Navy Pier, roared a tremendous welcome late this afternoon to 100 gallant Italian airmen under the command of General Italo Balbo as they brought the first of their twenty-four huge seaplanes safely to rest on the waters of Lake Michigan” (“100,000 at Chicago” 1). Balbo’s armada had been scheduled to coincide with the Century of Progress in order to demonstrate “Italy’s technical development of modern aviation” and to “bring a message of friendship to the United States” in “the eleventh year of the Fascist revolution” (Balbo qtd. in “Southern Route Safer” 15). For the first time since the sixteenth century, Italy represented the vanguard of modernity. Chicago embraced Balbo, proclaiming 15 July “Italo Balbo Day” (“Chicago to Mark” 3) and naming a street in the South Loop after the aviator. Balbo Drive remains to this day probably the only avenue in America named after an Axis war hero. President Roosevelt called the Italian General and his companions “most welcome visitors” and expressed “great admiration for their achievement” (qtd. in “Southern Route Safer” 15). Wanamaker’s unionist background and family history insulated him from fascist influence, but one wonders what ideas a young man of Sam’s energy and determination might have taken away from the World’s Fair in 1933.

While the first Century of Progress Exhibition had been financially successful, organizers were somewhat alarmed by its excessive futurism and sought in 1934 to offer “something more traditional” (Hildy, “Why Elizabethan” 108). There was also a desire to raise the tone and “display more of the meritorious and less of the meretricious” (Duncan-Clark E7). A simulated “Belgian village” had been popular in 1933, and organizers expanded on this idea by presenting a variety of nationally themed exhibits, including one devoted to early modern England (Duncan-Clark E7). The Fair’s planners recruited Thomas Wood Stevens to build a Globe for inclusion in this Tudor attraction. Stevens was a pioneer in educational theater and had worked with Ben Iden Payne at the Carnegie Institute of Technology to advance the cause of Elizabethan staging (Hildy, “Why Elizabethan” 107). His Chicago Globe was, according to Hildy, “an odd combination of the Fortune contract and the then prevalent idea [from Visscher] that the Globe was eight-sided” (“Reconstructing” 27). The design was compromised by the arrangement of its audience. Spectators in the pit sat on benches rather than standing, and the third, highest gallery of the structure was a “fake” not used for seating (Hildy, “Why Elizabethan” 108). According to Hildy, these deficiencies “prevented the space from generating the kind of energy and excitement we know these buildings were capable of producing” (109). The Chicago Globe was nevertheless a great success. “If nothing else,” Hildy writes, “the presence of the actors in the same volume of space as the audience, with no proscenium arch frame, no front curtain, and no difference in light between the stage and the house was a compelling experience” (109-10). More than 400,000 people

attended performances, and “people who reported not generally liking Shakespeare plays said that the productions they saw in this theatre changed their minds” (109).

Similar Globes were built in San Diego in 1935 and Dallas the following year (Hildy, “Why Elizabethan” 111). By 1936 Wanamaker, who had become an admirer of Shakespeare at the Century of Progress Exhibition, was performing in one of Stevens’s three companies of players at the “Great Lakes Festival” in Cleveland (Day 45). These troupes, working in San Diego, Dallas and Cleveland as well as on national tours, staged five thousand performances of early modern plays for over two million spectators between 1934 and 1937. This spawned an “explosion of Elizabethan revival activities” which eventually led to the establishment of hundreds of Shakespeare Festivals throughout the United States (Hildy, “Why Elizabethan” 111). One of the most distinguished products of this movement, the Chicago Shakespeare Theater, today resides at Navy Pier, the very spot where Balbo triumphantly landed in 1933. Shakespeare alone did not, of course, save America from fascism. But when such an option was badly needed, the Elizabethan revival offered an alternative to ruthless futurism.

Building Wanamaker’s Globe

Sam Wanamaker first came to England in 1949 to play the leading role of Geremio in the cinematic adaptation of Pietro di Donato’s novel *Christ in Concrete*, released in Britain under the title *Give Us This Day* (Day 24). This was a neorealist saga about Italian immigrants working in the American construction industry. Geremio is forced by economic pressure to work on an unsafe, non-union job site. He is killed when the building collapses, drowning him in a pool of liquid concrete. Wanamaker may have

recalled the experience of being crushed and devoured by a construction project during the tribulations of his decades-long quest to build the Globe, a process he described as an “epic journey through a sea of icebergs” (qtd. in Day 34). *Give Us This Day* was a perfect fit with the actor’s political sympathies. The film was shot in England because its director, Edward Dmytryk, had been blacklisted by Hollywood red-hunters, as had other members of the cast (25). While he was filming in London, Wanamaker discovered that there was no fitting monument to Shakespeare and conceived the notion of reconstructing the Globe on or near its original location. This project was placed on hold, however, for the next twenty years.

During the 1950s, Wanamaker enjoyed great success on the London stage. He exemplified the American “Method,” a style of acting which at the time was a great innovation. Kenneth Tynan described Wanamaker’s technique as “downright dangerous.” “He enjoys smoldering,” Tynan wrote, “and when smoldering is not enough, he throws things” (from an unspecified review, qtd. in Day 51). Wanamaker played Iago to Paul Robeson’s Othello at Stratford in 1959. The pairing of two Americans in these roles was too much for some members of the English public. The production’s director, Tony Richardson, wrote in his journal that “Anti-Americanism, always latent with so many so-called Europeans, boiled up and, as Paul was sacrosanct, it was directed mainly at Sam” (qtd. in Day 56). According to Day, “words like ‘Hollywood’ and ‘cowboy’ were used freely” to describe his Iago (56), and the experience effectively ended Wanamaker’s British stage career. He “never appeared at Stratford again nor did he play another leading role in the West End” (57). By the 1960s, however, the McCarthy era was over,

and Wanamaker felt comfortable returning to the United States. He spent this decade working internationally as a director and actor in both theater and film (58).

In 1969 Wanamaker began his campaign to build a Shakespearean theater as part of a broader Bankside development project. This plan was not driven by the considerations of monetary gain that inform most real-estate development. Although many of Wanamaker's critics characterized him as a "Shylock American entrepreneur lining his pockets with the money he was coining from Britain's glorious cultural past" (Day 71), his actual goals were far more altruistic. Day notes that "Sam never took a penny out of the Globe project" and that "by the time of his death the Trust *owed* him a substantial sum" (59). Some confusion regarding his motivations is understandable because, while Wanamaker was articulate in his advocacy of the new Globe, he did not document the ideological underpinnings of his larger development plan. Architect Theo Crosby, a principal collaborator in both the Globe reconstruction and the proposed Bankside renewal, did describe a philosophy of urban planning, and his thought illuminates Wanamaker's project.

Crosby was highly critical of the "Modern movement," in which "to achieve the maximum benefits of technology . . . the intellectual and creative elements in society must be bent to the service of the machine" (Crosby 8). Crosby wrote that "in such a world, the past is an embarrassment" (9), but he believed that restoring "our feelings of continuity with the past" (87) could provide "a possible way out" (9). Crosby argued that it was necessary to preserve and, where necessary, recreate buildings from earlier eras because they were "enormous *examples* of an alternative mode of perception, of another

set of priorities, an alternative to our accommodation to the industrial system” (Crosby 9). Such “monuments carry a subversive message” because “they are reminders of our better selves, our communal responsibilities and of our present slavery to the requirements of the production process” (Crosby 85). This philosophy links the Bankside project to the Pre-Raphaelite sentiments of William Poel and Nugent Monck and to the suspicion of modernity expressed by Tyrone Guthrie. Robert Shaughnessy writes that “Poel revived early modern forms of theatrical production in order to attempt to retrieve an unalienated mode of social existence, wherein everyday life, work and culture could become organically integrated.” The Elizabethan revival was therefore “a way of restoring a lost wholeness of life to an increasingly mechanized industrial society.” Crosby’s writings suggest that he and Wanamaker sought, like Poel before them, “to revolutionize the Shakespearean theatre [as] a step towards changing the world” (Shaughnessy 36). In both cases this revolutionary impulse questioned the hegemony of scientific industrialism, which for Crosby was symbolized by “the machine” (9).

Sam Wanamaker won Theo Crosby to his cause at a 1969 meeting of the Architectural Association when the actor presented a rather pathetic model for his proposed development which, according to Crosby, “seemed to consist of a lot of shoe boxes arranged all over the Thames” (qtd. in Day 125). The architect saw past the defects of Wanamaker’s presentation and grasped the sincerity and progressive intent behind the plan. He signed on almost immediately, and “the next quarter century or so passed in something of a blur for Theo, as the amiable maniac with the shoe boxes drew him further and further into a universe of his own imaginings” (Day 126). Few others were so

readily convinced. The same anti-American sentiment which had plagued Wanamaker at Stratford bedeviled his efforts in the Bankside project. Many Londoners, especially those of the political Left, “saw Sam as an American who—*because* he was American—must be in it for the money” (Day 174). For his detractors, suspicion that Wanamaker was an American carpetbagger merged with concerns that all of Southwark would be transformed into a kitschy theme park. David Schalkwyk writes that the new Globe sought to “distance itself” from the specter of Disneyfication “by applying the most rigorous standards of historical authenticity, based on the foremost academic experts in the field” (36). These authorities recommended that Wanamaker “build the most authentic reconstruction of Shakespeare’s first Globe that modern scholarship was capable of producing” (Hildy, “Reconstructing” 29). According to Schalkwyk, this approach served “to offset the American origins, and hence the perceived cultural contamination, of the instigator and driver of the whole project” (36). From that point onward, historical accuracy became the *raison d’etre* of the Bankside endeavor. Authentic reconstruction, however, was no simple task.

In the early years, a number of different researchers took charge of the amphitheater’s design. In 1970 Richard Southern initially led this effort (Day 79) and was followed briefly by Richard Hosley (80). The model produced by Hosley and Southern differs from the eventual Bankside reconstruction in its sixteen-sided form (Egan 6) and in the fact that its “heavens” covered “only part of the stage, leaving the front section open to the weather” (Orrell, “Designing” 58). The Hosley-Southern Globe had a diameter of 100 feet, a figure determined by applying the 33 foot height established in the

Fortune Contract to the image from Hollar's "Long View" and thereby deducing the structure's proportional width (Orrell, "Accuracy" 5). John Orrell would eventually apply more complex calculations to Hollar's drawing to arrive at this same diameter.

C. Walter Hodges replaced Hosley, which led to "one of the major philosophical arguments that was to haunt the early years of the project" (Day 81). Hodges wanted to rebuild the second Globe, the one built in 1614. He reasoned that this was the structure represented in Hollar's drawing, which was the most reliable source of contemporary visual evidence. Hodges further believed that reconstructing the second Globe would allow the incorporation of advances in playhouse design which had occurred between 1599 and 1614. Chief among these was an improved building technique that allowed the roof over the stage to be supported without pillars. Hodges referred to the contract for the Hope playhouse, built at about the same time as the second Globe, which specified that "the Heavens all over the said stage [were] to be borne or carried without any posts or supporters to be fixed or set upon the said stage" (qtd. in Hodges, *Shakespeare's Second Globe* 59). Such an arrangement would greatly improve sight lines (Hodges, *Shakespeare's Second Globe* 93).

Wanamaker and his advisors rejected Hodges's plan because Shakespeare wrote no plays for the 1614 amphitheater. "By no stretch of the imagination," Day writes of this decision, "could you call the second Globe *Shakespeare's Globe*" (81). Hodges countered that "the Second Globe has as much claim to be considered Shakespeare's theatre as had the first" because the playwright was still a shareholder during the 1614 reconstruction, and the later playhouse would therefore have included all the lessons Shakespeare and his

fellows learned during their occupancy of the original structure (*Shakespeare's Second Globe* 19). The dispute was irreconcilable, and Hodges left the Wanamaker team. He wrote in 1973, "In the summer of 1970 I was asked to advise in a project to build a full-size reconstruction of Shakespeare's Globe playhouse on or as near as possible to its historic site on Bankside." This endeavor, Hodges claims, "came to nothing—or at least declined into such a good imitation of coming to nothing that I am sure there cannot be any present offense in thinking so" (*Shakespeare's Second Globe* 7). After leaving Southwark, Hodges joined a similar project in Michigan. Despite Hodges's diagnosis, Wanamaker's amphitheater did not come "to nothing," but eventually rose on Bankside. The Detroit Globe, on the other hand, was never constructed (Day 84).

As design went forward, the new Globe sought goodwill within the academic community. 1971's First International Shakespeare Conference in Vancouver, "stunned by the audacity" of Wanamaker's plan (Day 79), issued a statement "that such a reconstruction would be of the greatest value to Shakespearean scholarship and to the history of the theatre, as well as of widespread interest to people and to education everywhere in the world" (qtd. in Hodges, *Shakespeare's Second Globe* 7). Ten years later, however, at the third meeting of this group in Stratford, England, the whole endeavor "was almost sand-bagged" by academics with ties to Stratford's Shakespeare industry. They feared "a rival Shakespearean venue not much more than a hundred miles to the south" and therefore refused to endorse the new Globe (Day 83). Following this conference, Andrew Gurr rallied support by circulating a letter among 200 Shakespeare scholars, asking them to sign in affirmation of the planned reconstruction. The only one

to refuse was John Russell Brown, who had conflicts of interest as the academic advisor for the National Theater (located along the same riverfront as the proposed Southwark Globe) and as a supporter of the Detroit project (Day 85). Gurr then met with Wanamaker and received a firm promise of “no compromise” in historical accuracy, although he acknowledges that at this same meeting “we had half an hour on whether to have a plastic roof” (Gurr qtd. in Day 85). Rather than a first principle, “authenticity” was a philosophy Wanamaker accepted to win the support of academics.

Gurr skillfully built consensus by “organizing a series of seminars, hosted by Theo [Crosby]” to which acknowledged scholarly experts were invited. These meetings were run “on the old Quaker principle of allowing people to argue until everyone agreed” (Day 87). John Orrell took over design duties, and in the early 1980s the project seemed to be moving forward (Orrell, “Designing” 51). Then, in 1982, several leftist opponents of the new Globe were elected to the Southwark Council. They sought to renege on an earlier agreement which would have allowed Wanamaker to build on a lot currently used for the storage of trash-collection equipment. The Council wanted the proposed site to be used for housing. Wanamaker agreed “that there should be housing close by” but asserted that it “could be built elsewhere.” The reconstructed playhouse, he insisted, would offer “a potential public amenity accessible to all” (qtd. in Holderness, “Interview” 17). A protracted court battle ensued. John Drakakis saw this as a clash between “Shakespeare and the Roadsweepers” (24) in which “the local inhabitants of the third poorest borough in England” (38) were “victim[s] of a cultural hegemony consisting of a power elite supported by an influential right-wing press” (31). Wanamaker, in Drakakis’s view,

displayed his true exploitative colors in a “final recourse to that most potent of ideological state apparatuses, the law” (30). The Globe won the court case in 1986 and, in retrospect; the outcry at the time from critics like Drakakis seems overblown. Day notes that their position “was essentially based on the argument that the people of Southwark were against the Globe” but asks, “How true was this?” (178). Several of the evicted sanitation engineers met Wanamaker to congratulate him on his legal victory, and a photograph of “Sam, champagne bottle in hand, surrounded by back-slapping road sweepers” (Day 179) suggests that these Bankside residents did not feel unduly crushed or exploited.

A shortage of funding prevented work from moving forward in the immediate aftermath of the court victory. If money had been available, the Globe would have been built sooner but would not have had the benefit of several later discoveries. Before 1989, for instance, an authentic thatch roof would have been impossible due to fire regulations. It was only in that year that a new fire-retardant spray was developed which, together with a modern sprinkler system, brought the thatch roof up to code (Gurr, “Shakespeare’s Globe” 35). More significantly, a Globe built in the 1980s could not have incorporated any findings from the excavations which began in 1989. The evaluation of this archaeological data, however, created dissension within the design team. Up until 1989, John Orrell had posited a 24-sided polygon 100 feet in diameter. Orrell acknowledged that evidence from the digs rendered his 24-sided model “not only speculative but decidedly open to question” (qtd. in Day 219). There was no agreement, however, as to

how many sides the Globe should have or what its diameter should be. Andrew Gurr published all the available evidence and summoned scholars to an October 1992 seminar in order to reach a decision.

The two major alternatives proposed at this meeting were Orrell's revised plan of 20 sides with a 100-foot diameter and an 18-sided, 90-foot model submitted by Frank Hildy (Egan 12-13). The cases for these schemes are thoughtful and complex, and were further developed in a series of articles by both scholars. While considering the archaeological evidence, these arguments focus primarily on the validity of Orrell's painstaking "trigonometric analysis" of the Hollar drawing, which takes into account the "anamorphosis" by which "spheres and horizontal discs are distorted in true linear perspective if they are far removed from the central ray." Orrell concluded "that the theatre was somewhere between 101.37 and 103.32 ft. wide, plus or minus a further two percent" (Orrell, "Accuracy" 7). Hildy questioned whether the Hollar drawing was "ever intended to have the kind of accuracy Orrell's analysis requires of it." He further notes that "Orrell has used the inked-in lines of the drawing," while the original "pencil tracings" would be "more reliable." Hildy asserts that when these pencil lines are used the techniques of Orrell's analysis yield "a Globe 93 ft. across" rather than "one of 100 ft." (Hildy, "Minority Report" 10). Orrell counters that the original pencil marking on which Hildy makes his case "is not a deliberate line at all, but a scuff mark which continues its random way through the area of the roof" (Orrell, "Accuracy" 8).

This may seem an arcane dispute, but it has serious theatrical implications. The diameter of the building necessarily determines the breadth of the yard, which directly

impacts performance. Hildy notes that “as the size of the yard increases, the distance between the gallery audience and the stage increases” resulting in “serious consequences for audibility.” Staging would also be affected. “The larger the yard, the larger the stage must be,” Hildy writes. “Deep stages are extremely problematic, especially for scenes with small numbers of actors involved” (Hildy, “Minority Report” 9). The scales were somewhat tilted in favor of Orrell’s plan by the fact that two bays had already been constructed to conform to his proposal. The burden of proof was therefore higher for Hildy’s scheme, which would have required the costly dismantling of these sections (Hildy, “Minority Report” 9).

I do not presume to offer an opinion as to whether a 90-foot or 100-foot diameter is better justified by the evidence. I would instead suggest that if neither plan is conclusively superior in terms of historical authenticity, as would seem to be the case when such esteemed experts as Orrell and Hildy disagree, then the solution adopted should be the one which best serves the building’s theatrical function. Such considerations were rarely a factor in the new Globe’s decision-making process. This may have been partly due to under-representation of the theatrical community at planning meetings. While Gurr writes that “actors” and “directors” were present at the “five major seminars” held prior to 1986 (*Rebuilding* 42), there is little evidence of such participation. For example, a list of attendees from the 1983 and 1986 seminars, published in a supplement to *Renaissance Drama Newsletter* (“Shape of the Globe” 2, 31), does not include any of the “household names,” like Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., Michael York, and Nicol Williamson, who were then participating in Globe fundraising efforts or

serving on the Artistic Directorate (Day 156). Nor were any of the cast members from the Globe's 1996 and 1997 seasons present at these meetings (Kiernan 158-61). Hildy, a Professor of Theater, called attention to the performance consequences of the 100-foot diameter, but he was outvoted. The presence of more theater practitioners might have swayed the decision in Hildy's favor.

As it is, the Globe has been successful in spite of the acoustic and visual challenges posed by its 100-foot diameter. "If the theatre consistently plays to eighty percent capacity audiences," Hildy wrote in 1992, "the apprehensions of the minority should seem groundless" ("Minority Report" 10). Actual attendance at the new Globe has exceeded this estimate, but other early modern reconstructions currently in development, "including the second Globe for Shenandoah Shakespeare and the Rose for Shakespeare and Company" in Lennox, Massachusetts (Hildy, "Why Elizabethan" 116), will not have the advantage of a historically authentic Bankside location. Their economic survival will depend on audience satisfaction, and they should therefore carefully consider those "judgment calls" in authentic design which affect the quality of performance.

Another cautionary tale concerns the placement of stage pillars, which Pauline Kiernan calls "the most controversial feature of the new Globe" (76). All the evidence, including the Swan drawing, the Fortune contract, and the Hollar and Norden illustrations, points to some kind of stage cover as a standard feature of early modern playhouses. In 1599, such a structure could almost certainly not have been built without supportive pillars anchored in the stage. Hodges addresses the question of how these

pillars would impact sight lines. “The answer must be,” he writes, “that the pillars *did* impair visibility; and that was that. To what extent they did so would depend upon their exact placing” (Hodges, *Globe Restored* 30). The further downstage the pillars are, the greater percentage of stage action they will obstruct. A roof that covers the entire playing area would, by the methods of sixteenth century construction, require supporting posts very far downstage. The Swan drawing, however, shows a “heavens” which covers only half the stage (Gurr, *Rebuilding* 37). A similar partial covering appears in William Poel’s Globe (White 156), Hodges’s 1953 design (Hodges, *Globe Restored* 59), and Southern and Hosley’s early model for the Wanamaker project (Orrell, “Designing” 58).

In 1982 John Orrell, with the support of seminar participants, rejected the Southern-Hosley demi-roof in favor of a “heavens” that would cover the entire stage, as suggested by the Hollar drawing (Day 106). A decade later, the 1992 seminar determined the exact placement of the supporting pillars. Day writes, “Where would the two great pillars go? For once there really was so little historical evidence to go on that it was anyone’s guess. It was agreed to let structural considerations dictate the decision” (226). These “structural considerations” were determined by the notion that the new Globe’s roof must shield its whole playing area. This assumption, however, was based principally on the Hollar drawing, even though the amphitheater portrayed therein is the second Globe which, according to Hodges, could have supported a full stage covering without the aid of pillars (*Shakespeare’s Second Globe* 59). The de Witt sketch, by contrast, portrays the interior of an amphitheater built much closer in time to the first Globe and shows “the front of the stage” to be “unprotected by its roof” (Wilson 71).

As in the case of the controversy regarding diameter, my intention is not to suggest that a half-roof is necessarily better justified by contemporary evidence than a full-roof. Rather I assert that, where the historical record is unclear, designers should choose the option which best supports the playhouse's eventual function as a living theater. This was not the path taken by the new Globe's planners. Gurr, for instance, does not mention visual obstruction as a potential challenge in his discussion of the stage posts in *Rebuilding Shakespeare's Globe* (166). It was not until the "Workshop Season" of 1995 that the position of these pillars became a point of contention. On 1 October John Peter reported in the *Sunday Times*, "A polite but ferocious row has blown up between the academic theatre historians who advised on the construction, and the artists who will have to use it" ("Dramatic" 14). The actors and directors of the Workshop Season, led by Peter Hall, complained "that the pillars holding up the ceiling would get in the way of performance" (14). Hall contended that these posts were too cumbersome, too far downstage, and too far out to each side. They therefore interfered with both movement and visibility (14).

Supporters of the current design accused the theater practitioners of applying anachronistic preconceptions to the new Globe. These actors and directors were, Day writes, "prompted by a desire to adapt the theatre to their hard-learned techniques rather than adapt their techniques to a new and challenging space" (298). For Alan Dessen, the objections from Workshop participants were an example of the essentialist attitude that "theater is theater." He claims that "intuitions" formed "the basis for the rejection of scholars' and architects' original placement of the twin pillars that support the heavens.

Regardless of any evidence to the contrary (so goes this argument), no sensible theater person then or now would interpose these obstructions to sightlines where the scholars had placed them” (196). Dessen overlooks the fact that there is no “evidence” for the pillars’ downstage position. There are only inferences drawn from the Hollar and Norden illustrations. The only direct visual evidence of onstage pillars in an Elizabethan playhouse, from the Swan drawing, indicates that these posts should be placed upstage, roughly halfway to the *frons scenae*. This is not to claim that the Swan drawing is definitive but rather that “the actual scholastic facts,” as Peter Hall pointed out, “are so vague and contradictory that almost anybody can make them mean anything” (qtd. in Day 298).

The assumption of Dessen and others is that modern actors are so accustomed to realistic productions staged in proscenium theaters that they are incapable of appreciating early modern conventions. Nelsen summarizes this view when he writes, “The apparent fact that the stage posts feel so strange and ‘wrong’ to modern practitioners is a compelling reason to have them there” (335). The players need, according to Gurr, to “abandon what they have been taught” and “learn from scratch the distinctive demands the Globe’s particular construction lays on them” (*Rebuilding* 24-25). Before World War II, this argument had great merit. But since Tyrone Guthrie’s establishment of the Stratford (Ontario) Shakespeare Festival in 1953, performers in Europe and North America have had ample opportunity to work in spaces which, while not incorporating all the Elizabethan nuances of the new Globe, provide some insight into an early modern approach. It would have perhaps have been wise to incorporate their experience into the

process of design. Michael Kahn for example, or many of the other directors and actors who struggled with downstage pillars at the Folger Library's theater, could have offered valuable input.

Practitioners were, however, partly themselves to blame for not being more involved. Day writes that "the shoulder presented by the theatrical establishment" during the project's early days was "cool to say the least" (61). In later years, participation centered on the "Artistic Directorate." This group was led by Michael Birkett, who had significant "theatrical credentials" which "included collaboration with both Peter Hall and Peter Brook" (Day 267). The Directorate, however, was not particularly effective. For one thing, it numbered fifty members in 1993, "a group large enough to disagree on almost everything and far too big to agree on anything" (Day 268). The conditions for membership and terms of participation were never well defined. Birkett recalls that "you could never be *quite* sure who Sam had invited to be a member of the Directorate," because "he'd see some production that had impressed him and then say to So-and-So—'Oh, you must be a member'" (qtd. in Day 268). Some of the "highly impressive people" identified by Benedict Nightingale in 1995 as members of this group, including "Diana Rigg, Judy Dench, Nigel Hawthorne and Brian Cox" ("A Globe" 5), seem to have been recruited more for star power than to offer constructive input on Elizabethan staging. Day suggests the disconnect between the project's goals and the more conservative members of its Artistic Directorate when he notes that during one discussion Maggie Smith asked "in her best Lady Bracknell voice" (268) if the new Globe wouldn't "be terribly *un-com-for-table*?" (qtd. in Day 268). Nevertheless the Artistic Directorate rose as one to support

Hall's protest in 1995. Jon Greenfield, who took over as lead architect following the death of Theo Crosby in 1994, writes that "actors in a group never agree on anything, and to hear them speaking with one voice was alarming" (94).

Following the Workshop Season it was, according to Day, "the academics, Orrell and Gurr v. the actors" (305). The academics were "not particularly understanding" because "it had taken them fifteen years to come to an agreed design and they were naturally fearful that any changes would crack the fragile surface of that accord and re-open the debate" (Day 298). They were willing to negotiate a compromise, but only with the understanding "that the stage was to be fully covered by its roof," a condition which Greenfield claims is dictated by "historical evidence" (Greenfield 95). Peter Hall argued that the columns should be positioned at least twelve feet from the front and nine and a half feet from the edges of the stage. This was rejected as "untenable for designs in which a full stage cover was to be retained" (Nelsen 329). The design team countered with a proposal in which "the columns would now be set 8'3" back from both the front edge and from the sides" (Day 306). The new Artistic Director, Mark Rylance, agreed to this solution, but he was in an awkward situation. Sam Wanamaker's death in 1993 had left the Globe without artistic leadership. Rylance notes, "When Sam died we lost the leadership of a man who guided the Globe from many different perspectives, but . . . especially from the perspective of an actor" (169). Members of the Artistic Directorate always assumed that Wanamaker would be in charge of the Globe's theatrical operations, and his untimely passing left a void at a critical moment (Day 268). When Rylance was first appointed at the Globe he was directing and starring in a production of *Macbeth* at

the Greenwich Theatre (Hoggard 5) and could not participate in the critical Workshop Season (Alberge 15). Had either Wanamaker or Rylance been present in 1995, the players' concerns regarding the pillars might have been received more sympathetically.

Greenfield believed that the compromise placement of the pillars adopted in 1996 solved the problem. "The mistake of the workshop season of summer 1995," he wrote, "was not repeated" (Greenfield 94). Critics during the first few seasons did not agree. "The pillar," Stephen Orgel noted of his experience as an audience member, "was a problem." 1997's *The Maid's Tragedy* was for Orgel "largely hidden behind [a] column" (191). The *Independent* wrote this same year that "the biggest problem for the directors and actors (and the audience if you are unlucky enough to be sitting in the wrong place) are the two huge pillars on either side of the stage which support the roof" ("Open House at the Globe" 3). Paul Taylor wrote that he would have better enjoyed 1997's *Winter's Tale* if he "could have seen more of it." Interfering with Taylor's "complete appreciation was one of the pair of hefty Corinthian pillars that support the canopy roof" (Rev. of *Henry V* and *The Winter's Tale* 12). John Peter noted that "the two hefty pillars can get in the way and clog up the flow" ("Where the Audience" 16), and Michael Coveney complained of "the two Corinthian pillars, which simply deaden the stage and leave only two strong areas for the actors to engage with themselves and the audience" (5). In 1998, Richard Proudfoot featured the pillars prominently in his list of the Globe's "discomforts and discontents" (228); and Lois Potter referred in 1999 to "the fake-marble pillars that support the stage canopy and block the action from spectators on the side" as "the least-loved and most-discussed features of the Globe" ("Stage" 80).

Some commentators have looked to the actors to correct these sight-line problems. Kiernan, for instance, writes that players must “resist using the pillars as a ‘proscenium-arch’ frame” (63). This tendency, however, largely results from the position of these stage posts, which mirrors the placement of such an arch’s legs. One radical solution focuses not on the pillars’ location or the behavior of the actors, but rather on the distribution of the audience. Tiffany Stern acknowledges that “the dimension and position of the pillars are such that sight lines for seated members of the audience are easily obstructed.” She contends, however, that “historically at the Globe members of the audience had freedom of movement in the galleries as well as in the yard” (Stern 211) and that spectators could thereby shift to avoid visual obstacles. Besides being supported by the copious historical documents Stern cites, this idea also finds precedent in William Poel’s 1897 design for the Globe, the lowest gallery of which had “provision for both seated and standing spectators” (White 154). Stern’s idea clashes with the typically frenetic modern style of Shakespearean staging popularized by Tyrone Guthrie. She notes that “the idea that actors at the original Globe had to keep in constant motion so that no member of the audience would be denied visibility for too long is contradicted by illustrations that show actors sitting at tables” as on the title page of Middleton’s *A Game at Chess* (Stern 216). Yet one wonders how Globe spectators could adjust their positions quickly enough to keep pace with a play like *Antony and Cleopatra*. To use a sports analogy, it is one thing for fans to follow the action of a golf match from hole to hole, but quite another for them to move up and down the field of a soccer game. Even if Stern’s solution is historically accurate, it would likely meet opposition from House Management

at the new Globe. Proudfoot reports that a schoolboy attending *As You Like It* who changed position “in eagerness to see better” was “promptly reprov'd by an usher” and “required to return to his ‘restricted view’ seat” (221).

Rylance acknowledged in 1998 that “there are still those who maintain the pillars are not quite right” and held out hope that “the stage will be changed in time” (qtd. in Day 318). A minor adjustment was made to the stage posts in 1999. They remained in the same position but were mounted on “new slimmer bases” in an effort to make them less obtrusive (Potter, “Roman” 508). This may have done the trick, as published complaints have greatly diminished in recent years. Or perhaps critics and audiences have come to accept the pillars as actors have grown more skilful in minimizing sight-line problems. In any case, future Elizabethan reconstructions might want to avoid this difficulty altogether by adopting a half-stage roof, which is no less historically accurate than the full covering employed at the Bankside Globe. A rebuilt second Globe, such as is currently under consideration in Virginia, could also consider Hodges’s model for this later amphitheater, in which a full-roof is supported without pillars. While eliminating sight-line difficulties, such an arrangement denies those dramatic uses of onstage pillars suggested by Shakespeare’s plays. They have long been thought to have served as “the trees Orlando hangs his verses on” in *As You Like It* and the box-tree behind which Toby, Andrew and Fabian hide in *Twelfth Night* (Nelsen 331). But J.L. Styan argues that these plays were staged in a variety of public and private locations, with and without pillars. The notion that stage posts routinely served as trees is, for Styan, “shaky, since there is

evidence that property trees stood ready in the tiring-house” (*Shakespeare’s Stagecraft* 18) as demonstrated by “Henslowe’s inventory of the properties he kept in his Rose Theatre” (31).

Whatever design a future reconstruction chooses to follow, its organizers would do well to solicit, early in the process, the input of those theatrical practitioners who will eventually work on its stage. “What case has scholarship on its own?” John Peter asks in considering such involvement. “We are, after all, talking about a building in which, pre-eminently, conception will have to serve function. In the theatre, nobody understands this better than actors and directors” (“Dramatic” 14).

Theatrical Production at the New Globe

Performance at the new Globe has been, as Alan Dessen writes, “driven by several not-always-compatible constituencies and agendas” (195). Authenticity had been the dominant rationale during the long period of planning and construction. After opening, this quest for historical accuracy merged with the demands of theatrical production. Ros King wrote in 1997 that “apart from the Globe’s design team, only theatre historians are currently much interested in the way in which the physical nature of the sixteenth and seventeenth-century theatre building itself may have influenced the choices made by writers and performers for that theatre.” She predicted that these scholars would “have to get used to the messier human pragmatics of practical day to day invention” (King 126). The Globe’s historical construction, however, makes it unique. It could never be, Gurr noted, “just another theatre” (“Rebuilding” 12). The project needed

to balance the demands of its postmodern actors and audiences with the legacy of its early modern architecture. The person to whom this task fell was Artistic Director Mark Rylance.

Rylance was an odd choice to head the company. The *Times* reported in 1991 that he was a new age eccentric who liked “to talk of circles of power, yin and yang and other matters mystical.” The itinerary of his touring company, Phoebus Cart, was “drawn up in conjunction with cosmologist Peter Dawkin to take in ancient mystical energy points.” Rylance was fascinated by the Globe’s location because “it marks one of the points where Britain’s magic lines of energy known as ley lines meet” (“Rubble, rubble” 37). Shortly before assuming his duties at the Globe, Rylance directed a “now infamous Hari [sic] Krishna-inspired *Macbeth* at the Greenwich Theatre,” in which he also played the lead. Liz Hoggard writes that this production “included robed actors in sandals speaking with American accents and Jane Horrock’s Lady Macbeth peeing on stage during the sleepwalking scene” (5). Benedict Nightingale wrote in the *Times* on 27 September 1995, “If the next decade produces a more preposterous *Macbeth*, or ill-conceived *Macbeth*, I promise to eat the First Folio in its entirety” (“Fair is Foul” 36). This Scottish tragedy did not inspire confidence in the director’s ability. “The Globe is already in trouble,” warned the *Daily Telegraph*. “If Rylance offers work like this, we can look forward to a fiasco of monumental proportions”(qtd. in Hoggard 5).

Against such expectations, the new Artistic Director adopted a level-headed approach to the challenges facing him. Rylance said of the Globe’s mission, “Authenticity is certainly a purpose but not the *prime* purpose.” While he acknowledged

that historical accuracy “should have a place” in the playhouse’s priorities, Rylance tied its value to a pragmatic agenda. “Authenticity,” he believed, “is nothing unless it’s authenticity that reveals better methods of doing things.” Rylance realized that the Globe offered the possibility of “of a closer marriage than other theatres have between actual practitioners and the academic world.” But he also cautioned, “If the academic world is going to come in without an open mind, high handedly—as I feel some are—it won’t be a happy marriage.” At the same time, Rylance set limits to the kind of modernist experimentation he planned to tolerate at the Globe. “I’m all for people trying what they want on that stage, as long as they realize that this is a new kind of stage,” he opined. “There’s absolutely no point in building sets; they must do it minimally” (qtd. in Day 279). Directors would frequently test the boundaries of this proscription.

The new Globe’s productions during its first decade reflected the playhouse’s distinct missions of historical recovery and postmodern expression. They alternated between “original practices” and more contemporary notions of staging. Sometimes these two styles appeared in a single season. 1997, for instance, featured a *Henry V* which “reproduce[d] original Elizabethan stage practices in the costuming and all-male casting.” This same year saw a *Winter’s Tale* that employed a “freer, modern approach.” It was “played on a carpet of red earth and with a tribal African feel” in its “striking costumes and design” (Taylor, Rev. of *Henry V* and *The Winter’s Tale* 12). Other seasons have consistently employed a single method. In 2001, Lois Potter writes, “the company apparently agreed not to treat the Globe as a set in its own right but to use it as if it were any other theater, apart from the fact that it happened to have a couple of big pillars on its

stage.” She observes that “all the directors seem to have been encouraged to do whatever they liked to conceal the fact that they were performing on a reconstructed Renaissance stage” (Potter, “2001 Season” 95).

Paradoxically, the “authentic” approach has sometimes seemed more modern. Georgina Brown identifies 2002’s *Twelfth Night* as “the most historically authentic yet” of the company’s efforts. But she also writes, “For the first time, a Globe production is not a dreary exercise in heritage Shakespeare but a valuable and hugely entertaining celebration.” (Brown, Georgina 76). Ian Hislop wrote of this same *Twelfth Night*, “It should not work, really, with the weather and the noise of airplanes and mobile phones intruding, as an all-male cast in authentic Elizabethan dress performs an ancient play. But it does” (3). More contemporary approaches have often appeared dated and stale. Richard Proudfoot writes of 1998’s *The Honest Whore* by Dekker and Middleton that “twentieth-century tables and chairs, even a bulky sofa, were overused, robbing scenes of their physical energy by making characters sit down, and reducing the mobility needed if an in-the-round audience is to be fully engaged with the action” (216). 2001’s high-concept *Macbeth* used for its design a “basic metaphor” which “seemed to be that of a New Year’s or Halloween party, with the entire cast in tuxedos and long dresses” (Potter, “2001 Season” 102). According to Lyn Gardner this production aspired to be “smoky and spellbinding” but was instead “just camp” (22). Nicholas De Jongh wrote that 2005’s *Tempest* was “inspired by Carl Jung’s psychological interpretation of alchemy” and used “five pages in the programme” to explain this approach. “I have never been so flummoxed by a Shakespeare production in my life,” De Jongh proclaimed in his *Evening*

Standard review (wittily subtitled “Shakespeare for the Jung”). This *Tempest* tried to “integrate analytical psychology, Renaissance Philosophy and pantomime knockabout” but “these elements mix about as well as chalk and beer” (29).

Just as modern notions regarding design and directorial concepts fall flat on the Globe stage, twentieth-century approaches to acting also seem out of place. “Attempts to create an implied fourth wall and to act within the conventions of naturalism as in a proscenium theatre,” Kiernan writes, “come adrift in a space like the Globe where there is no physical or psychological dividing line between the playgoers and the players” (Kiernan 18). Michael Cordner observes of Ade Sapara’s performance as Camillo in 1997’s *Winter’s Tale* that the actor “was allowed to cling to old-style proscenium arch technique, his soliloquies and extended asides numbly addressed to some unpeopled spot in the middle distance. This fearful refusal to acknowledge our presence disabled his entire performance” (207). Proudfoot similarly writes that Jack Shepherd’s 1998 Antonio in *The Merchant of Venice* “seemed to belong in a different production from the rest of the cast. His inward, underplayed and vocally strained performance turned the enigma of Antonio’s sadness from the focal point of the scene into a gap at its center” (217). These and other criticisms suggest that the modern style of “Method Acting,” which Hugh Richmond defines as “subjective, even solipsistic” (161) in “its excessive self-centeredness” (175), may not work at the Globe. William Worthen notes,

Stanislavski’s attention to “public solitude,” and the method’s concentration on the actor’s “private moments,” are both, in this sense, means for training the actor to create character before—not with, not for, not among—a silent majority of

disembodied spectators. These practices clearly textualize character in ways probably undesirable—even unimaginable—on Shakespeare’s more open, public, and interactive stage. (“Deeper” 454-55)

While Worthen here identifies the Method as inappropriate for Shakespearean interpretation, he does not in his 1999 article on the new Globe acknowledge the advances made by Rylance and other performers toward developing a more presentational approach (Worthen, “Reconstructing” 33-45). The amphitheater’s architecture, which produces a unique actor-audience dynamic, has enabled this progress.

The new Globe possesses three attributes not found in earlier Elizabethan-style theaters like Nugent Monck’s Maddermarket or Tyrone Guthrie’s Stratford Festival Stage. The steeply stacked galleries mean that “at the new Globe the furthest distance between a playgoer and the center of the stage is about fifty feet” (Kiernan 19), closer even than in Guthrie’s Ontario configuration. A significant portion of the audience, 700 among a total capacity of 1,500, stand in the yard around the stage (Proudfoot 215). These “groundlings” are very close to the stage, and their standing posture encourages engagement with the performance to an extent not expected by the new Globe’s planners. Andrew Gurr notes that this “sense of the performance space as somewhere that people actively participate, particularly the groundlings, was something none of us anticipated” (qtd. in McCormack 3). The playhouse is open to the sky, and during daytime performances stage and auditorium are illuminated by the sun. The covering over the stage means that audiences are better lit than performers in a radical inversion of twentieth-century practice. “It is the playgoers,” Kiernan writes, “who are highly visible—to the actors on stage and, most significantly, to one another” (5). Floodlights are used

for evening performances, but the intent of this “discreet background lighting” is to “simulate daylight conditions” (Gurr, *Rebuilding* 22). This means that the amphitheater consistently employs the concept of “universal lighting” with which Guthrie flirted at various points in his career. The proximity and visibility of the audience, and the energized attitudes of those standing in the pit, have had powerful consequences at the new Globe.

William Russell, who played the King of France in 1997’s *Henry V*, considers the playhouse unique. “Even when I’ve worked in the round,” Russell says, “I’ve never had this wall of people so near and yet so far with the sea of groundlings all around.” He defines this “living link with the audience” as the “key to the whole experience” (qtd. in Kiernan 133). Rylance observes that while “darkness divides and isolates an audience” universal lighting unites them with each other and with the actors, encouraging the public to “play along” with the performers (qtd. in Kiernan 132). This presence of the spectators as active partners means “that the narrative of the play” is no longer “in the control of the players but shared between the audience and the actors” (Rylance qtd. in Day 317). A Globe performance will therefore be, more than in traditional theaters, what the audience wishes it to be. Rylance observes, “We have to let go of the idea of controlling the reaction” (qtd. in Day 318).

Audiences love this sense of empowerment, and it is a major reason for the Globe’s financial success. Scholars and journal critics, however, have frequently expressed reservations. One problem is that the participation of the pit (where tickets cost an affordable five pounds) is often based not exclusively on an honest and unmediated

response to events on stage but also on a preconceived notion of what the behavior of “groundlings” should be. Ros King notes that “whether or not the descriptions of rowdiness” traditionally attributed to early modern audiences are accurate, “the modern public certainly believes that this is how ‘they’ behaved.” In 1997 Globe spectators “regularly exchanged such information amongst themselves and, encouraged by newspaper reports, came prepared to play the part” (King 132). Critics took particular exception to the xenophobic jeering of French characters during the inaugural season’s *Henry V*. “They persisted in their cheerfully assumed jingoism throughout,” complains Schalkwyk. “I found their behavior as an audience irritating, even offensive” (45). Michael Cordner similarly laments “the kind of anti-French laugh the audience was only too willing to provide and the production to encourage” (211), and King criticizes the production’s “readiness to accept and indeed encourage rabidly anti-French play-acting in the audience as if it were both genuine and morally unproblematic.” She notes, “As an audience member—on three occasions—opposed to gratuitous racial abuse I was deeply angered by feeling that I was being allowed only one option: to join in the booing” (133). These critics fear that the encouragement of mock bellicosity could lead playgoers to support real-life military adventurism. Yu Jin Ko, however, suggests that the audience’s behavior at *Henry V* did not reflect a mindless endorsement of imperialism. Instead their vociferousness indicated recognition of their authority in enabling the theatrical experience, which in turn mirrors the broader role of the populace in manufacturing political consent. “Part of what the audience becomes conscious of,” Ko writes, “is its power as makers of kings and queens” (119).

The new Globe's spectator demographic is broader than that of most twentieth-century performance venues. This public is often largely composed of people who more frequently attend sporting events than theater. David Fielder, who played several roles in *Henry V*, describes "the shock of the first night" by saying, "It felt as if we were all at a football match" (qtd. in Kiernan 134). These sports fans are accustomed to raucous audience participation as an essential cathartic attribute of performance. If the Bankside playhouse wishes to attract some of the overwhelming majority of citizens who do not normally patronize the lively arts, it will need to accommodate this more aggressively expressive mind-set. Some scholars, however, resent the fact that new Globe audiences do not always accept works of early modern drama for the style in which they were written and instead turn diverse genres into broad comedy. Gurr claims of the 1996 Prologue Season production of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* that "under heavy pressure from an audience determined to have fun, the tragicomic drama of the perils and strength of true friendship became a comic farce" ("First Plays" 7). Patricia Tatspaugh writes of 2004's *Measure for Measure* that the audience "laugh[ed] at rape, deserted mothers, castration, death in several guises, clergy of dubious Christianity, Claudio's incarceration, and the mistreatment of prisoners. The comic reading compromised any attempt to address the[se] issues seriously" (474). Peter J. Smith agrees. "Call me a purist," he writes, "but *Measure for Measure* is not a funny play" (143).

These comments, while understandable, nevertheless betray preconceptions about the plays that are based largely on twentieth-century interpretations. *Two Gentlemen* is not necessarily a "tragicomic drama of the perils and strength of true friendship," as Gurr

asserts. While modern stagings have accentuated this more serious aspect, in Shakespeare's time *Two Gentlemen* may have been received more as the "comic farce" this scholar rejects (Gurr, "First Plays" 7). *Measure for Measure* is likewise, despite Smith's protestations, in many ways "a funny play." Appreciation of its comedy is not, as he writes, an indication of "audience philistinism" (Smith, Peter 143). Tatspaugh's comment on *Measure*'s finale that "in any other production [Isabella] would have remained isolated from the other characters, and the closing image would have been dark or ambiguous" (474) suggests that she has been influenced by recent theatrical interpretations which emphasize a sinister atmosphere. We can never know how these works were originally received. New Globe spectators, many of whom come to these plays for the first time, might with their honest laughter provide a more "authentic" reaction than that of critics indoctrinated by contemporary readings. Some plays, however, have provoked responses which were almost certainly never intended by their authors. Stephen Orgel, for instance, regrets that a 1997 audience "found [Beaumont and Fletcher's] *The Maid's Tragedy* hilarious" (193), as does Dessen, who calls this production (after Hamlet) "caviar to the general" (196). This raises the question of whether such a contrary reaction is in any way valid. If the public is paying for their tickets and enjoying themselves, perhaps it doesn't matter if they receive the play in an untraditional manner. A similar case occurred in New York in 2004, when the Metropolitan Playhouse staged the early modern domestic tragedy *Arden of Faversham*. The production was widely acclaimed and had a long and successful run—as a comedy.

Mary Bly commented in her review for *Shakespeare Bulletin*, “One of Time’s crueler tricks is turning serious concerns from tragic to risible” (84). Generic transformations of this kind will likely continue at the Globe.

While the contemporary Bankside public has taken some Renaissance tragedies for farce, they have readily accepted many Elizabethan conventions. The practice of males playing female roles, for instance, has been highly successful. Andrew Gurr warned against employing this device because it “creates some odd problems” in today’s society. He was particularly wary of postmodern notions regarding “the erotic sexual politics of this cross-dressing” (“Staging” 165), which Gurr considers ahistorical. All-male casting, however, has proven surprisingly unproblematic. Toby Cockerell, who played Katherine in *Henry V*, notes that “some people didn’t realize it was an all-male cast” (qtd. in Kiernan 130). Globe audiences have even suspended their disbelief when women’s roles were played not by adolescent boys, as would have been the case in Shakespeare’s day, but by the company’s middle-aged artistic director. Ian Hislop calls Mark Rylance’s 2002 performance as Olivia “a revelation” (3), and Lois Potter uses this same accolade to describe Rylance’s 1999 interpretation of Cleopatra (“Roman” 514). Such casting is not strictly authentic, but it illustrates how original practices at the Globe have led to new but historically-inspired conventions that serve the needs of the twenty-first century. All-female productions exemplify this same trend. In 2003, for example, *Richard III* and *The Taming of the Shrew* were presented traditionally in terms of staging and costumes, but with exclusively distaff casts. Louis Muinzer wrote that this choice “served to underscore an important tenet of Shakespeare’s Globe, that Theatre is not

Biology, but Art—that it involves the creation of characters who define their own gender in the context of the stage” (66). How well this “important tenet” reflects the sexual dynamics of Shakespeare’s own era is an open and probably unanswerable question. What matters is how this freedom of gender identity speaks to today’s audiences and performers.

The new Globe has experimented with theatrical hierarchy and division of labor. Mark Rylance’s title, prior to his retirement in 2005, was “Artistic Director,” but he was also a leading actor in the company. Potter likens him to “a great actor-manager in the old tradition” (“Distracted” 128), but this comparison is not completely accurate. Unlike Irving and Beerbohm Tree, Rylance always performed under a director, although this position has not been as powerful as at most modern theaters. Christian Camargo, an American actor who performed in 1997’s *Henry V*, highlights the difference between working at the Globe and his previous experience “coming from New York where you have conceptual directors” (qtd. in Kiernan 153). Gurr hoped that the new Globe would “not be the now-standard ‘director’s theatre’” (*Rebuilding* 46), and Rylance agrees. The rise of the director, he says, had “a lot to do with the theatre becoming considered a middle class or a suppressive medium, as opposed to the revolutionary medium it *should* be.” Rylance’s assumption about theater’s natural function as an agent of radical change is of course open to question, but it aligns him with the late Pre-Raphaelite vision of William Morris, who inspired earlier practitioners of the Elizabethan revival. Actors, Rylance believes, “must take more responsibility for the whole, working *with* not merely *for* the director” (Rylance qtd. in Day 273). To this end, the new Globe decentralized the

directing function in 1999. The title formerly known as “Director” was now called “Master of Play” and was complemented by a “Master of Verse” who focused on voice and text work (Potter, “Roman” 508). The impact of this change is not yet clear. The “Master of Play,” for instance, still receives the “Director” credit in most published reviews. Potter believes that this redistribution of labor “made a difference” which has resulted in better audibility and clearer staging (“Roman” 508). At times, however, the nontraditional hierarchy has created problems of accountability. Kate Bassett writes of 2003’s *Romeo and Juliet*, “Melanie Jessop’s dire Lady Capulet doesn’t even seem to understand her lines. Given that the director or ‘master of play’ is supported by masters of dance, combat, movement, voice and words, you sometimes wonder what half of them have been doing” (Bassett 18).

Mark Rylance’s decision to lead the Globe from the stage produced generally positive results. At times his performer’s vanity may have harmed productions, as Michael Billington indicates in his review of 2003’s *Richard II*. “One admires Rylance’s energy,” Billington writes, “but wishes that Tim Carroll, as Master of Play, also showed a bit more mastery of his lead player” (Rev. of *Richard II* 28). Paul Taylor, however, is probably correct that “only one man could have launched Shakespeare’s Globe and made it such a thriving theatrical concern. That man is Mark Rylance” (Rev. of *The Tempest* 46). Rylance’s success was based on his ability to blend the historical authenticity of the theater’s architecture with the postmodern sensibilities of its audience. One of his last performances was in an adaptation of Plautus titled *The Storm*. Maddy Costa wrote that she was struck by an “eerily beautiful” sequence in which “Rylance conjure[d] up a

lightning storm by encouraging the crowd to take pictures with their mobile phones.” While this intrusion of modern gadgetry could not be less “authentic,” it nevertheless captured the spirit of actor-audience engagement in an outdoor setting which is the essence of the Globe experience. It was a moment, Costa writes, which “surely even cynics couldn’t resist” (20).

Conclusion

Scholarly advocates of Elizabethan reconstructions traditionally discounted the theatrical potential of such ventures. C. Walter Hodges wrote that the notion of a rebuilt early modern playhouse as “a commercially viable *theatre*—that is, a place designed primarily for the production of plays” was “ill-judged, unpractical, and doomed to failure from the start.” Audiences would, according to Hodges, “when they had had it once, have had it for good.” Such spectators “would like it and they would recommend it to others, but they would not themselves feel any urgent compulsion to go back. Thereafter, they would go as before to more comfortable modern theatres” (Hodges, *Shakespeare’s Second Globe* 95). The new Globe has disproved this logic. Andrew Gurr predicted in 1989 that the Bankside amphitheater would not be “a rival to the National Theatre or the Royal Shakespeare Company” (*Rebuilding* 163). Kate Basset, however, writes that the Globe’s 2004 *Romeo and Juliet* “rivals the RSC’s current production” of this tragedy (18), and Nick Hytner of the National Theatre believes that the playhouse “has done an amazing job” in establishing its economic and artistic bona fides (qtd. in Hoggard 5). The Globe operates without a government subsidy, which is uncommon for a classical theater in Britain. Hugh Richmond predicted that this lack of funding would enable success as a

performance venue. He wrote in 1990 that “the strength” of the project would be “that it cannot afford to preserve archaic practices merely for their own sake.” Because the theater would need to pay its own way, “the Globe will survive and flourish only in so far as it is able to prove that the practices of the Elizabethan stage are at least as effective and attractive in their communication of Shakespeare’s scripts to audiences as any methods developed by the theatre since then” (Richmond 181). This differs from the philosophy of “authenticity” which advocates the replication of original practices as an end in itself, regardless of how these conventions affect postmodern audiences. Richmond’s model of the Globe in action has proved more accurate than the museum-like paradigms of Gurr and Hodges.

Mark Rylance’s replacement, new Artistic Director Domenic Dromgoole, initially dismissed Wanamaker’s project. “It had all the chutzpah, energy and passion of Americans,” he told *The New York Times* in May of 2006. “As an English person, I sneered at it from afar.” Dromgoole now admits, however, that “theaters are constantly being built everywhere, but incredibly few work as well as this” (qtd. in Riding, “Shakespeare’s Globe” 23). The new Globe has operated at eight-five percent capacity since opening in 1997 and has averaged profits of one and a half million pounds a year (“Shakespeare’s Globe Makes £ 1.5 Million” 9). Dromgoole calls this achievement “unprecedented for a theatre” and “little short of a phenomenon” (qtd. in “Shakespeare’s Globe Makes £ 1.5 Million” 9). This success has not come, as Graham Holderness expected, through “the phony religion of the tourist industry” (“Interview” 18). While the Globe was “voted the top tourist attraction in Europe” by “the European Federation of

Associations of Tourism Journalists” in 1996 (Lister 11), recreational travelers have made up a smaller percentage of audiences than originally anticipated. Dromgoole reports that only a “tiny proportion” of the Globe’s public, which he quantifies as “16%-20%,” are “foreign visitors.” He adds that “English people come . . . and they love it and they return” because “they find it special” (qtd. in Appleyard 8).

The precise attraction of the Globe remains difficult to define. “The trouble is,” says Rory Edwards, who played Orleans in 1997’s *Henry V*, “if you start to try to analyze it you have to start talking about things like ‘a higher consciousness’ which can sound crap [sic].” He nevertheless postulates that the Globe’s magic has “to do with the actual generation of energy in the circle within the building” (qtd. in Kiernan 138). This may relate to the “tingle factor” of the playhouse’s nearly authentic location (Schmitz 89); to Rylance’s theory that the Globe is geographically located “on a very powerful magnetic line [which] links us to the past” (Rylance qtd. in “Rubble, rubble” 37); and perhaps even to the fact that, as Day notes, the Globe stands in relation to the sun at “the same orientation as Stonehenge” (Day 98). These imprecise and unscientific notions explain why, according to James Wood, the reconstructed playhouse so “troubles the cultural materialists, and encourages their special condescension” (22). The naivety of the new Globe’s approach, however, can be disarming. Writing of the tradition in which productions of Shakespeare end with the company executing a spirited jig, Paul Taylor comments that “a cynic might claim that the terminal jig is just a play to whip up a last-minute frenzy of applause.” But he adds that “a cynic would be wrong.” Taylor observes of the concluding dance in 2004’s *Romeo and Juliet*,

It's a piercing sight here when, in a fresh twist, the bodies of the hero and heroine are tenderly taken down from the tomb and propped up facing each other for a long moment of eye-to-eye suspension. Then, as the music kicks in, those bodies, as it were, magically defrost, take each other by the hand and embark on the joyous, disciplined abandon of a dance that shifts from a poignant what-might-have-been to a what-is, in this strange alternative reality of the postscript jig. (Taylor, Rev. of *Romeo and Juliet* 11)

This extra-textual sequence recalls another Shakespearean resurrection, the coming to life of Hermione's statue at the end of *The Winter's Tale*. Taylor's description suggests that the Globe's *Romeo and Juliet* used its final jig to similarly celebrate the healing power of art. One cannot appreciate this theme from a completely rational perspective. Instead, "It is required," as Paulina tells us, "You do awake your faith" (*Winter's Tale* 5. 3. 115-16).

The new Globe's founding Artistic Director is an unreconstructed essentialist. Mark Rylance writes that Shakespeare "creat[ed] drama that has proved universal in application" and that the amphitheater's mission is to "provide theatrical experiences that reflect and enrich human nature" (175). Sam Wanamaker similarly believed that Shakespeare's plays could "express the human condition in a form recognizable to all people" (Wanamaker qtd. in Holderness, "Interview" 19). Terry Eagleton dismisses this view as "dismally regressive" (206) and "gullibly" humanist (204) because it denies the historical uniqueness of each artistic moment. Cultural materialists are rightly suspicious of nostalgic schmaltz that often masks more sinister ideological projects. But if critics analyze too empirically the performance experience, they can easily overlook the inherently irrational impulse behind it. "The Globe," James Wood writes, "is a triumph of excessive love" (22). However imperfectly it imitates early modern architecture, staging and audience response, the new Globe has proven that the plays of Shakespeare (and

theater in general) still have the power to affect a broad segment of the population. The success of the Bankside amphitheater combines with the earlier achievements of Guthrie, Monck, and Poel to point the way toward a continued revival of early modern staging in the twenty-first century.

CODA

The Elizabethan revival, by embracing some theatrical conventions of the English Renaissance, is inherently engaged with the past and constitutes a “revolution” in the early modern sense of the word. It assumes that there is no progress without conservation, no forward movement without preservation of past gains, no promising future without a return to what was best of an earlier age. As was often the case with the twentieth-century avant-garde, from Antonin Artaud’s fascination with traditional Balinese dance to William Butler Yeats’s emulation of Japanese Noh Theater, a progressive desire to create new forms in response to the pressures of modernity motivated the early Elizabethanists’ embrace of historical practices. Their efforts, and those of their later followers, have always been “old and new in the same breath” (Womack 79). As George Bernard Shaw observed, an Elizabethan production is not only a “picture of the past,” but also “a picture of the future” (Rev. of *Doctor Faustus* 37). Despite the claims of scholars like Marjorie Garber, the movement has never primarily pursued the fetishistic objective of freezing Shakespeare’s plays in a distant and unobtainable era (Garber 246). From William Poel’s *Troilus and Cressida*, which critiqued growing militarism on the eve of World War I (Speaight, *William Poel* 193), to Mark Rylance’s 2005 *Tempest*, which deconstructed this play in a three-man production based on the philosophy of Carl Jung (De Jongh 29), Elizabethanists have frequently sought to connect their efforts to the zeitgeist of contemporary audiences.

Nor are early modern practices inherently tied, as William Worthen asserts, to an agenda of literary hegemony which minimizes the creative contributions of theater practitioners while revering the authorial intent of long-dead playwrights (Worthen, *Authority* 33). While critics like Muriel St. Clare Byrne sought to enlist the movement in the cause of textual fidelity, Elizabethanists from Poel to Tyrone Guthrie to the companies of the new Globe consistently cut and adapted Renaissance plays to suit the needs of twentieth-century productions. Even when initially drawn to early modern staging from a sense of literary duty, some practitioners have come to value the Elizabethan approach primarily for its theatrical impact on a contemporary public. Ralph Alan Cohen, the Professor of English who founded the American Shakespeare Center in Staunton, Virginia, writes of his company's early efforts, "we thought—rather grandly—that we were saving the plays, saving them from over-production and too-reverent treatment. What we discovered was that we were saving the audiences, too" ("Our Mission" 1).

In this same document (an unpublished statement of purpose circulated to actors auditioning for the American Shakespeare Center), Cohen describes the role of early modern staging in combating alienation in twenty-first-century America. He asserts that "de Tocqueville's convivial nation of citizens joined in countless fraternal, religious, political, and social groups" has been replaced by "a nation of individuals, suspicious of one another, more comfortable with IM'ing than with front porch socializing, listening to iPods instead of attending concerts, withdrawing from all that is the life of a community" ("Our Mission" 1). This high-tech isolation is a postmodern descendant of the industrial

anomie against which William Morris rebelled, and Cohen thus reinforces the Elizabethan revival's status as the heir of Pre-Raphaelitism. He also follows Guthrie in championing early modern methods as an alternative to the soporific medium of cinema. "At a movie," Cohen writes, "the audience sits in the dark—individual and anonymous—and passively watches what a director, with the help of Industrial Light and Magic, has created." He contrasts this with his company's mission of "Theatre as Civic Engagement" (1), in which the public becomes an active participant in performance.

The dangers of what Cohen calls "a nation of individuals, suspicious of one another" are increasingly apparent in the current political climate. Throughout the modern era, governments have used fear and alienation to coerce public acquiescence to repressive policies. Cohen's notion of a passive audience overwhelmed by the technological expertise of an all-powerful "director" recalls the totalitarian vision of Gordon Craig and, more ominously, the Nuremberg rallies which Gary Taylor sees as employing Craig's stagecraft (271). By encouraging genuine interpersonal communication between actors and audiences and by relying on collective imagination rather than technological illusion, early modern staging may, in a small way, help prevent the twenty-first century from reliving the nightmares of the twentieth. I hope that if scholars and critics come to see the Elizabethan revival in this light they may become more sympathetic to the movement. Theater practitioners, however, have the greatest opportunity to impact the future of early modern staging. In the few remaining pages, I will therefore suggest ways in which they can utilize Elizabethan conventions.

The three principal features to consider are a permanent architectural set, universal lighting, and the placement of the audience in a deep-thrust configuration. The first two conditions are relatively easy to create. The third is more difficult, but is also the most important. One can place an architectural set on the stage of a proscenium theater, but such an arrangement offers a “pictur[e] of an Elizabethan stage rather than the thing itself” (Kennedy, *Looking* 157). This was the fate of William Poel’s experiments with his Fortune fit-up at the Royalty Theatre (O’Connor, “Theatre of Empire” 71), as well as of Ben Iden Payne’s Stratford efforts in the early 1930s (Howard 146) and Tanya Moiseiwitsch’s 1951 design for the second historical tetralogy at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre (Kennedy, *Looking* 157). Recent attempts by the North Carolina Shakespeare Festival to employ an Elizabethan set within the proscenium confines of the High Point Theatre have been similarly unsatisfactory. Universal lighting is also easily achieved in a picture-frame configuration. All one need do is flood the playing area and leave the house lights up. The great distance between the back row and the stage of a typical proscenium theater, however, negates the connection between actors and audience that shared illumination can create. A deep-thrust configuration, on the other hand, achieves much of early modern staging’s potential for immediacy, even without universal lighting. Illumination naturally spills from the stage onto the surrounding public so that “spectators can see one another around, and beyond, the more brightly lighted stage” (Guthrie, *New Theatre* 69) and performers become more aware of the audience.

The intimate and inclusive atmosphere of a thrust configuration creates a three-dimensional perspective that cannot be replicated by film and television. A mediocre

production of Shakespeare staged in three-quarter is therefore often more effective than an excellent picture-frame staging. But most theaters are still proscenium houses, and the average practitioner cannot afford to custom-build an Elizabethan space. For university directors, one solution is to use a smaller theater rather than a department's main stage. These "black-box" spaces can usually be configured in thrust. If performances are successful and demand grows, a Theater Department might consider permanently dedicating its black-box to an Elizabethan model. Assuming the ceiling is high enough, a second tier of seating could be built over the first. This would recreate the critical "stacked gallery" effect (Hildy, "Reconstructing" 13) while simultaneously increasing public capacity and potential revenue. If the seated audience can be lifted sufficiently, the playing area could also be raised to create room for the kind of standing patrons who have been such a boon to the new Globe.

A raised stage and the presence of "understanders," however, make it more difficult to use the auditorium for entrances and exits. Such vomitorium-style staging has been a constant hallmark of the Elizabethan revival. William Poel "blocked some entrances through the two aisles which divided the audience" in his 1895 *Comedy of Errors* at Gray's Inn and his 1896 *Two Gentlemen* at Merchant Taylors' Hall (O'Connor, *William Poel* 48). Guthrie used a similar approach in his Edinburgh productions of *The Thrie Estaits* and in his Stratford, Ontario configuration (Guthrie, "Theatre at Minneapolis" 44). Directors at the new Globe have also employed this tactic. Only five of the first thirteen productions staged at the amphitheatre did not feature "actors entering and exiting through the yard" (Gurr, "Enter" 32), although this method is not as effective

with a raised platform as it was for Poel and Guthrie. Richard Proudfoot (215) and Lois Potter (“Roman” 512, 515) note problems with visibility and access to the playing area through the crowd of “groundlings.” Before elevating their stages, practitioners should consider whether the energizing presence of a standing audience outweighs the loss of the house as a viable location for entrances and exits.

According to Andrew Gurr, entering “through the yard” has “no precedent in ‘authentic’ staging.” Gurr writes that “Elizabethans were on average 10 percent shorter than modern people” and that “the height of the Globe’s stage, at five feet, was clearly intended as a deterrent to access.” He extends this proscription to “other theatres of the time,” including indoor playhouses (“Enter” 32). While the strange center aisle in the plans for Inigo Jones’s Cockpit theater (Gurr, “Shakespeare’s Globe” 45) seems (to a modern eye) tailor-made for entrances and exits through the auditorium, Gurr is probably correct that Shakespeare and his fellows did not employ this practice. Twentieth-century Elizabethanists nevertheless consistently used it to increase the number of avenues on to and off of their stages. This same desire to expand access to the playing area explains the removable stairway at Nugent Monck’s Maddermarket Theatre (Monck, *Shakespeare Survey* 72-73) and the multiple staircases in Guthrie’s designs for Edinburgh and the two Stratfords (Guthrie, *Life* 121). Using only the doors and discovery space in the *frons scenae* would pose an interesting challenge, but most modern directors, including Poel, Monck, and Guthrie, have required more variety. Practitioners should therefore consider entrances through the house and/or staircases connecting the onstage balcony to the main playing area as inevitable contemporary adjuncts to early modern staging.

Many educational and professional directors do not have a black-box that can be configured in thrust. For them the only options are a proscenium theater or a non-theatrical space. The second alternative is generally preferable. The Elizabethan convention of universal lighting means that companies do not have to transport bulky and complex electrical equipment in order to stage Shakespeare in a non-traditional venue. Most gymnasiums have moveable bleacher-style seating, which can easily be arranged in a three-quarter model. Acoustics in such spaces, however, are often dreadful because of echoes which limit intelligibility. Another option is to look for a “natural” configuration consisting of a balcony above one or more doorways, such as Poel found at Gray’s Inn and Middle Temple Hall (O’Connor *William Poel* 48). Performances can be staged against this kind of backdrop with a minimum of set-up time, allowing for flexibility in scheduling. Hugh Richmond points out that college campuses are full of locations which offer this opportunity for “vertical differentiation” (167). Such settings are also common in older urban environments, and mostly exist outdoors.

Whether they choose to perform against an existing architectural backdrop or to construct their own set, practitioners interested in early modern staging should consider working in the open air. *Al fresco* performance involves many challenges, but also provides something of the connection to the natural world experienced in early modern amphitheaters. Universal lighting in such conditions means coordinating show times to coincide with sunlight. The glow of sunset on the face of young lovers at the conclusion of a romantic comedy, or the gathering gloom in the fifth act of a tragedy played at twilight, are effects not easily reproduced by the most elaborate stage technology. Many

outdoor Shakespeare festivals, such as those in Utah and Kentucky, give performances on long summer days with the sun still shining at curtain time. They often spend thousands of dollars for lighting effects that can only be appreciated after intermission, when darkness has descended. By beginning their performances an hour earlier, such companies could save a huge production expense while simultaneously experiencing the benefits of universal lighting. As in the case of gymnasium staging, outdoor performance poses acoustical problems, which relate primarily to audibility and interference from background noise (police sirens, airplanes, ice cream trucks). Practitioners should resist the temptation to amplify actors' voices. When the audience hears a play from an electronic speaker rather than from the mouths of actors, the special bond between player and public often disintegrates.

The Elizabethan revival has come a long way since Herbert Beerbohm Tree derided William Poel as "an absolute crank—and an unsuccessful crank to boot" (quoted in Glick 16). Yet directors pursuing early modern staging still meet resistance. Set and lighting designers are sometimes hostile to an approach that they feel challenges the importance of their craft. Administrators often cannot understand why an alternative performance venue is necessary if a proscenium theater sits unused. Journal critics encountering the style for the first time may not know what to make of it, and their reviews sometimes reflect incomprehension. Each passing year, however, provides more successful examples of the Elizabethan approach. The movement has the logic of the marketplace on its side. It is less expensive to stage Shakespeare in this manner, and audiences often prefer it to the traditional proscenium format because of the increased

opportunity for active participation. During the twentieth century, the paradigm shifted from actor-manager's theater to director's theater to designer's theater (Berry 595). Early modern staging may help create in the twenty-first century a theater that belongs to the audience.

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